

## Develop skills – encourage board-level volunteering!

Attracting and retaining talent is an ongoing challenge, but particularly so in the current economic climate. So the question of how to achieve a highly skilled workforce is a very real issue – how do you ensure that your organisation is an employer of choice?

'Giving something back' is one of eight factors taken into account in the judging of the *Sunday Times* 'Best 100 companies to work for' and a common characteristic of many companies in the 100 Best list is their commitment to corporate responsibility, including offering paid time off to volunteer. The latest *Sunday Times* survey highlights the importance of a firm's attitude to corporate responsibility and clearly demonstrates the importance of an employer's community involvement for talent recruitment and retention.

Board-level volunteering (that is, volunteering as a trustee of a charity, a school governor or a board member of a public body such as an NHS trust) is a particularly appropriate type of volunteering for skilled employees, enabling them to make a real contribution to their communities. It is a great way to develop skills, particularly leadership skills, including, for example, strategic planning, marketing and managing change, which are all key for leadership roles.

People with HR expertise are in great demand themselves as volunteer board members. They can make a real difference to charities, schools and public bodies by bringing to their boards the skills that are needed to deal with the challenges these organisations face. These are very much people-driven organisations so they need people skills on their boards. In addition to HR, skills that are particularly crucial on boards include legal, financial, IT, marketing and fundraising. And, of course, HR professionals are in key positions to encourage employees to volunteer for boards as part of their skills development.

For employers, board-level volunteering provides a low-cost and effective means (potentially chargeable to learning and development budgets) of developing their employees' skills, as well as raising their profile in the area of corporate responsibility and connecting them with the communities in which they operate.

Candidates, particularly young people, are asking more and more frequently at interview what an employer does for the community. It is important to them, so board-level volunteering is a useful tool in the recruitment and retention of talent.

Katherine Thomas, Group Talent Director, BT, said: 'We see board-level volunteering as a great opportunity for our talent to develop a breadth of experience and skills that are also highly relevant within the workplace.'

For employees, it offers an excellent learning opportunity, enabling them to develop their skills as well as improve their CVs, work-life balance and personal satisfaction. In many of today's flatter organisational structures, it is not so easy, at work, to develop the skills, such as chairing meetings, required for future leadership roles.

Miles Templeman, Director General, Institute of Directors, said: 'Increasingly, prospective employees want to work for employers that put something back into their communities, and companies that encourage board-level volunteering are more likely to become employers of choice.'

Getting on Board, a registered charity and board-level volunteering career specialist, works with employers to enable them to encourage their staff to volunteer for boards and to facilitate individuals' search for suitable opportunities. It runs employee seminars about board-level volunteering, explaining what the role involves, the commitment required and the resulting benefits for the community and the volunteer board member.

David Mulholland, a member of BT's Talent Pool, has recently been appointed as a trustee of a Citizens Advice Bureau branch using Getting on Board's brokerage service. He said: 'I am thoroughly enjoying the experience. I'm very grateful to Getting on Board for matching me with such an interesting and challenging role so quickly. I really feel I am putting something back into the local community.'

For the recruitment and retention of talent and, indeed, of all staff, board-level volunteering can be a key tool. And HR professionals can enjoy the personal benefits of board-level volunteering, developing new skills and personal satisfaction themselves while setting a good example to their staff. Supporting employee board-level volunteering can indeed help you to become an employer of choice.

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