

Volunteering can lead way back to work

Stephanie Veale • January 23, 2011

It's a cardinal rule of résumés: Avoid gaps at all costs.

Even if your reasons for employment gaps are perfectly valid — for example, being downsized and unable to find a job for a while — employers don't like to be left wondering what occurred while you weren't working.

The best solution is to stay busy, even when you're not employed, and to include on your résumé whatever you did to stay active, said Steve Neelin, CEO at Quality Recruiting Services in Rochester said.

The best way to stay busy is to get out and volunteer.

"The last thing an employer wants to see is that you've been out of work for a year and a half and you've been sitting at home on your couch the whole time," Neelin said.

Volunteering can serve as a conduit to a full-time job, whether you give your time and talents at an organization that later hires you, or you're able to use your volunteer experience to market yourself more effectively in a job interview somewhere else.

"I would say doing volunteer work increases your opportunity for networking," said Peter Pecor, executive director of RochesterWorks!

"You don't want to keep it a secret that you're looking for a job. Communicate that to as many people as you can ... (and) as you're doing volunteer work, you'll run into people who are employers, in business for themselves, or who could be a source for referrals."

Julie Duddy of LeRoy had been volunteering at Lollypop Farm's development office for seven months when, in April 2009, a full-time position became available.

Duddy had spent two years actively looking for work

prior to volunteering at Lollypop.

As a volunteer, she helped the associate development director put fundraising information into computer files.

The shelter hired Duddy for the post.

She thinks her positive, "can-do" attitude and passion for Lollypop, as shown in her willingness to volunteer there, were important factors in being hired. She also had the requisite computer skills.

"This was a perfect fit," Duddy said. "I offered them skills they needed, and they gave me the fulfillment I needed."

Lollypop's volunteer coordinator Maggie Huff says she often fields calls from employers requesting references.

She's happy to oblige for those reliable, trustworthy volunteers who have attended consistently and who interact well with staff and customers alike.

"Once in a while, I get (potential volunteers) who come in and say, 'I get along better with animals than I do with people,' and that's not exactly what I want to hear," Huff said. "We have 70 staff and hundreds of volunteers who work here, too. If you can communicate with people, you can do a better job for the animals."

Volunteer positions at Lollypop include everything from dog walker to gift shop operator to information technology worker.

Advertisement



Kodak

Bring in any old printer to **BEST BUY** and save an additional **\$50 off any new Kodak Printer**

4240 West Wisconsin Avenue
Appleton, 920-739-8319
825 Pilgrim Way Suite A
Green Bay, 920-494-2950

OFFER EXPIRES 2/19/2011

Print Powered By 

"If somebody can get along in this environment with lots of different kinds of people, I think that says something about their ability to fit into a job setting," Huff said.

At the local chapter of the American Red Cross, volunteers can find a range of opportunities from teaching to emergency management to public affairs.

The positions are often serious commitments, both in time and intensity.

In return, volunteers are able to gain valuable, applicable experience, said Sheryl Karch, director of volunteer development and community outreach. Volunteers learn organizational and people skills, as well as more specialized skills, such as how to give a dynamic presentation to a group.

"Over the years, we've hired some of our health and safety instructors to be employees, and we've hired some of our administrative volunteers to become involved within the organization in a variety of different capacities," Karch said.

Erin Caldwell, a spokeswoman for the Red Cross, said she wishes she had known about the public affairs volunteer opportunity when she was first getting into the communications industry. Public affairs volunteers learn how to collect salient details about a disaster from Red Cross responders, reach out to the media, and communicate effectively.

"(These positions) give you so much real experience doing PR," she said. And, Caldwell said, volunteering in this capacity shows a deep commitment to the field: "You'll even do it for free, in the middle of night."

Stephanie Veale is a freelance writer in Rochester.

Get involved

To find volunteer opportunities, check out:

Do Good: DoGood.DemocratandChronicle.com

United Way: uwrochester.org or (585) 242-6400.

American Red Cross: <http://rochesterredcross.org> or (585) 241-4490 or 241-4487.

Lollypop Farm: <http://lollypop.org> or (585) 223-1330.

Advertisement



Mom Dilemma #36:
Your daughter insists on wearing her princess costume to the grocery store. Allow it or not?

YES, at least she's dressed!

NO, I have some rules!

momlikeme.com
where Local moms meet