

The Development of a Successful Corporate Volunteer Program*

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We all know that one of the critical components in any company's success and profitability is the commitment of employees to the company. One way to develop that commitment is to show employees *our* commitment to people, our recognition of the value of our human resources, and our willingness to reach out to support *community services* that help people, not by financial contributions that have no direct impact on our employees' lives, but by encouraging and matching our employees' gifts of time and energy.

When we create a volunteer program such as the one we have at Central Guaranty Trustco, we send a message to the community that we care about the quality of life in that community and we send the message to our employees that we care about *their* contributions to the community.

We got involved in our volunteer program in March, 1987. Our Head Office on Church Street in Toronto is in an area that is served by Mid-Toronto Community Services (formerly St. Luke's Community Services). St. Luke's approached us, asking for help with Meals on Wheels through their corporate volunteer program. We said "yes" for three reasons: first, this kind of community involvement was exactly what our Guaranty Trust (which became part of Central Guaranty Trustco in June, 1987) Mission Statement meant by a commitment to corporate social responsibility. Second, our former president had recognized the importance of community volunteerism and this commitment was shared by our new president. Third, our employees had always shown a keen interest in the communities surrounding our branches.

The program works this way: volunteers contribute one hour of their time every six weeks on Thursdays (Central Guaranty Trustco's day), and the company then matches that donation with a second hour, i.e., the employee is picked up from work at 11:45 a.m., driven to the agency van, and assigned to a team for Meals on Wheels. The team serves a different route each

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week, delivering hot mid-day meals to senior citizens or disabled people who cannot shop and cook for themselves. The delivery takes about an hour, then the volunteers are driven back to work with a brown-bag lunch by 1:45 p.m.

Measured in time, the donation is not large. Measured in terms of corporate commitment to the community and to our employees, the donation is immense. By reaching out beyond the walls of our company and by supporting our employees' decision to give up a lunch hour in order to help, we feel we are honouring our commitment to people and to the quality of the lives in our community.

Our first volunteers (18 of them) began with Meals on Wheels in April, 1987. We were also able to provide assistance by offering the use of our mail van each day to pick up food prepared at nearby ManuLife and take it to neighbouring St. Andrew's Church for the delivery teams. During August, we ran a mini-campaign and six more employees volunteered. At an orientation session in September, morale was high.

Towards the end of the year, as a merger between Guaranty Trust and Central Trust proceeded, we organized another campaign to recruit volunteers. This drive was tied in with the United Way campaign (Mid-Toronto is a member agency of the United Way) with displays at our head office building at Church and Bloor Streets. Employees who were already volunteers went the extra mile and made themselves available at an information booth to talk about their experiences and about the work and its rewards. By the end of the campaign, the program had been well publicized and we had recruited seven more volunteers, as well as two people who offered to become weekend drivers.

As the merger neared completion, we organized a bigger campaign. Our strategy was to make this program more visible by sending memos not only to Guaranty Trust employees at the Church and Bloor location but also to those several blocks away at 335 and 366 Bay Street. And this time, we included the employees from Central Trust since they were now "part of the family". In addition, we set up display booths in the lobbies of the Church Street and Bay Street buildings. We also described the program in the company newsletter and posted notices at elevators and in the lobbies of the buildings. In June 1988, our efforts paid off and *48 new volunteers* made a commitment of time that was matched by the company.

Our volunteers come from all levels in the company; our commitment to the program is whole-hearted. We don't distinguish between the donation of a clerk's hour of work and a senior executive's hour; we are committed to a social responsibility that supports what our employees choose to give to community service.

The cost of the program is hard to gauge. In terms of hours, we make a donation that is quantifiable—the cost of a working hour for each volunteer employee, but in terms of benefits to the company, the profit is incalculable. We have found that employees who volunteer at work (as opposed to volunteering that takes place outside working hours) realize a high level of satisfaction from both their volunteering and their company and are consequently better employees.

The response to an evaluation that we circulated to volunteers after six months' participation showed a high level of appreciation for the company's volunteer program. Almost all commented on the personal benefits of their participation, e.g., "seeing a smile on the face of someone who is receiving a meal"; "helping part of our society that is in need"; "being aware of how many people in this city have to live, and how important it is to help care for those less fortunate". They also commended the company for supporting the volunteer program.

As good corporate citizens, we want to create a climate of good will in our communities. We also want to inspire in our employees a commitment to our corporate goals. Both these ends can be achieved by this kind of volunteer program.

Central Guaranty Trustco's explicit policy is to "add positively to the communities in which we do business". We feel we can do this through corporate volunteer programs.

The success of corporate volunteerism depends on a firm *commitment* but also on *communication*. Anne Drakes, executive secretary in Human Resources, has been responsible for co-ordinating the program and has maintained constant contact with both the volunteers and the agency to ensure that the needs of both are met. Another communication device that has been useful has been the "thank you" card and letters sent by the agency to our volunteers. We feel that our contribution to the Meals on Wheels program has been *seen*.

The vital component is employee co-operation. Corporate volunteer programs allow employees to recognize the connection between their work world and the community outside and to feel corporate support for their donations of time and energy.

Our volunteer program has been a success—for Central Guaranty Trustco, for our volunteers, for the Meals on Wheels program, and for the people in need who, as one of our volunteers said, "are ensured one meal a day that is nutritious, because of ours and our company's donation of a small amount of time". That really is the bottom line!