

Enhance Your Job Search by Volunteering – Tip 5

If you are unemployed and searching for a new job, you've probably heard people tell you that searching for a new job should now be your full-time job. You might conclude from that advice that now is not the right time for you to volunteer. Good advice, wrong conclusion!

Many volunteers do so while holding full-time jobs and they usually do so for reasons that do not relate to having too much time on their hands. There is no wrong time to be a volunteer. There is only a wrong reason not to volunteer.

Volunteering while you are unemployed should be an important part of your job search because you will derive many tangible and intangible benefits from doing so. If you are still not convinced that now is a good time to volunteer, let's take a look at a typical interview of two candidates who have been unemployed for several months and have similar skills and experience.

You're a candidate and during the interview, you're asked what you've been doing during the time you've been unemployed.

If you're candidate no. 1, you answer that you've been actively searching for a new job and have devoted all your time to it.

If you're candidate no. 2, you answer that you've been actively searching for a new job full time and volunteer two hours every week at your local library helping people with English as their second language learn to read. In the process, you helped others learn how to complete job applications and some to read safety instructions that related to their jobs.

Interviewers know, as well as you do, that you cannot possibly spend 100% of your time looking for a new job. There will always be a significant amount of dead time during any job search where you are waiting for others to call back, trying to make appointments, attending networking events, and trying to figure out what to do next.

Assuming both candidates have similar skills and experience, here is how the interviewer analyzes the candidates based on their responses to the question. Candidate no. 1 is trying to convince me of something I know is not true. When we need our people to step up and do something extra, this candidate will say he is too busy. He might be inclined to pace his work so he is always seen as being busy. We probably won't be able to rely on him to suggest new or more efficient ways of doing things or volunteer to help others out when their plates are overloaded.

The interviewer may not conclude that candidate no. 2 will be the opposite of every negative characteristic inferred about candidate no. 1 but they will have a far more positive feeling

about candidate no. 2 and will see their volunteering as an indication of their higher level of energy.

Apart from the obvious advantages for you in an interview, here's a list of some of the other benefits you will receive by volunteering:

- Your life will have more purpose as you fit in your contribution to a cause with your job search activities.
- Volunteering gives you something else to talk about when you're networking with others who will see you as being a caring, active and outgoing person, a positive influence on others.
- Some of the other people you meet during your volunteering activities may also be looking for a new job and you can be a resource to each other.
- Some of the other people you meet will currently be working and can be a resource to you. People have often found their job through such connections.
- The organizers of the volunteer activity are often asked by employers if they know of anyone looking for a job, correctly believing that they find better candidates who actively volunteer to help others.
- Employees and senior management of many companies are often involved in non-profit organizations themselves and look favorably on others who are actively participating.
- You will feel much better about yourself and will have a more positive attitude when you participate in volunteer activities.
- Research has shown that people who are actively involved in altruistic behavior are generally happier and live healthier and longer lives.

The more people you meet, the better chance you will have to make a connection with someone else that results in your finding a job. The connections you meet while networking often means that you will not be competing with others for a job, since you will have a personal referral.

How do you find opportunities for volunteering? Go to your local library and the social services department at your local city hall. Some online resources are: www.craigslist.org, www.idealists.org, www.serve.gov, www.volunteermatch.org and www.voa.org (Volunteers of America).

Carl Wellenstein is an employment and career strategist located in Southern California and is the author of 12 Steps to a New Career. He helps those in mid-career facilitate career advancement, expedite job changes, and pursue new career destinies.