

Leadership Through Community Engagement: The Ultimate Win-Win



By Barbara Higgins

An  **MSBCOACH** Leadership Resource

501 West Main Street Charlottesville VA 22903 | 434.293.5758 | www.msbcoach.com

INTRODUCTION

As we develop and strengthen the leadership in our organizations, as well as our personal leadership development, we should be sure to include time and planning for **“community focus.”** More and more organizations have broadened their vision to include community service initiatives. Your career development plan should include the same goals for considering your involvement in your community. There are many ways to explore ‘community’, both inside and outside

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your organization and this can become a highlight for your experience and resume. Caretaking for your community can also contribute to your overall wellness and help you to develop as a confident professional.

Let’s start with a definition of what we mean by community focus. Wikipedia defines community as a social unit of any size that shares common values. “Values” elicit our energy and emotion because they are principles that we deeply believe

in. We should therefore invest our time and our support. In our career path, we sometimes get so busy with tasks that we forget to schedule time to “give back” and revisit our values. Finding time to serve a greater good can be easier than you think and the rewards for you can make a big difference.

1

Investing in our Existing Community

By nature of our roles in business, family, and activities, we establish a community of connections. It can be hard to balance your time and keep these important links active. To ensure a vibrant community presence, we need to be sure to plan time for nurturing these important connections.

With today's omnipresent technology, you might think that we are continuously connected to our communities, but real

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community takes focus, personal attention, and a special level of commitment. In a true community there is a kind of “quid pro quo” for sharing and advancing the interests of the group. This fiber creates a level of trust and the fabric for real community to further a greater purpose. Quality time is critically important to initiate and build new connections.

Consider the following options to rejuvenate your contribution to the community:

1 **Sharing skills and insights** – Consider speaking on an area of expertise or networking with a group on industry or topical knowledge. Whether online or in-person, this connectivity can generate creativity and contacts for future success.

2 **Mentoring** – Sometimes a one-to-one connection is the best way to make a deeper connection and show your commitment to a personal approach. In the professional realm, offer to be a mentor or request a mentor from a local professional group. Having a trusted mentor can help give you an outside perspective to solve difficult problems.

3 **Volunteering** – A great way to connect with other professionals can be through volunteering for a charity, association, or board role. Research proves that giving back to the broader community serves a basic human need for connecting to a greater purpose. When this is your common value, the connection to other professionals in your community can be a rewarding experience.

4 **Continuing Education** – No doubt about it, today's world moves at a busy pace. It can be difficult to take the time to participate in a course, executive education, or even learn a new skill. Picking the right course can energize your thinking and innovate your approach. Plus connecting with others on an interesting topic expands your network.

2

Creating Community Connections that Matter

As part of a development plan, broadening our view of community can be a stimulating part of our leadership development. Volunteering can provide benefits for our mental and physical health as well as advancing new skills that can be useful for career advancement.



Consider the various types of organizations that make a difference in your community. Is there a specific charity that connects to your interests? What volunteer role would be most satisfying to you and what time do you have to contribute? Opportunities exist for everything from hands on work to leading boards. Getting involved in the right role is a lot like finding the right job. You may want to start in a role that has a specific event of interest to you and then decide how to engage with the organization in a deeper role.

Consider the following questions as you create your personalized approach to deepening your community focus.

My Current Community:

1. What communities do I currently connect to? (consider personal, professional, charitable and online options)
2. How connected am I with those groups? When did I last contribute or tap into that relationship?
3. Do I have time, or do I need to make time for investing in my community?

Within your organization:

1. Have I created the connections I need to get my job done?
2. Do people call me for information as a central contact?
3. Do I create connections for open, two-way flow of information that benefits my organization?
4. Do I mentor other employees?

In my broader community:

1. Do I connect with similar professionals outside of my current job?
2. Do I have an external cause or charity that I am passionate about?
3. What type of role would be most enjoyable and rewarding for me?
4. Have I considered offering time to share my business experience? (local colleges or speaking opportunities)

Examples of Opportunities to Consider

- ◇ Volunteer for a company project group
- ◇ Offer to present or participate in a round-table
- ◇ Participate in a company charity – or initiate a new one
- ◇ Support a current company initiative
- ◇ Support fellow employees in charitable participation
- ◇ Participate in a mentor program
- ◇ Encourage career development for others
- ◇ Connect with a local charity
- ◇ Join a local charitable giving Initiative
- ◇ Non-Profit board or governance role
- ◇ Local sustainability initiative
- ◇ Speaking at a local or regional conference
- ◇ Attend a conference
- ◇ Contribute to local school initiatives



Barbara Higgins

Leadership and Strategy Consultant

barbara@msbcoach.com

Barbara is passionate about helping to develop effective leadership solutions for your organization. Her broad experience in strategy, operations, and leadership translates to creative and relevant solutions for your leaders. Mission driven organizations and measuring long-term success, is a specialty for her with experience in the Balanced Scorecard and Strategy Maps (The Balanced Scorecard; Kaplan and Norton; Harvard Business School).

Barbara's current focus includes experiential and engaging learning techniques for continuing education and corporate training. She teaches a Quality and Productivity Management course at Piedmont Virginia Community College as an adjunct business professor gaining insights from her students about interactive learning. She is similarly passionate about bringing her experience to local non-profit organizations to help with strategy and business planning.



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