



Community Engagement – Lunch with a Purpose Draft Notes

One of the topics relevant to today's young professional and subject of one of the three issues in Emerge NNY 2009 was Community Engagement. While, it seems many of the reasons local YP'ers choose to become engaged in their community have not changed much since we last visited the subject at Emerge 2006, there are new sources for volunteer information, more ideas to recruit and retain volunteers and more specific criteria for the work the volunteers are wanting to donate their time to.

The discussion began with the topic of why young professionals donate their time to get involved with civic and non-profit organizations. Most felt a personal & professional responsibility to our community to give back, also seeing it as a networking opportunity and good learning experience for their families. When posed with the question why others did not participate or stopped participating in volunteer activities the top reasons were lack of knowledge of volunteer opportunities and not feeling comfortable doing it alone, and feeling that the volunteer duty did not have a significant impact on the organization.

Since Emerge 2006 there have been new tools created, such as Drumcountry.com and the Jaycees monthly newsletter 'The Scoop', to help disseminate information about volunteer opportunities. Other ideas to increase knowledge of these opportunities included encouraging the non-profit and civic organizations to keep their websites current with volunteer activities. Also, enhancing the Council of Social Agencies existing website (or another existing site) to become a central clearing house for organizations to post their open volunteer duties would allow individuals to 'one stop shop' for the job that would best suit their skill set and interests. The creation of a 'volunteer buddy system' was discussed to alleviate apprehension people may have about volunteering on their own.

To encourage more people to become involved, businesses could support participation by organizing group volunteer days or offering paid time-off to employees who donated their time to local charities. Local schools could create curriculum that requires students to garner hours of community service.

Many of the people present during the discussion had experiences where they stopped donating their time to an organization because they either didn't feel their time was well spent or they weren't appreciated. Participants suggested that volunteer opportunities be organized similar to internal paid positions, to include; written job descriptions, feedback and an opportunity to grow with the organization. This would allow the organizations help match people's skill set with specific tasks, keep communication lines open as well as provide a personal connection for long-term partnerships.

Finally we discussed the need to change the legislation that penalizes people who collect unemployment when volunteering. They have to deduct the hours they volunteered from their wages. This deters available volunteers to donate their time to help their community as well as help them build valuable skills that would enhance their resumes.