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Getting the Most Out of Your Volunteer Experience: Tips for Older Workers

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Getting the most out of your volunteer experience

Tips for older workers

Are you an older adult who is juggling life's demands and trying to find time for yourself? Volunteering is a great way to support your health and well-being while making a difference in your community.

Volunteering has been linked to a number of positive outcomes for older adults such as good health and mental health, social connections, and a sense of purpose. However, for many older adults, especially those who are employed, finding the time to volunteer can be a challenge.

A recent study was carried out with older adult volunteers and volunteer managers across the country to understand how busy older adults can successfully manage their multiple commitments. Based on that survey, as many as one out of every seven current volunteers are also working for pay in addition to their volunteer work.

Here's what we learned about volunteering from other older workers:

Benefits of volunteering

Older workers reported that volunteering:

- Gave them new skills and knowledge that they can use in their paid employment.
- Provided them with information on different programs, services, and resources that could be used in their paid role.
- Helped them to connect with new employment opportunities.
- Provided an opportunity to meet new people and build a network that helped them in their paid work.
- Provided a valuable opportunity for stress relief.

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Volunteering at the county museum **led directly to my current job** with that museum.”

Volunteer

“

Volunteering at the public library **helps me to stay abreast of educational trends and book choices of the students I come in contact with** in school in my job as a substitute teacher.”

Volunteer

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“[Volunteering] has **stimulated my mind and helped be creative.** It balances my experiences”

Volunteer

Juggling work and volunteer obligations

Workers were more likely to report role-related strain than volunteers who did not work. However, older workers found volunteering rewarding and beneficial. They offered suggestions for combatting stress. Older workers use the following strategies to reduce stress and stay involved in volunteer work:

- **Finding volunteer opportunities that provide a “different” experience** from their paid work. By connecting with a different type of experience than what is available in the workplace, volunteers report a sense of “balance” in their lives.
- **Volunteering on nights and weekends or “off-work” hours:** Volunteers who work often seek out volunteer opportunities that can be completed during nights, weekends or even lunch break times. Examples include delivering meals during the lunch hour and posting educational flyers with local businesses after work.
- **Flexible arrangements:** Some volunteer programs offer flexible arrangements for volunteers like job sharing, per diem volunteering, and volunteering for one-time or special events. These options make it easier for workers to volunteer.

Overall, older workers can benefit from volunteering in their community. Start by having a conversation with a local volunteer program about your needs as an older worker to find the right fit for you.