



Talent Update

Opinion

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Pro Bono 2.0

It's Not Your Father's Pro Bono Service: Engaging Professionals in Transition is a Win:Win Proposition

By Karen Heller Key

Times are challenging in our sector, with donations and foundation grants diminished and demand for services greater than ever – but from what we're seeing, senior executives at our nation's leading nonprofits aren't complaining – they're innovating. Holding down and cutting costs, protecting core services and people wherever possible, looking for low cost ways to engage employees and keep morale high... this is what we're seeing leaders try. And we're seeing another emerging trend – what we'd call ***Pro Bono 2.0.***

Outside the office, you almost certainly know very talented friends, family members, former colleagues who are looking for jobs or looking for other opportunities, short term or long term – contract work, going back to graduate school, sector switching... We all wish we had leads for these good folks, but right now the employment scene is very difficult. In truth, these friends and family members often would welcome good contacts, ways to keep their skills fresh or develop new skills... and they'd like something meaningful and engaging to do as they go through this process, which we know is no longer a matter of weeks for most people, it's a matter of months, or longer.

Actually, you do have something to offer these folks and others like them – something that also can help you back at the office – opportunities to engage with and work for and with your organization on a pro bono basis. We're not talking about stuffing envelopes here. We're talking about working with your organization using high level skills – finance, IT, Human Resources, curriculum design, training, social media & communications... the possibilities are many. Remember, "volunteer" is just a pay scale, not a job title. You can engage an HR executive (pro bono), an outreach manager (pro bono)... a team to explore a new revenue model for you... you get the idea.

Back in the day, pro bono meant volunteer attorneys. What it really means – pro bono publico – is 'for the public good.' Pro Bono 2.0 is for the good of all – for the good of our communities and at the same time for the good of those who lend us their time as they build skills, forge connections, and engaging in meaningful, purpose-ful work.

Want to find a great person to work on an initiative, add talent to an area that's underresourced at this time? Your organization has the reputation and the capacity to attract the best.... And now you have a 'place' – on the web – to do so. Your website for attracting people interested in a career with you – paid, stipended, or volunteer – free (for unpaid positions) or low cost (for paid job postings), and made for your use as a member of the National Human Services Assembly – is careersforgood.org. In 2010 we will be putting CFG in front of the kind of people who are looking for these opportunities through broad outreach. To engage them and make sure they come back to the site, what we need are real, tangible, smartly designed pro bono opportunities.

So what would it take for you to attract this top talent? Identify areas of need, shape an “ad” (hint: think with your HR hat on – imagine this is a job – what skills and experience do you need? What are the major responsibilities? What's the purpose?). Then add language that helps the candidate see the benefits (what's in it for them, in addition to the satisfaction of important work)... and post. Posting pro bono positions is simple, free, and honestly, there are a lot of people looking for these kind of opportunities. Be prepared to respond promptly – treat them similarly to job candidates.

We all know the economy will eventually recover, thank goodness. If we're smart, we'll have engaged and worked with a cadre of talented, committed pro bono folks who – whether they get a great new job or launch a new career or end up hired by us! – will know and value our organizations – as volunteers, donors, supporters, consumers, and possibly employees. Some of you are already innovating in this skilled volunteer 'space' - the time is right for turbo-charging this practice across our organizations.

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