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3 Reasons Executives Should Volunteer

By Revital Bitan (<https://blogs.intel.com/csr/author/rbitan/>) on October (<https://blogs.intel.com/csr/2015/10/>) 19 (<https://blogs.intel.com/csr/2015/10/19/>), 2015 (<https://blogs.intel.com/csr/2015/>)

An MBA degree is traditionally perceived as the key training program for future business leaders. However, without diminishing the value of academic MBA training, I feel that the current business environment mandates aligning social and economic development goals with a strategic business approach. To this end, the new generation of future leaders needs to understand the social and community topics that extend beyond traditional MBA skills.

As a CSR manager for many years, I've seen how the social sector is becoming increasingly important, with multiple organizations becoming involved in society and community. With this, the need for good leaders and modern management methods in this sector is becoming more acute. Bringing together business and social leaders is vital to the continued growth of social activism and its benefits on society. And the flip-side is that it's vital to managers becoming effective business leaders.

The "Synergy" project, which has been running in Intel Israel, is meant to achieve just that. As its name suggests, it creates synergy between the JDC (Joint Distribution Committee) Institute for Leadership and Governance and the executive boards of NGOs in order to develop voluntary lay leadership within business corporations. Under the "Synergy" project, executives from Intel are assigned to the executive boards of NGOs where they can contribute their managerial skills and talents.

"The project is based on a model developed and described by Alice Korngold in "Leveraging Good Will", a book that was published in the USA about a decade ago," explained Ronit Levy, head of Lay Leadership programming at the Institute, our partner for this project. "The idea is to achieve reciprocal fertilization between the business and social sectors by leveraging the strengths of each for the benefit of the other: NGOs need help in financial management, regulatory compliance, fundraising, measuring effectiveness, access to external networks and good governance. Business corporations can benefit from a better public image, understanding the importance of corporate responsibility, and enhancing commitment and team pride within the company, as well as personal development for executives."

My colleague, Chen Dekel-Cohen, who heads up the Intel Israel Leadership Program, said that she finds this program very innovative and a great way for her to accelerate development of top potential managers, as it combines on-the-job training for leadership positions in a new environment.

I strongly believe that by volunteering in this project, leaders can learn and benefit in multiple ways – starting with these three:

1. Going beyond the comfort zone

In addition to the gratification that comes with helping others, the executives participating in the project benefit from a type of learning that is not possible under other circumstances. In order to join the executive board of an NGO, the executives need to pass an interview where they introduce themselves and describe their added value to the organization. This is instrumental in the development of managerial authority and the enhancement of their capabilities. It is also an opportunity for introspection that forces them to see their own strengths in an environment that is outside of their comfort zone.

2. Expanded networking

Volunteering gives executives an opportunity to hang out with a whole new crowd made up of people with different experiences and approaches. Moreover, as most of the volunteers also have day jobs, they can network and make additional career connections.

3. Broader perspective

Volunteering gives the executives an opportunity to work with new challenges and people, as well as a fresh perspective on priorities.

In a nutshell – a classic win-win

Business managers and executives have a lot to learn and gain from volunteering. The contribution that volunteering can make to their abilities and careers is often a mirror image of the contribution that they can make to the non-profits they work with. It will help them integrate social and economic development strategies into their business strategies, as demanded for success in modern business environments.

If that's not a case of win-win, then I don't know what is.

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