



Debunking Myths About Volunteers, Interns and Impact

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<https://nicolersmith.net/tuw>



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Good Free Labor is Not an Oxymoron

Entrepreneurs, small and large organizations alike often find themselves in the bittersweet position of growing by leaps and bounds. The next logical step is to bring an extra set of hands or two to help manage the workload.

The challenge is the organization isn't quite in the place to be able to afford an additional full-time or part time staff member so what are they to do?

This is normally when I suggest bringing on a volunteer or intern to supplement the staff on hand. Like clockwork, 99% of the time the suggestion is met with either "no one would want to help me for free," "there is no such thing as good free help," or simply a grunt, followed by an eye roll, and this response, "Are you kidding me? No thank you."



According to the Corporation for National and Community Service, in 2018, 77.34 million adults volunteered nearly 6.9 billion hours, worth an estimated \$167 billion in, you guessed it FREE LABOR (not even counting what interns contribute).

As an entrepreneur and a professional working with volunteers and interns for over two decades - in churches, sports, radio, and the performing arts, as well as being a volunteer myself - I have heard it all. "Volunteers and interns are lazy, unreliable, have poor quality of work," the list goes on and on. When I hear this, I am utterly amazed and wonder to myself what they base these sentiments upon. I have found volunteers and interns to be some of the most dedicated, passionate and reliable people known to mankind.

Let's take a look at six commonly held myths about volunteers and interns

What I do know, however, is in an environment that thwarts their growth and an organization that underestimates their value, volunteers and interns will not be very productive and will eventually "vote with their feet" and quietly walk away never to return; and that could possibly give the impression that they are unreliable. Does that mean that every volunteer I have ever encountered was stellar? Absolutely not. However, I have learned that through Communication, Care and Connection, you can build the mightiest of volunteer and/or intern programs resulting in valuable help to that will help your organization thrive and witness loyalty beyond measure.

VOLUNTEERS

MYTH 1: THEY ARE UNEDUCATED

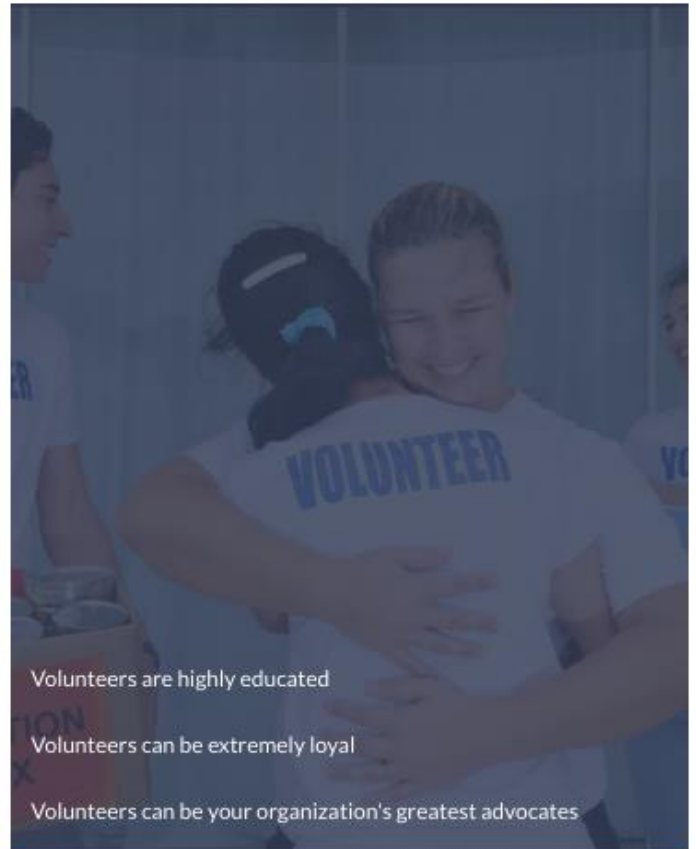
This one baffles me the most. Many people feel as though if a person willingly gives of their time, they are unintelligent. This just doesn't make sense. According to CNN, most volunteers range in age between 35-54 and possess a bachelor's degree or higher. Furthermore, studies show that people with little to no high school education are the least likely to volunteer. People volunteering for your organization are typically in the prime of their careers or nearing retirement. This means not only are they educated, but they have a plethora of life and professional experience under their belt. So not only are they donating their time, they are contributing countless years of experience and knowledge to your organization that would otherwise prove costly. All of this to say that your volunteers are not uneducated.

MYTH 2: ALL THEY NEED IS BUSYWORK

Nothing can be further from the truth. Volunteers give of their precious time because they want to be a part of something bigger than themselves. They want to impact their community for the greater good. They are pretty wise people. If they sense the notion that the work they are doing is not meaningful or vital to the organization, teenagers and adults alike, there is a good chance they won't return. On the other hand, if they know that what they are doing is making an impact, they will be "breaking down the door" to offer even more assistance during the week and even weekends.

MYTH 3: THEY ARE UNRELIABLE

I have worked with many volunteers over the years and have found that yes, SOME are unreliable. But that is the case about everything in life. You have certain friends, coworkers, family members and employees that are unreliable. However, I have discovered that once expectations were established, most volunteers were eager to comply, resulting in some of the most reliable people I have ever met.



Volunteers are highly educated

Volunteers can be extremely loyal

Volunteers can be your organization's greatest advocates

Organizational Volunteering



30.3%

of the population volunteered through an organization such as a ministry, arts organization, feeding the homeless, delivering meals to the elderly, building homes and cleaning beaches

Helping friends and neighbors



77.34 Million

adults volunteered through organizations but many millions more volunteer by supporting friends, family and supporting their neighbors considered "informal volunteering."

INTERNS

MYTH 1: THEY ARE UNRELIABLE

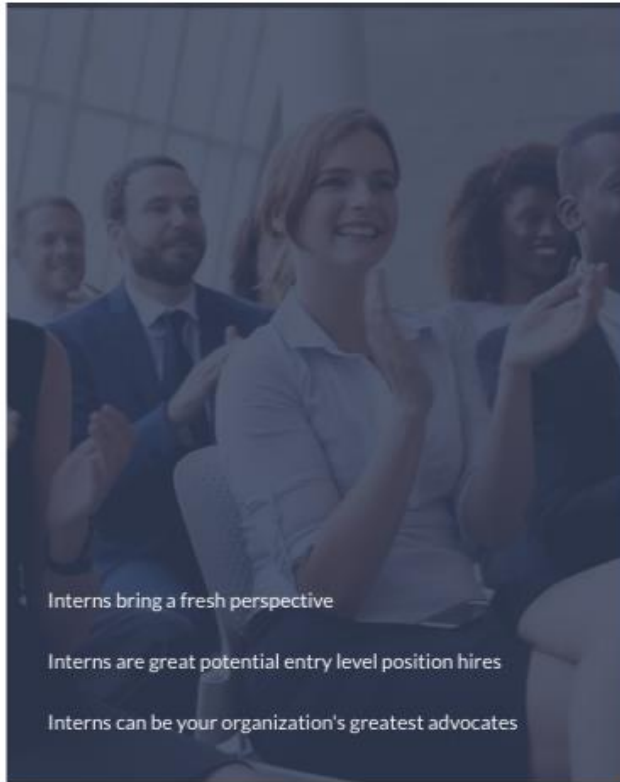
Having worked with hundreds of interns, yes, *SOME* are unreliable. But that is the case about everything in life. You have certain friends, family members, employees or coworkers that are unreliable. So why are interns so harshly judged? Most interns that I have worked with, once a schedule was established and expectations of their scope of work were made clear, they were extremely reliable.

MYTH 2: ALL THEY NEED IS BUSYWORK

Nothing can be further from the truth. Someone interning is often looking for that magical ingredient to help them land their first professional job to jumpstart their career path: **HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE**. This means they are looking for meaningful assignments that will not only make a difference in the organization, but will boost their resume. All internships should be a win / win. In actuality, the student should actually benefit more than the organization, but that's another topic altogether. The bottom line is, if all your intern does is perform menial tasks such as making copies and going on coffee runs and isn't contributing something meaningful to the organization, you will definitely see disinterest. That disinterest may manifest as being unreliable because it is a waste of their time.

MYTH 3: THEY PRODUCE SUBPAR WORK

An intern, just like an employee may produce subpar work. So, just like an employee, an intern should receive constructive feedback regarding their work. As the manager of an intern, you need to inspect what you expect. Never assume that they know what is expected. Try to get to the root cause of the poor work quality. Did they have a clear understanding of the assignment? Were they given constructive feedback on how to improve? Were they given specific guidelines to follow?



Interns bring a fresh perspective

Interns are great potential entry level position hires


Interns can be your organization's greatest advocates

Hire Rate

 **80%**

Many Fortune-500 companies retain over 80% of their interns as entry-level hires.

Retention Rate

 **More than 50%**

**of employers had a higher five-year retention rate. Having an internship program to find new talent is a great way to try out talent before bringing them on full time.

*<https://www.thebalancecareers.com/why-hire-interns-1986579>

**<https://www.randstadrisemart.com/blog/6-benefits-running-company-internship-program>

What Keeps Them Coming Back?



Communication

True for both groups, clear constant communication is key. Not only setting goals and expectations, but clearly communicating them to volunteers and interns is vital. Communicating correct dates, times, goals, deadlines etc. are extremely important. Once they know and understand what is expected of them up front, they are typically eager to participate. The great thing is, by doing this, those who find it to be too much find out at the beginning and can make the decision at that time if they want to be involved or not. This weeds out participants in the beginning leaving you with the cream of the crop.

Care

Constantly communicating and **SHOWING** that you care will go a very long way and create loyalty. For instance, especially with interns, having the ability to be flexible helps. Many of our students are still in school, often in their last year and sometimes class projects interfere with intern dates. We have often suggested that perhaps they switch their days for the internship or if they have a test they need to study for let them skip a day so they can study for a final. The intern was always grateful and would make up the day and we would all be happy because they would do well on their final and they produced great work for us because they weren't worried about studying for their exam.



Connection

Including volunteers and interns in the thread of your organization is key. When they see their efforts integrated into the organization, they feel connected. They know that they have contributed to the organization and have made a difference. Furthermore, when they are invited to participate in meetings, company events and recognition ceremonies, it creates a bond between that ties them to the organization forever making them feel as though they made an impact; that they made a difference.

Communication, Care & Connection Go a Long Way

In 2018, Americans alone volunteered nearly 6.9 billion hours; equivalent to 287,500,0000 days! People want to help and are willing to donate their most precious commodity, their time, to those who they feel will value their time for what it is worth

Last year alone, interns at an organization that I worked with contributed 11,000 hours; enough hours equivalent to 5 1/2 full time employees. Interns bring fresh perspectives and new ideas that if implemented can have a huge impact on your organization.

In an ideal world, your interns will enjoy their experience so much that they come back and volunteer their time, volunteers will believe in your organization so much, they become donors, or better yet, even both.

According to the Corporation for National and Community Service, in 2018, 77.34 million adults volunteered nearly 6.9 billion hours, worth an estimated \$167 billion in, you guessed it FREE LABOR (not even counting what interns contribute).



Contact me today for a free consultation on how I can help your organization maximize volunteer and intern impact
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Many people make the mistake of underestimating the value and potential impact volunteers and interns can have on their businesses and organizations. Unfortunately, often times, organizations are completely unaware that they are potentially creating an unwelcome atmosphere for their volunteers or interns which leads them to having a less than desirable experience with either group.

At The Underestimated Workforce we are committed to working with organizations to help identify opportunities for growth within their organization to create an environment where volunteers and interns can thrive and teach them how to maximize the potential of their volunteers and interns to help increase the support, reach and value of their organizations.

For more information on how I can help:

www.nicolersmith.net/tuw

Helping Your Organization Maximize the Potential of the Underestimated Workforce

Nicole is a Panamanian-American, single mother, workforce development specialist, published author, dancer, and motivational speaker. She attended Oral Roberts University on a Division I full-ride track scholarship. After graduating, she founded Step It Up! Inc., a non-profit dance organization. Her experience in sports and entertainment, radio, TV and the performing arts has spanned nearly 20 years covering the Chicago, Houston and Miami markets. She has danced and cheered for four Professional and Semi-Professional sports teams, has prepared more than 500 interns to enter the workforce and has inspired crowds upwards of 2000. In 2019, She joined the Board of the Arts and Business Council of Miami and was listed as one of WLRN's "Local Women Who Inspire You" and in November 2019 she was selected as one of Legacy Miami's MOST PROMINENT AND INFLUENTIAL BLACK WOMEN IN BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY OF 2019 and has recently becoming a contributing writer for The Life of a Single Mom.



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