



Stanford eCorner

The Value of Volunteering

Shah Selbe, *National Geographic Society*

January 21, 2015

Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/3449/The-Value-of-Volunteering>

National Geographic Explorer Shah Selbe underscores volunteering's profound effect on who you are and what you end up doing. He also describes how being honored for his leadership in Engineers Without Borders by his employer, Boeing, served as an opportunity to get the aerospace giant to support the nonprofit's charitable work.



Transcript

I have had the opportunity with Engineers Without Borders to work on projects in Mali, Malawi, Tanzania, India, Thailand and Mexico. So it's been a really cool opportunity and quite a bit of fun. So that brings me to the second lesson that I wanted to talk about, while I was here today, and that was to volunteer for something. A lot of the times people don't volunteer because they think that it's going to take a lot of effort, but I want to stress that like if you put yourself out there and you find a cause, it doesn't matter what the cause is, there are so many issues out there that need our help. So if it's something that speaks to you and doesn't speak to another person then still go through with it, but I really want to stress that the feeling that you get, the impact that you get out of working on something without expecting something in return, it has profound effect on the person that you are and the things that you end up doing with your life. And if you want to look at this in an entrepreneurial sort of way, if you want to end up working on this problem or working in an industry associated to that problem through volunteering is - you could really start to understand the problem more deeply and gain credibility in talking about that. So I volunteered for Engineers Without Borders for a number of years. Didn't really have any expectations other than I wanted to really do some good work and I wanted to try and help some people. I wanted to solve that problem that I said about the 2 billion people who lack access to those fundamental human rights. And so basically I went into it and I just - I worked hard on that and I ended up rising up through some of the ranks in the LA Professional Chapter and I did stuff in the Regional Chapter.

And it was a lot of years where I was trying to convince a lot of the other engineers at Boeing to come and join me and a lot of people didn't want to do it, because they are afraid that it was going to take up too much of their time. But the great thing about volunteering is that it only takes up as much of the time as you want to give it. So after years of talking to everyone about it and telling everyone at Boeing to join Engineers Without Borders, I actually ended up getting a little bit of recognition for it. And so Boeing named me their volunteer of the year, their exceptional volunteer of the year which is out of 170,000 employees it's the person who wins that award. And I got to fly to Chicago and meet with the executives out there and have lunch with the Los Angeles Mayor and lots of random things like that, but the reason why I wanted to bring this up was because in the whole mindset of using kind of entrepreneurial thinking in a big company, I used that opportunity to talk to Boeing, talk to the management at Boeing and kind of convince them that they need - that the things that Engineers Without Borders wants to do and the things that Boeing wants are kind of one and the same and they should kind of look at that a little bit more deeply. And they did, I mean, Boeing ended up getting behind Engineers Without Borders in a big way after that. They sent their entire executive Council to Management training which was important because EWB grew fast. They started in 2002 and in nine years they started from one chapter, one professor, in the University of Colorado, Boulder and in nine years they had 12,000 volunteers as part of their thing and they couldn't quite keep up. They also added - funded some board positions on the thing and they gave away \$1.1 million in grants to projects. So both EWB and all the communities that EWB supported were better off as a result of that.