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Community Service OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

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Businesspeople from all walks of life have many options when it comes to community service opportunities. Such activities are a great way for young professionals to build name recognition and forge goodwill among customers, causes and colleagues alike.

Building a Positive Reputation

Karen Gibler, president of Sarpy County Chamber of Commerce, said participating with a group is as effective a conduit for service opportunities as it is in providing networking.

"The Sarpy Chamber is all about establishing relationships and connections between businesses, but we also work with a huge number of nonprofit organizations," she said. "Young professionals who are active in the Sarpy Chamber find it's a great way to learn more about the amazing local nonprofits we have in the area and forge partnerships that will leave a lasting positive impact on the community."

Gibler said in addition to the charitable aspect of such partnerships, being visible in the community through service is good for young professionals

as it helps develop positive name recognition through volunteering, committee assignments and other charitable activities.

"Working on a community service campaign is a great way for a young professional to define who they are in terms of their values and identity as a community member," she said. "Building on these efforts can seem counterintuitive to our general Midwestern sensibility of not wanting to toot one's own horn, but it's an important part of building name recognition and a positive reputation."

Challenging Young Leaders

Marjorie Maas, executive director of SHARE Omaha, said another benefit of getting involved with community service campaigns is that it challenges young leaders to energize fellow employees where they work. She advises first-time organizers to start by discovering a cause the group can rally around.

"Find something you and your co-workers are passionate about," she said. "It could be rallying behind someone with a health concern, a

school or children's organization where employees have family attending, or a cause where there is a common affinity."

Maas also recommended that young professionals think creatively about how to invest in the effort to generate excitement. And, she suggested young professionals look beyond the work day to discover ways to get even more involved.

"Make the most of your volunteer day. Wear branded clothing, come ready to work," Maas said. "You should also take the opportunity to ask questions about the mission of the organization while you're there. Your workday should be the start of a relationship, not its final destination."

Getting Started

Philanthropy among young professionals can seem daunting at first, however there are resources to assist newcomers in developing habits of giving.

Kelli Cavey, director of donor services for the Omaha Community Foundation, said the OCF works with all manner of individuals and companies to help make the biggest impact with their contributions.

Among OCF's many services is a starter philanthropy program for young

professionals called Omaha Venture Group. Founded in 2002, OVG kicks off in January, where members begin their introduction to philanthropy and leadership development with monthly education opportunities, efforts that culminate in the spring with a celebratory Grant Night.

"The Omaha Venture Group is a giving circle facilitated by the Omaha Community Foundation geared towards young professionals, many of whom are already emerging philanthropists who want to deepen their community knowledge while expanding their professional network," Cavey said. "OVG members get to learn about the nonprofit sector and experience grantmaking firsthand, as well as learn about different aspects of philanthropy."

"OVG is equipping these emerging philanthropists with a deeper knowledge about local community needs, so they can eventually provide even more support to nonprofits through volunteering, becoming a long-term donor to that organization or even serving as a board member."