

ARIZONA woman

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Jennifer Hadley Dioguardi,
Partner, Snell & Wilmer

Accelerate Your Career

HOW VOLUNTEERING DRIVES YOU AHEAD

Zooming Ahead

How to boost your career and accelerate job success through volunteering

By Kate Fitzgerald Photography by Paul Markow

DURING JENNIFER HADLEY DIOGUARDI'S first job review as a new associate working 50 to 60 hours a week at the Phoenix law firm of Snell & Wilmer, her bosses said she was coming along fine as an attorney, with one exception.

She was not very active in the community, but stepping up as a volunteer could make the difference between merely doing her job and having an outstanding career, she was told.

How will I ever find the time to volunteer, she wondered, and why should I do it?

Nearly eight years later, Dioguardi—now 36 and a partner at the firm—logs many hours volunteering in the community, and she says it's all been worth it, on top of her demanding job as a commercial litigator.

What Dioguardi discovered is that the time she put into volunteering accelerated her career by multiplying the impact of the hours she devoted to community causes. Along with many other Valley women business owners and executives, she believes volunteering can work like rocket fuel for your career.

"The kind of volunteering I've done has been so interesting, leading me to new client contacts and expanding my field of knowledge so much that it never seemed like a burden," she says. "The more you do, the more it boosts your career, which inspires you to do more."

It helps that Dioguardi's employer supports volunteering and gives her permission to leave early on certain days to attend meetings. A growing number of Valley employers including America West Airlines and Intel Corp. do the same thing, as volunteering has gained recognition as a powerful tool for helping individuals develop new job skills.

Intel has even developed a matrix of job skills one can gain through volunteering at various levels, ranging from team-building and time management to fund-raising. Of course, employers know it also reflects well on the corporate image when employees go out into the community to volunteer as individuals or as a group.

"Supporting our employees in volunteering promotes our brand in the community, but it also enriches the employee's skills and experiences," says Julie Coleman, America West's director of community relations.

Awakening New Passions

Volunteering can also fulfill deeper needs, especially in today's performance-driven corporate environments, says Glendale resident Barbara Kavanagh, 65, who leads volunteering workshops through her company People to People International, and last year wrote the self-published book "Training Volunteers for the New Millennium."

"Whether you volunteer through your work or outside of it, volunteering can be a life-changing experience for women who feel frustrated in their jobs or lack passion for their work. Volunteering can get you fired up about working with people for a common cause, and it can awaken new passion for life and work," she says.

The key is finding the right organization whose members and mission click with your own, she advises.

Dioguardi found her first volunteering in her own neighborhood, when she applied to become a member of the City of Phoenix's planning committee for Encanto Village. Immediately, she began learning about zoning and other land

use issues related to Phoenix's light rail project that she would never have known otherwise, and met many influential people who have become sources for legal client referrals, she says.

Next, Dioguardi began volunteering for the American Bar Association's Women Advocate Committee, and continues to edit its quarterly newsletter on career and lifestyle issues affecting female attorneys. That job has dramatically expanded and enriched her professional circle locally and nationally, she says. Recently Dioguardi was also named to the board of trustees for the Arizona Theatre Co., where she helps to raise funds and expose new audiences to theater.

"The time and energy I spend sort of reinvests itself. When I go to social and work events now, I see all kinds of people I've met through volunteering, which makes it fun," she says.

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— Jennifer Hadley Dioguardi