

# Develop Leadership Skills through Volunteering

Nita Patel

[nita.patel@ieee.org](mailto:nita.patel@ieee.org)



Leadership skills include planning projects, managing time, motivating individuals, giving feedback and building teams. These skills, often termed 'soft skills', are considered more important than experience or college education in defining successful business leaders.

According to Power Skills research volunteerism develops and improves these and other critical business skills, such as problem solving, coaching/mentoring and communicating effectively.

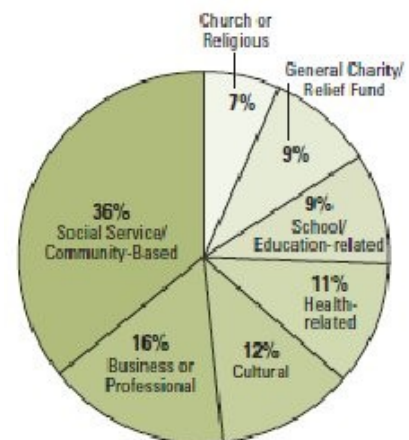
In a study, *How Volunteerism Shapes Professional Success*, conducted by Power Skills, professional women in a leadership capacity stated they gained many leadership skills through their volunteer activities.

Eighty-three percent (83%) of participants reported that they acquired, improved or developed their leadership skills due to volunteer participation, while seventy-eight percent (78%) reported improvement in their communications skills. Table 1 identifies other "power skills" improvements the study found. The study participants were involved in a variety of volunteer activities as shown in figure 1.

**TABLE 1: Leadership Skills Developed/Enhanced through Volunteerism**

(Responders selected ALL that apply)

%	Skill Developed/Enhanced
83%	Leadership
78%	Communications
73%	Fundraising / resource development
69%	Patience
63%	Political astuteness
62%	Problem solving
60%	Public speaking
57%	Organization/multitasking
54%	Finance/budgeting/accounting
53%	Coaching/mentoring
53%	Meeting planning
26%	Human resource management
17%	Interviewing/hiring
17%	Research



**Volunteer Organizations**

You can develop many leadership skills through volunteering.

1. **Grow People Skills:** Working side by side with others from very diverse backgrounds, you will develop interpersonal skills. In a professional workplace, the ability to interact with others is important to advancement. Through volunteering, you learn how to handle not only different types of people but also different situations. You will learn the value of diversity, strong communication, mutual respect, shared planning, cooperation and working towards common goals.

Additionally, in a volunteer role, you have more opportunities to interact with people at multiple levels of an organization. You may be on a committee with people from all levels of the organization including the president of the organization to a new member of the organization. This interaction will allow you to learn how to work with and communicate with multiple levels of an organization.

For example, being an IEEE section chair provides you the opportunity to interact with individuals interested in different technologies (that is, chapter officers), individuals interested in STEM education (e.g., pre-college, student activities or public awareness) and individuals interested in professional development (e.g., PACE or Industry Relations). You also have the opportunity to work with individual section members, regional officers, IEEE staff and members of the IEEE Board of Directors.

2. **Build your confidence:** Through volunteering, you have the opportunity to try new challenges without the fear of financial or career repercussions. Learning new skills in a supportive, low-consequence environment helps you expand your skills and gain confidence. Once you have gained experience tackling new challenges, you will be more confident when faced with challenges in work situations.

3. **Learn planning/organization skills:** Volunteers learn to plan effective meetings, organize events and coordinate other volunteers. Through planning an event, you learn how to set goals, define actions and track results. These planning and organization skills are transferrable through all career paths.

For example, volunteering to coordinate your chapter's summer social will require you to plan dates, coordinate a venue, ask others to help and plan activities for the social. Through this type of hands-on involvement, you have an opportunity to practice your skills and improve by getting feedback from other members.

**4. Acquire additional training:** Many volunteer organizations provide training for their volunteers to help them learn new skills, both technical and professional. By volunteering, you open yourself to new opportunities.

In IEEE, regions typically hold training workshop for their section volunteers. Additionally, as a volunteer, you have the opportunity to attend task-specific training to assist you in your role. These training opportunities include general professional development presentations, which can help you improve your leadership skills.

**5. Develop mentoring skills:** Most volunteer organizations rely on other volunteers to share information and knowledge. As you change roles within an organization, you gain the opportunity to mentor new members who assume a role you previously filled. This provides you the opportunity to mentor newer members and learn how to advise others.

**6. Improve communication skills:** Leadership requires clear, concise and organized communications. Volunteer activities typically require you to communicate what you are doing and to persuade others to assist in your cause. Through practice, your communication skills will improve.

**7. Learn time management skills:** Volunteering requires that you learn how to juggle your work, family and volunteer priorities. In order to maintain a reasonable balance, you learn how to manage your time.

**8. Grow Your Professional And Personal Network:** Volunteering is a very social activity that allows you to interact with and meet many new people. You will establish contacts and make friends who can introduce you to job leads, or provide recommendations for future employers. You will meet not only individuals sharing a common passion for an activity or cause but also individuals from very diverse backgrounds.

For example, working on a standards committee will put you in contact with other individuals and experts in your technical area from around the world. You will learn new ideas and gain different perspectives; thereby, increasing not only your contact list but also your knowledge base.

**9. Gain work experience:** Volunteer work experience is as valuable as traditional work experience. Through a volunteer activity, you might learn new skills, which can be used in getting a promotion or job transfer. Through volunteering, you can test new career paths or different fields without a long-term or potentially detrimental commitment. You can learn many different skills that you do not have the opportunity to develop or

practice in your normal work.

10. **Boost your career options:** Volunteering can boost your credibility and give you an edge when it comes to seeking a new job. A survey by TimeBank through Reed Executive showed that among 200 of the UK's leading businesses:

- 73% of employers would employ a candidate with volunteering experience over one without
- 94% of employers believe that volunteering can add to skills
- 58% say that voluntary work experience can actually be more valuable than experience gained in paid employment
- 94% of employees who volunteered to learn new skills had benefited either by getting their first job, improving their salary, or being promoted.

### **References:**

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