

Help at hand for doing a social good

There are organisations that promote the spirit of volunteering among their employees by offering them a grant and paid leave

LIFFY THOMAS

Aman Bhalla volunteers with Apne Aap Women Worldwide, generously extending time and money to the Mumbai-based charitable trust which works towards preventing trafficking of women.

Without the support of his employer, Bhalla can be only half as effective as he is in this volunteering work. DHL Express, where he works, has two initiatives – 'Living Responsibility Fund' and 'DHL Got Heart' – and under each of the two, employees working for a social good are provided with a grant. The social good they choose need not come under the ambit of the corporate social responsibility initiatives espoused by the company.

This is indicative of a new thinking in the corporate world. There are a small but slowly growing number of companies that offer its employees a grant, paid leave or any other privilege if they are engaged in a volunteering work.

Of course, the volunteering work should be deemed to be making a difference in society, for the company to loosen its purse strings.

'Living Responsibility Fund' requires employees to make a strong pitch to get the grant, which ranges from 500 to 4,000 euros.

'DHL Got Heart' is a global competition for employees where they have to prove their commitment to the causes they espouse, outside work. In India, the volunteering projects of the top 10 regional winners are showcased to all employees, and they get a grant of ₹35,000 each. Then these ten go on to

compete with winners from various countries, where each of those who make it, receives a grant of 22,000 euros.

"Both these initiatives ('Living Responsibility Fund' and 'DHL Got Heart') are aimed at enabling employees to take up causes they are passionate about," says R. S. Subramanian, country manager, DHL Express India.

"Under 'DHL Got Talent', 400 employees took part in the global competition and 18 won the grant this year. We pick up causes that have a structure and the grant is given to the NGO the individual is working for," says Subramanian.

In her volunteering engagement, Archana K.R., 30 years old, has found an ally in her organisation, Reap Benefit, a start-up that empowers youth to solve civic and environment-related issues.

"Your organisation and you need not always be on the same page even if it's a social enterprise. They are working on a host of projects; and to push my campaign idea along with theirs speaks volumes for how much importance they give to a team member's volunteering pursuit," says Archana, programme manager at Reap Benefit.

Archana is campaigning for clean and safe toilets at all government schools in Bengaluru.

Based on the data that Archana collected about sanitation facilities at government schools in Bengaluru, Reap Benefit has set up urinals at some of them.

"They have also promised to push my campaign through the 'Solve Ninja App'



"Every Saturday, I take lessons on how to use computers for children from Apne Aap Women Worldwide, which works for the welfare of children of sex workers at Kamathipura in Mumbai. Allowing me to volunteer for an area that I feel strongly about and giving me grants have only strengthened my commitment."

AMAN BHALLA
area sales manager, DHL Express



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ARCHANA K.R.,
programme manager, Reap Benefit

which has 23,000 users," says Archana.

During this year's Women's Day celebrations, at Reliance Capital, three employees were felicitated by the chairperson of the CSR Reliance Group, Tina Ambani, for the social causes they have been promoting.

Preeti Chhapra, senior manager, secretarial, Reliance Asset Reconstruction Company, Mumbai, takes Company Secretary and Law classes to students who have dropped out due to financial constraints; Priya Gupta, branch credit manager, Reliance Home Finance, Noida, works with street children; and Macherla Sangeetha, re-

lationship manager, Reliance Securities, Hyderabad,

provides employment opportunities to women. Many organisations offer paid time off work for employees to volunteer for a cause and some of these showcase the volunteering work being done by their associates through articles in the internal newsletter.

Driven by employees

Aarti Madhusudan, who runs Whiteboard, an initiative within iVolunteer that gets senior corporate professionals to spend time with NGOs, says that often Corporate Social Responsibility is run on

the beliefs of three to four employees who make a decision for hundreds of employees.

She says that to make sure employees make a meaningful contribution, volunteering must factor in the stage of life an employee is at, and also individual motivation.

She points out that corporates don't have the bandwidth to manage the volunteering choices of all employees in an organisation.

"Through corporate round-table discussions in various cities, we are trying to arrive at a sectoral understanding and explore collaborations," says Aarti.