Can You Volunteer to Find a Job?

Volunteering can allow you to stretch and practice new skills in a safe environment, and is a good way to fill in any gaps on your résumé.

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Anyone who has been through a life-changing diagnosis and found themselves out of work or looking for work should consider volunteering as a way to:

- Fill in blank spaces on the résumé: When you take time off (or are unceremoniously let go from a job during cancer and its treatments) you will have some blank spaces on your chronological timeline of jobs. Volunteering at an organization on a part-time bases (if you are cleared to do so by your medical team) could be a good way to showcase you have work experiences in the midst of not working.

- Enrich your skills: Volunteering can allow you to stretch and practice new skills in a safe environment. There is not a lot of pressure involved with a volunteer role meaning that if you fail at a task, you cannot be fired — this is a good way to get acclimated back to thinking on your feet and talking about things other than blood counts and PET scans.

- Meet new people: You will be out and about and building relationships with the folks in and around the organization for which you volunteer.

- Find potential opportunities: You can network with these folks when you are ready to transition back to a paid position and maybe your volunteer role could even become your new job.

- Find potential references: Even if you do not wind up working at the volunteer role, you can rely

on the relationship you have built to give you a great reference for your next job.

When you are not working, you have a lot of time on your hands and you can only “job search” for so long each day. Being in the home and thinking about your health might just be a bad thing for you to be doing, and if you are cleared to work and/or to do activity, you should consider volunteering.

What I learned from volunteering is how to:

- Lead people effectively — without true responsibility for staff or volunteers but being the focal point and the “leader” when you are really just someone there for a short amount of time is an amazing skill to exercise and keep fresh.

- Use project management skills — I was able to take my love of all things project management and execute it with an actual thriving business and these skills have come with me as I use them with my small business, too.

- Keep my public speaking and communication skills sharp — just having the interaction and the ability to speak aloud was great practice for me.

What do you think about volunteering for your career after cancer?

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