

### Purpose -v- Strategy: A Case Study from Silicon Valley

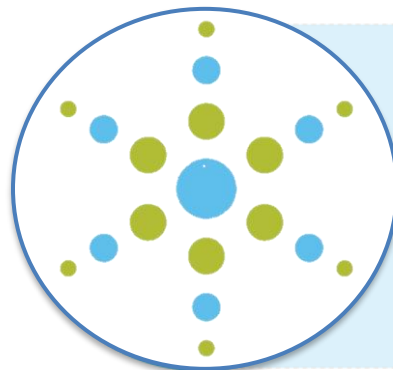
The business case for purpose in the workplace is clear. Studies show<sup>1-3</sup> that companies that develop and articulate a strong sense of purpose are better positioned to achieve business growth, customer loyalty and employee satisfaction.

Understanding and implementing purpose-supporting initiatives has become a top priority for those developing and managing Corporate Social Responsibility programs. Leaders continue to grapple with the challenge of developing initiatives and programs that are closely aligned with the company's brand, strategy and values, while also trying to engage employees with purpose-building opportunities that fit their personal interests. How do they do it?

To gain insights on how some companies are dealing with the challenge, Points of Light invited a select group of Silicon Valley-based CSR leaders from Airbnb, Google, Lyft, Salesforce and Twitter to participate in one-on-one in-depth interviews to share their perspectives and approaches to solving the challenge.

Why just Silicon Valley tech companies? We wanted to explore how these firms, known for their innovative and disruptive approach to solving our personal and business needs, were also finding innovative and disruptive ways to crack the code between meeting their employees' need for purpose in their jobs and developing their social impact strategy.

The key takeaway from conversations with these leaders was that there is no silver bullet. Leaders clearly recognized the need to support their employees' individual interests, which may not necessarily intersect with the organization's purpose agenda. And everyone commented on the importance of having CSR programs that strongly aligned with the company's purpose. The aligned initiatives were viewed as important in helping employees connect to the CSR strategy and the greater impact goals the company is seeking to achieve.



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So how are they resolving these competing objectives? They are seeking pathways that intentionally accommodate both interests through a variety of programs and approaches, from months of service to Dollars for Doers.

The approach to employee choice may appear simply to be an add-on to the core CSR strategy, but it is in fact a strong building block of that strategy. By providing employees a **voice** and **choice** in how

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their company and/or foundation supports their personal causes, CSR leaders are providing them with an important entry point to finding purpose at work.

Although the study participants' solutions reflected a blended approach, they did provide two key points to keep in mind when developing or re-evaluating programs to make a stronger connection between strategy and employee purpose: **know your superpower** and **meet your employees where they are**.

### Know Your Superpower

Lisa Boyd, senior manager of social impact at [Lyft](#), stresses the importance of knowing your company's superpower, and understanding how that power aligns with your company purpose.



Lyft demonstrated the strength of their superpower recently when it announced it would offer free rides to attendees of the March for our Lives, on Saturday, March 22. [Read more.](#)

"Our superpower at Lyft is our ability to provide transportation in ways that are needed, including donating transportation during natural or man-made disasters, or to vulnerable populations on an ongoing basis," Lisa explains. "We want to focus our power into ways that really make sense, tell a cohesive story, and show where our values stand. Employee engagement is one of many important areas of focus, but it's not the only one."

It is clear that Salesforce knows its superpower for social good. In fact, it brings so much technical power to organizations that it created a social enterprise – [Salesforce.org](#) – to "bring technology to more nonprofits and educators, which in turn allows the company to invest more in technology and communities, thus creating an endless circle of good."

Salesforce is the driving force behind the [Pledge 1%](#) movement. Companies that make the pledge commit to donating 1 percent of their product, equity and volunteer time to the community.



The impact of this circle of good is clear. The results of its 2016 customer survey showed that 87 percent of nonprofit and higher education respondents indicate that Salesforce.org is helping them advance their mission.

Alissa May, manager of employee engagement, shares, "Our focus areas at Salesforce.org are education and workforce development, but our employee programs have always been employee inspired and driven by their passions. If an employee's interest falls outside of our focus areas, we absolutely support them by providing toolkits and other resources that help to amplify their own goals."

### Meet your employees where they are

Each of the CSR leaders interviewed understood their employee volunteer program as the primary vehicle by which they support the varied interests of their workforce. By providing volunteer time off

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alongside a form of matching grants for those volunteer hours, the companies felt employees had both a voice and a choice in how they could make an impact in the community.

Caroline Barlerin, head of community outreach and philanthropy at Twitter, recommends CSR practitioners “meet your employees where they are” by offering a portfolio of opportunities to give back to the community. For Twitter, this means offering opportunities ranging from a hands-on activity to a skills-based project that is closely aligned with Twitter’s focus areas around internet safety, digital citizenship and freedom of expression.

She explains, "Recognizing everyone's incredibly busy, it's critical to figure out where your social impact program fits within the Venn diagram between employee priorities and those of the business. Finding the best pathway between these two is where the strongest challenges and opportunities lie."



Twitter works with nonprofits all over the world to help them develop a more effective and engaging presence on the platform. The Neighbor Nest, located directly across the street from Twitter SF, offers a family-friendly learning center for the local community, which has attracted thousands of visits from residents, provided hours of community and Twitter-led programming, and free childcare alongside nonprofit partners.

Google employees can use up to 20 hours of work time throughout the year to participate in volunteer opportunities, and the company will match up to \$6,000 per employee per year to nonprofits of their choosing.

In the past year, as the company has brought employee engagement and philanthropic efforts together, Google.org has been exploring ways to "encourage employee giving and volunteering with strategic partners and within Google.org's focus areas of education, economic opportunity, inclusion, and crisis response."



In 2017, Google and Googlers donated more than \$260 million to nonprofit organizations around the world, and Googlers volunteered more than 220,000 hours in their local communities.

Lacy Caruthers, principal at Google.org, comments, "We want to empower employees to give and volunteer with the causes they're most passionate about and provide opportunities for people to get involved with our strategic social impact efforts."

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[Airbnb](#)'s superpower translates to a social impact goal of providing open homes. This means providing short-term accommodations to people in need through its platform in three categories: refugees, disaster response and medical stays.

Airbnb has been working with International Rescue Committee since 2015, focusing on short-term housing for relief workers and refugee resettlement. In 2017, Airbnb pledged \$4 million over the next four years in both cash and housing credit to support these IRC's initiatives even further. Employees connect to the cause by volunteering with IRC in a variety of ways, including workshops with IRC clients.



Airbnb also empowers employee choice in how they volunteer and donate to the community through their giving/volunteering platform. Results from their giving campaign showed the wide range of interest, with employees donating to more than 1,300 organizations.

"It was interesting to see so many organizations chosen by employees, but we also saw 15 to 20 percent of funds were donated to our strategic partners, which we featured on the platform," states Rachel Katz, global volunteer engagement manager at Airbnb. "We'll continue to use levers like the giving/volunteering platform to provide employee choice, but we'll also create volunteer experiences with strategic partners so they become more and more connected to the organizations and issues that we work on. In fact, in our internal survey last year, 91 percent of employees said they're proud of the work we do in local communities."

Lou Reda, executive director of [HandsOn Bay Area](#), a Points of Light affiliate that each year works with more than 50 innovative companies to create custom volunteering events for more than 18,000 employees, has seen this growing trend in the companies they support. Traditionally, organization clients looked to HandsOn Bay Area to just develop and manage their hands-on volunteer activities. Today, HandsOn Bay Area is increasingly getting requests for service projects that provide a deeper engagement with the company's strategic nonprofit partner. This is true for large companies and for the growing number of start-ups in San Francisco.

"We have many start-ups that use our 'Project in a Box' and Calendar Program," explains Lou. "These are typical entry points for the start-ups, before they utilize our custom projects. These custom projects tend to be aligned with the company's giving goals and/or offer a deeper learning and reflection component that may include a fireside chat with the nonprofit founder. There's a greater appetite to go deeper."

By offering multiple entry points to give back to the community, employees are able to see how they can contribute to the overall CSR social impact goals. Whether these activities simply provide a means to satisfy personal passions or align to the CSR focus areas, both contribute to the employees' sense of meaning in their work.



### Where do we go from here?

It is encouraging to see from the project interviews that all the companies, including the start-ups, recognize the need to have a multi-pronged approach to their CSR programs. When companies leverage their unique products and services, and engage employees in a thoughtful variety of opportunities for volunteering and community action, CSR leaders can deliver social impact in the community and purpose integration for the employee.

### How to get started:

1. **Explore employee interests and passions:** Analyze data available through your HR or volunteer management platform, or by surveying or hosting a series of focus groups. Ask employees to begin tracking their personal volunteer time if they are not already, and make sure to explain the context for collecting this data. Create personas based on validated commonalities – not assumptions – to better understand the different employee profiles and how they relate to volunteering.
2. **Identify easy wins:** Use that data, along with your company's core competencies and strengths, to find overlapping social impact goals. Try to align with existing employee affinity groups or a celebration. If there are none, don't despair! Create a soundboard group, share your results with senior leadership and propose changes to your program that will elicit greater success.
3. **Ask for help:** There are nonprofits with know-how and proven track records of supporting companies and employees to better engage with the local communities where they live and work. They can match your unique community goals with their network of community partners, and use their expertise to identify the highest need in the community and create the highest quality volunteer experience for your employees. Making plans and budgets for outside support can help you maximize opportunities.
4. **Set a strategy and goals:** Design a strategy for your employee volunteer program along with associated goals and tactics that allow for a three-pronged approach: meeting community needs, company priorities and employee interests and motivations.
  - Use signature programs and partners to align with the company's priorities and social impact goals. Provide additional opportunities, such as team-based volunteering, that are more flexible and responsive to local needs.
5. **Spread the word:** Promote the benefits of volunteering through communication campaigns, training and resources. Encourage your employees to become civically engaged as individuals, and as ambassadors of the company brand.
6. **Make it personal:** Bolster participation and interest by offering employee-centric incentives like volunteer time off during the workday, Dollars for Doers or matching gifts that support personal passions.



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7. **Improve over time:** Community needs, company priorities and employee interests can change over time. Regular evaluation of your program will lead to continued support and engagement.

### Interested in learning more? Check out these links:

1. In a recent Champions for Social Good [podcast](#), Jennifer Lawson, president of networks at [Points of Light](#) spoke with Rachel Hutchisson, vice president of corporate citizenship and philanthropy at [Blackbaud](#), about the emerging trends in how companies are designing volunteer opportunities that engage employees and honor more personal purpose.
2. Bea Boccalandro, founder and president of [Veraworks](#), is a highly-regarded expert on the topic of job purposing. Get insights [on her blog](#).
3. Sustainable Brands' online [library](#) offers numerous publications on how purpose can play a role in strengthening a company's brand.
4. Check out [Service Unites 2018](#), powered by Points of Light. The conference's Business Path offers research, models, proven practices and networking opportunities to empower and equip attendees to accelerate and grow their corporate volunteer programs.

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The [Points of Light Corporate Service Council](#) equips, connects and leads global brands in developing the very best strategies to engage employees and partners, sustain high-impact service and lead social innovation in communities around the world. Together, we are a global network of corporate citizenship leaders seeking to help more people volunteer more often and with greater impact. Join us!

This report was written by Rebecca Wang, CSR Leader and Social Impact Change Agent. Thanks to the following individuals for providing their expertise: Lisa Boyd, Lyft; Alissa May, Salesforce; Caroline Barlerin, Twitter; Lacy Caruthers, Google; Rachel Katz, Airbnb; and Lou Reda, HandsOn Bay Area.

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