The Edge: It’s worth it to do business with the government

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You can look at the value of volunteering in your community from many points of view. As far as I am concerned, it’s a societal responsibility that I take seriously.

But there is a business bottom-line point of view to volunteering as well.

Here’s what I’ve learned through a variety of volunteer positions: The business-smart reason for volunteering is that volunteering allows you to get a lot smarter.

Volunteering helps you dig deeper into how things work. You can get very informed on a subject, a mission, a community offering, a community challenge or another aspect of the fabric or infrastructure of your city, your state, your country or your world through volunteering. And
making sense of your world — local and global — is key, because your business lives in this marketplace, this ecosystem.

Getting involved in organizations and entities, perhaps not like your own, can open so many doors and windows in your mind, fill in gaps in your business knowledge and open you to experts in other fields, who are also sharing their knowledge. Remember that if you are part of a volunteer team, you are likely one expert in a room of other experts unlike yourself. Most times, you will find a group strategically invited their volunteers to get different points of view and different skill sets together.

This is ideal. It may also be a learning opportunity you need very much, especially if you find yourself all too frequently with others in your same career path or industry. Volunteering gives you many mini-lessons in a hurry as part of a board of directors, a committee, a task force or an executive advising team.

Running a business (or starting a business, or holding a leadership role in someone else’s business) requires that you bring to the table a wider, more grounded perspective on your world. You can gain this through volunteering.

Decisions a business makes, and you make as a decision-maker within or for a business, can only be enhanced by a smarter you — someone who understands better the mechanisms and operations and opportunities and complexities of our ecosystem.

So get out there, get in it, find groups where what you know can be added to what they know, and stir it up. See what net positives you can achieve even as you scoop up all kinds of new things to think about and stow away as tools and resources — and, yes, relationships — that enrich who you are, what you can achieve and how you go about making the decisions that take you there.