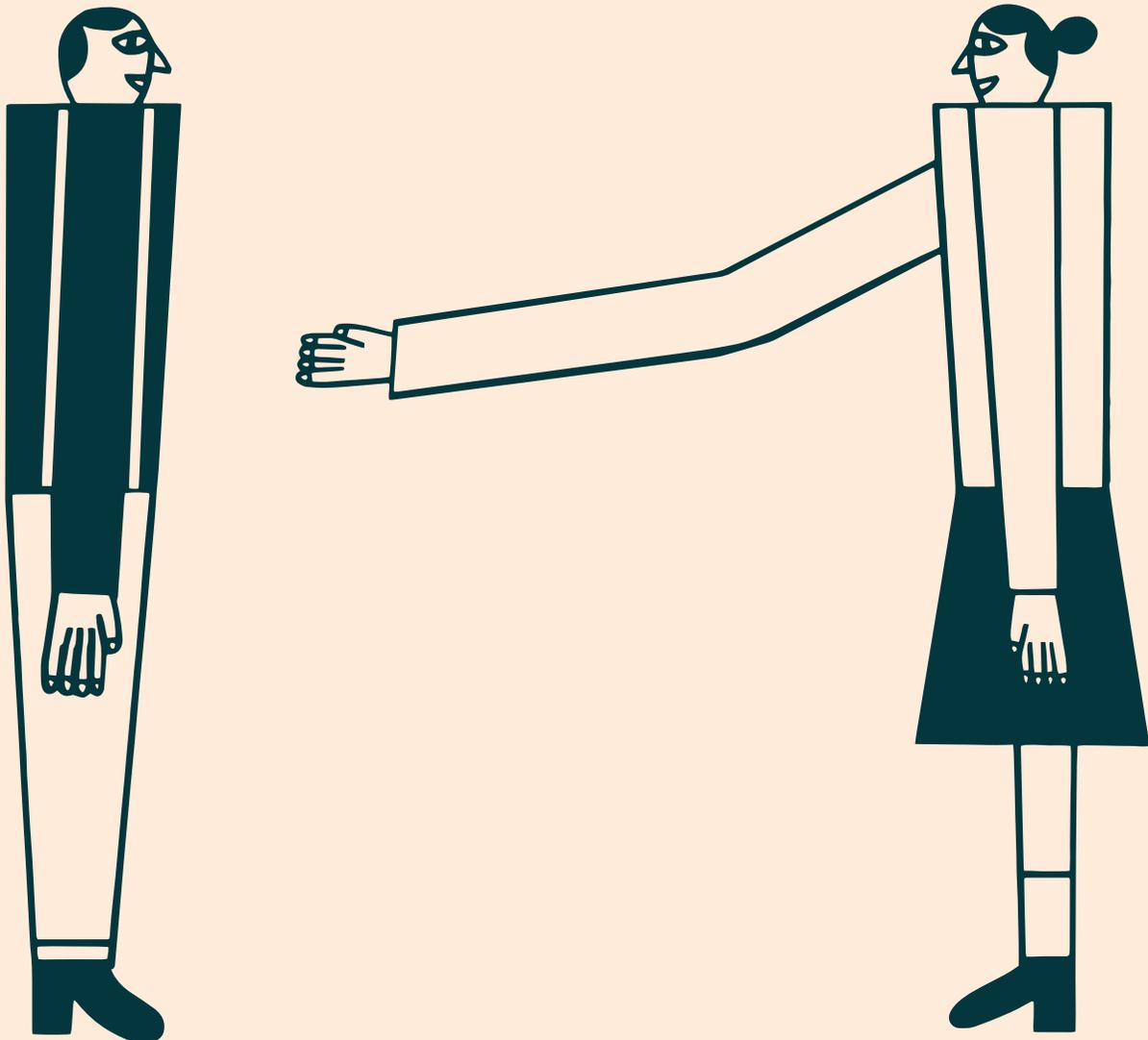




How volunteering boosts agent performance: 3 key benefits



Since 2012, Zendesk has woven corporate giving into its business model.

When an employee joins the company, we encourage employee volunteering from the beginning—not only to help the communities where we operate but to also help employees form bonds and get to know one another better. Volunteering is part of our core philosophy to be better community members and a responsible business and to be the company our customers and employees want us to be. That's why we've made substantial time, money, and human resources investments to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in our communities.

To get a better sense of how Zendesk's culture of volunteering has impacted our Advocates' (customer-support employees') feelings and performance on the job, we partnered with Drexel University to conduct a study.

What did we learn? Volunteering has benefited our organization in 3 ways: improving CSAT due to increased help-seeking behaviors, improving empathy scores, and improving agent retention through pride in our communities.

Keep reading to learn more about our company-wide study on how volunteering impacts our Advocates and, as a result, customer satisfaction and employee retention.

3 key benefits of volunteering

1. CSR can increase CSAT by stimulating help-seeking behaviors among advocates. It enables advocates to meet other employees, enriching existing relationships and creating new relationships.

The notion that volunteering with others at the company encourages helping and help-seeking behaviors, which then facilitates customer satisfaction, was tested in two steps. First, helping and help-seeking behaviors were examined as predictors of CSAT. We found that the more an advocate seeks help from others at the company, the higher their CSAT scores.

The second step was to test the effect of CSR volunteering on help-seeking. We found that Advocates are significantly more likely to engage in help-seeking the more a volunteering event puts them in contact with other employees. The frequency of volunteering is not as important as the type of CSR contact while volunteering. Taken together, this suggests that, if trying to boost help-seeking behaviors, the people present at the volunteering event are more meaningful than whether the advocate attended events more than once every two months.

15%

Regular volunteering increased "help-seeking" behavior in our Advocates by 15%.

2. Focus group respondents said that volunteering helps them empathize with customers and builds empathy muscles.

Focus group respondents said that volunteering helps them empathize with customers and that seeing people in need and then helping those beneficiaries enables the advocate to "build the empathy muscle." We found that volunteering at least once every two months was a significant predictor of empathy scores. Likewise, CSR contact with the end beneficiary was the important factor. This suggests that both the frequency of volunteering and the degree of CSR contact with end beneficiaries play a role in creating empathy during customer encounters. This supports the focus group finding that volunteering can spill over to frontline interactions by encouraging advocates to "put themselves in the shoes" of customers who are facing difficulties.

3x

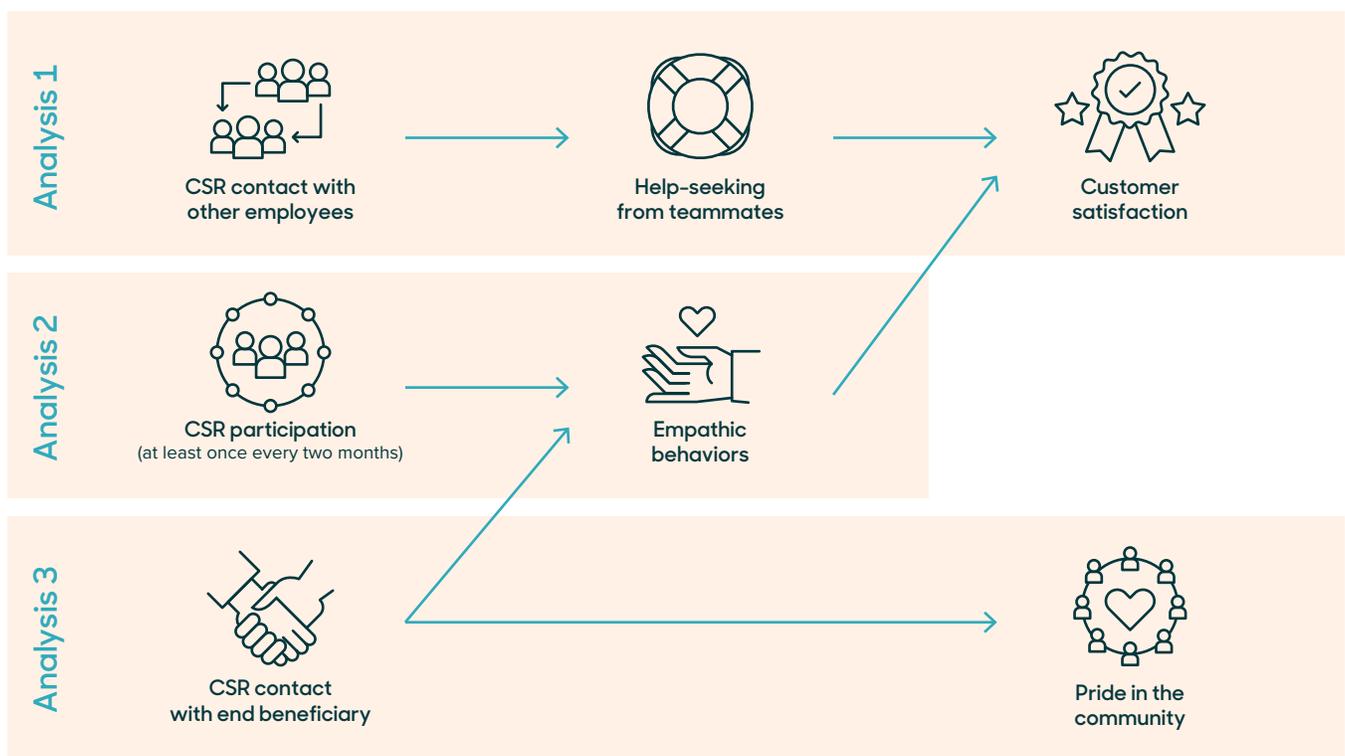
Advocates who volunteered at least once every 2 months were more than 3 times more likely to be rated among the top third in our QA empathy scores.

A more intuitive way to describe the data is the following: Advocates who volunteered at least once every 2 months were more than 3 times more likely to be rated among the top third in the company for empathy.

Volunteering at least once every two months is associated with higher empathy, and this relationship becomes even stronger with more CSR contact with end beneficiaries.

3. Advocates stated that volunteering gives them pride in the community.

Volunteering at least once every two months was marginally associated with pride in the community, and CSR contact with the end beneficiary was significantly associated with pride in the community. This supports the qualitative finding that pride develops when advocates meet people in need in the neighborhood on a regular basis.



This study explored the potential connections between CSR volunteering and job performance.

The central finding? Volunteering can influence the way employees conduct themselves during customer encounters. Employees who volunteer more often tend to develop help and help-seeking behaviors and show greater empathy during interactions, which can produce higher customer satisfaction.

They also tend to have more pride in the local community, which can improve employee retention. These findings dovetail with what advocates in the study said themselves, noting that CSR volunteering has a profound effect on their work and personal life.

Different forms of CSR volunteering can be tailored to the needs of the company and the individual employee, and we hope these findings provide a springboard for managers to expand CSR volunteering experiences in meaningful ways. CSR provides an unusually potent means to simultaneously create value for the company, employees, customers, and the community.

What our employees had to say

CSR was, for many, a reason to join the company and a reason to remain there.

"I took a theoretically less substantial offer to work at Zendesk because of their CSR, because I believe we do have a responsibility to give back."

"The CSR program was one of the main reasons why I wanted to come to Zendesk."

"CSR gives me a sense of loyalty and pride in saying I work at Zendesk."

"I still really appreciate that, as a company, Zendesk is willing to pay us to help in the community."

Advocates said that Zendesk's culture of volunteering makes their job more meaningful.

"Volunteering is a key aspect of the company's character and company's atmosphere."

"I applied for this job because I wanted to help people. Volunteering very much affects me mentally, physically, in every way."

"Volunteering plays such a huge role in how I am [not] just as a person but also [in] how I communicate with a customer. "

"We're spoiled in the sense that not only do we get to take volunteer opportunities during working hours, but we have an entire team that's aggregating different volunteer opportunities and building relationships with different services. They put it all together on a calendar and say 'come sign up.'"

Advocates said that volunteering helps give perspective when working with customers and builds an empathy muscle that Advocates use when a customer is upset.

“There is something very different about volunteering that connects you and brings out the humanity in you.”

“Our whole job is to help people solve problems so, when you can do it in a different context and do it with something you’re passionate about, it energizes you to look at your opportunities to help people at work with new eyes and with new energy.”

“Relating to people outside of our comfort zone and outside of our social spheres also opens up opportunities to strengthen our communication skills and get in touch with our empathy in ways that can sometimes become disassociated in our positions.”

“I just love helping people, but doing the same thing every day can make you forget about that. When you get to volunteer outside of work, it makes you aware that we’re here for the people; we are the advocates for our customers.”

Advocates reported that volunteering enabled them to meet other employees they wouldn’t normally interact with and, as a result, improved relationships and encouraged information-sharing and cooperation amongst Zendesk employees.

“You might be more inclined to help your colleagues or hit them up personally if you’ve met them volunteering.”

“It definitely helps us in advocacy because we tend to need to reach out to a lot of different departments to get things done. It can be helpful to feel comfortable messaging someone.”

“I never really spoke to my colleague until we volunteered together. He’s always really busy, so it was cool getting to see him outside of the office. I know what he does for work, and I know when and when not to bug him now.”

“Sometimes you haven’t yet formed a relationship with some of your colleagues, even when they sit a few desks away from you. When you go volunteer, now you have something in common.”

Advocates said volunteering gave them a greater sense of pride in the community, while improving their view of the community and the community's view of Zendesk.

“SR makes me feel more connected to Madison, Wisc., and more engaged in what’s going on in terms of where the city needs things.”

“It’s a really good way to know what’s happening here. You have to know where San Francisco came from.”

“Volunteering lowers skepticism level to strangers—it makes your environment level less alienating.”

“I remember being proud of the people that were speaking up and saying, ‘Yes, this isn’t necessarily a great neighborhood, but what can we do to make it better instead of just complaining about it?’”

The takeaway

Advocates don’t just enjoy volunteering through the company; they also claim it has an influence on the quality of their work. They say that seeing—and helping—others in need during volunteering events contributes to their empathy for others and even spills over to their interactions with customers. What’s more, not only can volunteering enhance a sense of community among advocates, it can intensify pride in the greater local community. Weaving volunteering and community engagement into our core business practice has made lasting impacts on Zendesk as a company.

If you would like to learn more about this study, or how to engage with your own community better, please email info@neighborfoundation.org or visit the [Zendesk Neighbor Foundation website](#).