



Humanitarian Holiday

Employees, communities and businesses can benefit when workers get paid time off for good deeds.

Ray Unger, the CEO of AccuTech Systems—the second-largest trust-and-financial software provider in North America—holds a unique view of employee motivation. Convinced by his personal experience with humanitarian work that philanthropy recharges people to be and do their best, he has created a program at AccuTech that serves as a model for philanthropic business owners and executives. In addition to vacation time, the company offers all employees one week of paid time off each year to perform philanthropic work. AccuTech calls it “philanthropic leave.”

MY WIFE CAROL and I started mulling over the concept of a philanthropic leave week when we became involved in short-term missions sponsored by our church. Each year we served in small villages in Mexico’s Yucatán Peninsula; we also went to El Salvador. We helped build various structures, painted a medical clinic, made benches for churches, and conducted Bible school sessions for hundreds of children and their parents. We have seen how much a one-week trip can do for the people we’ve helped—and it affected our own lives tremendously.

We began offering philanthropic leave as an employee benefit six years ago in an effort to motivate our staff at AccuTech Systems to share in similar experiences. Participating employees have the opportunity to help others and to realize that the blessings of selfless acts are twofold: When human beings help someone less fortunate, they develop a new sense of appreciation for their own life circumstances, including the work they do. As employers, we feel we are achieving our original

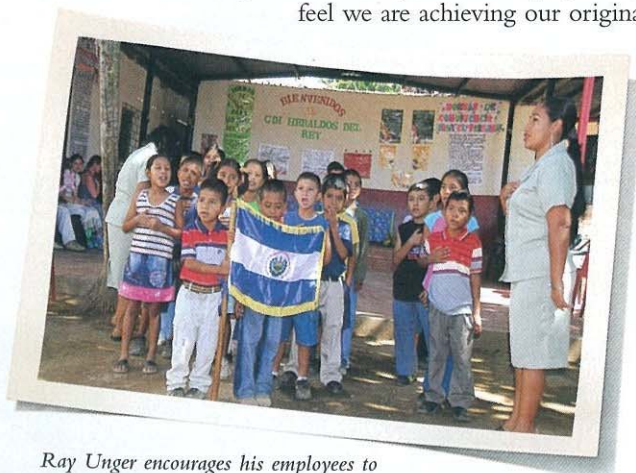
goal—to help others—while helping those who work for us to broaden their lives and dedicate themselves more fully to their work. In this age of selfishness and blind ambition, philanthropic leave is a tremendously successful antidote.

Furthermore, we see a ripple effect. Several organizations have benefited in our community and around the world from our staff’s participation. Our employees have worked with church programs, short-term overseas missions and organizations including Compassion International, Habitat for Humanity and Big Brothers Big Sisters. Some take a day or two at a time; others use the entire week at once. Like our company, these organizations experience the dedication and enthusiasm of motivated volunteers.

AccuTech Systems is a privately held software company with a staff of 40. We are family-owned, which gives us certain advantages. We do not have to concern ourselves with the effect philanthropic leave has on our stock price. Nor do we have to justify the program to aggressive investors. And while time away from work may affect productivity on the front end, there is a longer-term productivity boost. Employees who have participated in philanthropic leave—30 percent have, so far—typically return very appreciative of the opportunity. This appreciation translates into greater dedication and loyalty to their jobs, and to our company’s long-term goals, which then translate into greater sustained productivity. Everybody wins.

To qualify for philanthropic leave, employees must submit a request stating the occasion or event and in what role they will serve—and it must be in participation with a reputable nonprofit organization focused on helping others. Due to our company culture, we have not had to deny any employee request for philanthropic leave because of the organization or type of event involved. In larger companies in bigger cities, qualification may require more detailed criteria.

Without a doubt, this program has had a net positive effect on the company, its owners and its employees. This company benefit helps to further define our values and our culture. Our staff appreciates the opportunity to help others and still have their vacation time for their own families. In our management strategy, our bottom line, like that of most business, is financial success. But an equally important bottom line is this simple question: “Is this the right thing to do?” We believe it is. Our employees, and the people and organizations they serve, agree. ■



Ray Unger encourages his employees to do volunteer work, as he did at a school in El Salvador.