

This article was previously published in Military Money magazine. Used with permission.

Volunteering For Opportunity
by Kathie Hightower and Holly Scherer
Word Count (with byline): 762

Okay, so you know what your dream career is. You are ready to apply for a job that fits.

Then you move with the military and what you want to do is simply not available at that location. What do you do? Give up? Settle for a career field you aren't that excited about? Take a job, any job? Unfortunately, that is what many of us do.

A better idea would be to see if you can find or create the job you want via volunteer work. If that isn't possible, identify the skills you will need for that dream job – be it computer, marketing, managing others, fund-raising, PR – and find volunteer work that will teach you those skills.

Kathie had just started into the seminar business when her husband was transferred to Germany. The seminar companies she'd interviewed with did not have any international work. She couldn't afford to set up as a business in Germany (with the high tax rate and complicated laws) so she couldn't market her seminars to corporations located there.

Kathie feared her seminars skills would fade if she didn't use them for three years, so she found volunteer opportunities to speak. A new acquaintance told her about the American Women's Activities Germany (AWAG) conferences. She sent a proposal and ended up doing six workshops that first year and numerous ones every year after that. From that, she got to speak at many area AWAG workshops and at many wives club meetings. She volunteered to do free workshops about job-finding skills and personal PR in the Heidelberg community.

Not only did these volunteer presentations improve her skills, they gave her visibility and credibility that eventually resulted in paid work as well. This was in the days before the Army's AFTB program. If that program had been available, it would have been the perfect place for her to get lots of platform time as well as some added "train the trainer" courses.

Kathie's fellow members in the National Speakers Association are envious of the opportunities she had to speak internationally – in Germany, Italy and Belgium – that mark her as an International Speaker. That's not to mention the pleasure she derived from traveling to and speaking in fabulous places like Garmisch and Bamberg and Heidelberg and Vincenza. And it came mostly from volunteer work.

She's built her writing business the same way, using a regular column for the Ft. Lewis Wives Club newsletter followed by the Heidelberg Wives Club newsletter

as the stepping stones to continued writing. Now she continues with a mix of paid and unpaid writing as she builds the skills and portfolio she needs to pursue her dream of writing fulltime.

Other military spouses have applied the power of this tool. Sherry had been working as a secretary although her dream was to open and run a bakery. When she moved to Bamberg, Germany, she couldn't find a secretarial position. She saw that as an opportunity to pursue her dream. She took a job with a Subway Sandwich shop with the express purpose of learning all about running a small business, learning what works and doesn't work, so she'll be ready when she opens her bakery.

Sarah wanted to work in marketing, so she volunteered at the community's marketing office to learn the ropes. Rochelle, who knew absolutely nothing about computers, volunteered at the ACS referral office, providing her daily opportunities to learn the computer. She was even sent to local training courses.

Nancy wants to own her own cat resort. She first volunteered at her Community's Vet clinic and was eventually hired at the vet clinic at her next location, giving her the opportunity to keep learning the ropes – and building her credibility – before she puts her own money and time into her cat resort.

So, what if you have to earn a living – you have to take *some* job? Look for a job that allows you to learn or improve on some of the skills you will need in your dream job. On the job, ask for opportunities to take on projects or training that will enhance those skills. And if you do fit in some volunteering, look for those projects that advance your skills.

Volunteering: It's a win-win proposition.

###

©2004, Holly Scherer and Kathie Hightower. The authors write the *Married to the Military* column in the *Air Force/Army/Navy/Marine Corps Times* newspapers. They present workshops and are writing a book to help military spouses craft a life for themselves. For information and/or to subscribe to their free ezine, go to www.jumpintolife.net/military/html