

Kyra Tao Takes the Lead: Volunteering for the Greater Good



*Kyra Tao (WSP|Parsons Brinckerhoff transportation engineer and WTS-LA Volunteer Committee Chair),
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It's a catch-22. Leadership can only be learned through experience—by leading. But no one gets to lead when they're in an entry-level position. So how does one gain leadership experience without being given opportunity? WTS-LA has the answer—volunteering.

“The most valuable part of donating your time to WTS-LA is that you get to develop leadership skills. Whether it's conducting a meeting or running an event or heading up a subcommittee, participating meaningfully in WTS-LA gives individuals the unique opportunity to lead a group in achieving an objective. And that is absolutely invaluable,” explains WSP|Parsons Brinckerhoff transportation engineer and WTS-LA Volunteer Committee chair Kyra Tao (above). “But you also gain so much more. You get a chance to extend your professional and social network. You make friends in the industry. You get to know top people in the industry. And volunteering is a stepping stone for getting more involved in the chapter down the road.”



Volunteers are the lifeblood of WTS-LA. Responsible for a wide range of critical functions, volunteers help in virtually every aspect of the chapter, from Programs to Mentoring to Membership. Put simply, the chapter could not function without its volunteers. So the value of volunteers to the chapter is never in question. But many people do not understand that volunteering for WTS-LA is actually an investment and not a donation of time.

“In addition to important soft skills like leadership and politics, volunteers also can learn some technical skills from accounting to technology. So there is something for everyone to gain by volunteering,” adds Tao. “Volunteering brings you great exposure to senior people within the chapter. It helps you get known. And often, the senior people in the chapter are senior people in the transportation industry. So it's a fantastic, supportive, and natural way to network at the highest echelons. Volunteering can help you move up both inside the chapter and within the transportation industry.”

Tao finds that the Programs and the Communication/Social Media often use the most volunteers. But volunteers also help on Transportation Résumé Book, Membership, the Annual Scholarship and Awards

Dinner, and the Adopt-A-School/Career Day Committees. At present, WTS-LA has more than 200 people in its volunteer database. In 2015, Tao reports that more than 40 volunteers actively participated in various activities.



“We have long-term and short-term volunteers and the average time commitment for each volunteer is 5-10 hours per month. In 2015, there were 20 volunteers for program events and the remainder helped with other committees and tasks such as scholarship application review, the Transportation Résumé Book mixer, and the Adopt-A-School career day. The important thing to remember is that there is value in everything that volunteers do. For example, some people may think working the registration table at an event is a mundane and unrewarding task. Nothing could be further from the truth. One volunteer I work with always asks to do programs registration because she told me that in doing that she gets to meet everyone at every program, from entry-level people to CEOs. How smart is that! And by greeting them professionally and getting to know them and having them recognize her, she is making very real and valuable connections! So I strongly encourage anyone who is interested in volunteering to contact me. And if people are not sure how much they want to commit, how much they want to get involved, they can start with just one program or one event or one task and see how it goes from there.”

Leadership is a skill that can only be learned by doing. It’s a catch-22. But WTS-LA has found a very unique way around the conundrum. Volunteering for WTS-LA benefits the chapter, but it also provides the unique opportunity to gain invaluable skills including leadership. So, volunteer with WTS-LA today to gain hard and soft skills, as well as outstanding networking opportunities and a whole host of other benefits. To volunteer, contact Kyra Tao.