Volunteering Tips!

1. Consider the skills you have to offer.
   If you enjoy outdoor work, have a knack for teaching, or just enjoy interacting with people, you may want to look for volunteer work that would incorporate these aspects of your personality. Many positions require a volunteer who has previous familiarity with certain equipment, such as computers, or who possesses certain skills, such as ability in athletics or communications. For one of these positions you might decide to do something comparable to what you do on the job during your workday, or something that you already enjoy as a hobby. This sort of position allows you to jump right into the work without having to take training to prepare for the assignment.

2. Would you like to learn something new?
   Perhaps you would like to learn a new skill or gain exposure to a new situation. Consider seeking a volunteer opportunity where you'll learn something new. For example, volunteering to work on the newsletter for the local animal shelter will improve your writing and editing abilities - skills that may help you in your career. Or, volunteering can simply offer a change from your daily routine. For example, if your full-time job is in an office, you may decide to take on a more active volunteer assignment, such as leading tours at an art museum or building a playground. Many nonprofits seek out people who are willing to learn. Realize beforehand, however, that such work might require a time commitment for training before the actual volunteer assignment begins.

3. Combine your goals.
   Look for volunteer opportunities that will also help you achieve your other goals for your life. For example, if you want to lose a few extra pounds, pick an active volunteer opportunity, such as cleaning a park or working with kids. Or, if you've been meaning to take a cooking class, try volunteering at a food bank that teaches cooking skills.

4. Don't over-commit your schedule.
   Make sure the volunteer hours you want to give fit into your hectic life, so that you don't frustrate your family, exhaust yourself, shortchange the organization you're trying to help or neglect your job. Do you want a long-term assignment or something temporary? If you are unsure about your availability, or want to see how the work suits you before making an extensive commitment, see whether the organization will start you out on a limited number of hours until you get the feel of things. Better to start out slowly than to commit yourself to a schedule you can't or don't want to fulfill.

5. Nonprofits may have questions, too.
   While most nonprofits are eager to find volunteer help, they have to be careful when accepting the services you offer. If you contact an organization with an offer to volunteer your time, you may be asked to come in for an interview, fill out a volunteer application, or describe your qualifications and your background just as you would at an interview for a paying job. It is in the organization's interest and more beneficial to the people it serves to make certain you have the skills needed, that you are truly committed to doing the work, and that your interests match those of the nonprofit. Furthermore, in volunteer work involving children or other at-risk populations, there are legal ramifications for the organization to consider.

6. Give voice to your heart through your giving and volunteering!
   Bring your heart and your sense of humor to your volunteer service, along with your enthusiastic spirit, which in itself is a priceless gift. What you'll get back will be immeasurable!