

As April marks National Volunteer Month, I am reflecting on how incredibly important volunteerism is to our YMCAs, as well as our volunteer service to our fellow Y colleagues.

From board volunteers to youth sports coaches to mentors, volunteers generously give their time, talent, and financial support; without them, our Ys wouldn't be able to serve our communities effectively. We are in the relationship business at the Y. Nurturing strong volunteer relationships and listening to our volunteers is so critical. This creates connectivity into the community and into our organizations—it's really how we engage in our work.

Andy Calhoun, who had been the CEO at the Charlotte Y when I worked there, was an excellent mentor and a master at connecting staff, especially the leadership team, to volunteers. One time I was planning to meet Jim Morgan (who had been the CEO of Krispy Kreme and served on the to go fishing. I was slammed with work and told Andy that I thought I needed to cancel. Andy's response was "Never let work interfere with building a relationship with one of our volunteers." That advice was impactful for me. I worked it out, Jim and I went fishing, and that relationship is still strong today.

I hope you are finding ways this month (or next week during National Volunteer Week) to celebrate your volunteers so that you can continue to build those relationships and create accountability with them.

As Y leaders, we also have a responsibility to lean into supporting each other through volunteer opportunities in our state Alliance and within our national movement. It's also how we can each be successful in our careers. Through the years, the acronyms have changed – ADP, AYP and today YPN (Y Professional Network), but whatever the name, we all have an opportunity to learn from each other and to share what we know through peer communities. Plus, some of my best friends in this world are colleagues I have met through the Y.

Our state Alliance facilitates a number of [peer communities](#) to bring our staff together from across the state. Some of these groups have Y leaders chairing or co-chairing, and others have been led by Alliance staff team members. The Alliance is transitioning to having YMCA staff lead all those groups, with Alliance staff supporting. If you're engaged in one of those groups, consider the leadership opportunity and contact the staff at the Alliance to learn more.

Currently we have a CEO onboarding cohort that includes CEOs from North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. We could provide an opportunity to network with colleagues from the southern region through peer communities. Groups such as CFOs, COOs, regional VPs, and HR professionals, for example, could potentially meet. If you're interested in being part of a regional peer community like this that's

not currently meeting and would consider a volunteer leadership role, let your Alliance staff know.

By nature, I'm an introvert, but I learned early in my career that tapping into the resources that are available to you (your peers and your volunteers) is so important. Andy is one of my dearest friends. I worked for him for 25 years, and today we still talk regularly and get together. Building relationships like that one has become part of who I am and what I do. This all started because of networking, mentors, and peer groups. To be successful in your career, and in life, quite honestly, building those relationships and networks is foundational.

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