



THE VALUE OF GIVING BACK

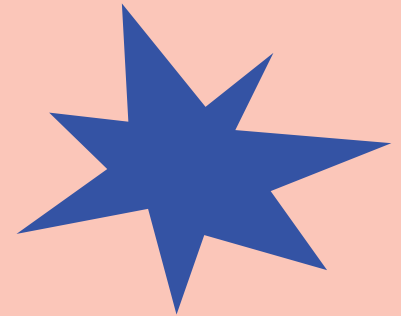
By Michelle Huffman

Real estate agents have a reputation for being good neighbors.

Two-thirds of REALTORS® volunteer in their communities monthly, according to a National Association

of REALTORS® report, but some agents do much more.

While these agents are primarily motivated by serving their communities, their good deeds also help their businesses grow.



impactful ways to get involved

1 Improve your neighborhood
When Sandra Nickel, CRS, broker/owner of the Sandra Nickel Hat Team, moved to Montgomery, Alabama, she wanted to specialize in Cloverdale, “the historic core of the city,” she says. Her former broker advised against it because the area was “changing,” implying that integration in the area was not beneficial. The experience bothered her.

Ever since, Nickel has worked actively to uplift her beloved Cloverdale as a desirable place to live, she says. It’s made an impact: The community is now highly desirable and diverse.

Her deep involvement in historic preservation as president of the Landmarks Foundation and in helping residents become more active in local politics has brought her the kind of “socially conscious,” as she calls them, clients she loves working with.



▲ Sandra Nickel, CRS, has worked to improve the Cloverdale district of Montgomery, Alabama.

► Anna May, CRS, performing stand-up comedy on stage.



2 Make helping nonprofits part of your everyday

Anna May, CRS, broker associate with Golden Gate Sotheby's International Realty in Oakland, California, was making her fellow REALTORS® laugh for years at her weekday morning marketing meetings before she tried stand-up comedy.

Now, when she performs, she donates all her stand-up earnings to charity. She also created SantaCon Hayward, a venue crawl now in its 10th year to raise funds for the Hayward Animal Shelter and highlight downtown businesses.

"All that I do is connected to everything else, and business flows to me because of it," she says.

Connecting her business, her comedy and all the organizations she works with makes the magic happen—and the community benefits.

3 Lead a nonprofit

Andrea Castinetti, CRS candidate, owner of Castinetti Realty Group in Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, started The Kindness Coalition of Massachusetts when she opened her brokerage five years ago. She draws 500–600 people to her backpack drives, filling them for the homeless and children in foster care, while also donating turkey dinners and toys around the holidays. Eventually, a friend recommended she create her own 501(c)(3), and she worked with a nonprofit specialist to get all the paperwork right.

Meanwhile, Kay Wilson-Bolton, CRS, broker associate with Century 21 Everest, in Santa Paula, California, serves

as the volunteer executive director of Spirit of Santa Paula, which offers services for homeless and hungry people. She oversees a homeless shelter at capacity with 49 people, 14 of whom are children, on top of her real estate business. In her view, many REALTORS® generate goodwill through things like sponsorships, but she decided to donate her efforts.

The primary benefit to leading your own group: Your passion shows.

"Find the one thing that makes your heart beat," Wilson-Bolton says. "It's easy to stay committed when you do. People will love you for doing it, and you end up making new friends."



iCathy Fitzgerald

▲ Andrea Castinetti, CRS, posing with backpacks for underprivileged children.

► Spirit of Santa Paula helps those who are homeless.



► A puppy enrolled in Hero Dogs, Inc.'s service dog training program.



4 Lean into a favorite organization

When D'Ann Melnick, CRS, associate broker with eXp Realty in Rockville, Maryland, and her husband were deciding if they wanted to adopt a

dog, they elected to do a test run first. They found their opportunity in Hero Dogs, Inc.,

a local nonprofit that trains service dogs for disabled veterans and former first responders for free. Fostering a puppy opened the doors to a niche community, leading her to regularly volunteer, donate and connect local businesses to the mission.

Fully committing to one organization has allowed her to really get to know people and become a major supporter.

"I used to spread myself way too thin volunteering for everything, and I wasn't able to develop deep relationships," Melnick says.



▲ Felicia Beltran, CRS (right), posing in a super hero costume at a CASA event.

5 Serve on a board of directors

Felicia Beltran, CRS, REALTOR® with the Empire Group of eXp Realty in Pueblo, Colorado, got involved with event marketing for CASA, which helps abused and neglected children, before she was invited to join the board. She has been there for more than three years, creating awareness, putting on and promoting events and raising funds.

Making these things happen for CASA has expanded her network exponentially, and it benefits both CASA and her business.

“A lot of my friends call me the mayor when they come from out of town because at any function, I pretty much know everybody,” she says.

ADVICE ON MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR INVOLVEMENT

Go all in. Helping many organizations a little may not be as effective as helping one or two organizations a lot, many of the agents say.

Keep track of how clients found you. Your time is precious, so it's important to know that it's spent in ways that are valuable to the community as well as your business.

Don't directly talk business. All the agents agree: If you're there just for the business boost, it's obvious.

building relationships through community involvement

Thanks to the relationships agents develop through volunteering, they often find future clients. “My whole thing is relationship building,” Castinetti says. “I never set up with ‘Castinetti Realty Group’ gear on. Credibility is the most important. You want to build trust in your community and get recognition for doing the right thing.”

Social media offers a great way to keep the connection with volunteers and supporters going. “Through social media, I get to know them, and they also see my real estate activity without being in their face or salesy,” Melnick says.

Beltran adds that it's important to ensure your social content is diverse. “If all you're doing is posting your listings and talking about your business incessantly, people will unfollow,” she says. “I try to share in an authentic way. I share about my kids, my community and other things I'm excited about.”

Nickel also believes just being herself helps, which includes her signature hat.

“I wear the hat wherever I go,” she says. “It lets people know I'm involved, my team is involved, and that brings us business.”

picking the right opportunities

To find the right organization, look at its mission and development to determine if it has needs that align with your skillset and talents. The key, says Wilson-Bolton, is to “find something that feeds your passion, so it's easy to stay committed.” An organization should make you and others in the group feel welcome, comfortable and energized.

“The vibes are everything,” Beltran agrees. “When you find the right organization and are passionate about what they're doing, it's going to be a very natural and authentic fit.”

There should be opportunity for meaningful connection, as well. “I think with anything you do to try to build up your sphere—whether it's charitable or networking or a book club—the things you spend the most time on should build that deeper connection,” Melnick says. **TRS**

66%
of REALTORS®
volunteer every
month. Volunteers
average eight
hours per month.

79%
of REALTORS®
donate to charity.

67%
say their firm
encourages
volunteerism.

Source: NAR 2022 CARE
Report: Community Aid
and Real Estate

For more lead generation tactics, attend the course Leads and Listings: Become a Power Lister, available at **CRS.com**.