

Why volunteer and when is enough, enough?

I graduated from NLSSM nearly 9 years ago and didn't know where I wanted my qualification to take me. I guess I kind of fell into my passion without even realizing it. My current role I work as consultant Soft Tissue Therapist for England Football Men's U21 squad. Previously I was employed by the English Institute of Sport (EIS). I was the sole Soft Tissue Therapist for both men and woman's England Hockey teams as well as working for the British Olympic Association's Intensive Rehabilitation Unit. This is run in partnership with EIS and British Olympic Association as part of a medical rehabilitation team for all GB Olympic athlete's. Before this I spent three years at a premiership rugby team based in London and also gained invaluable experience in private practice.

One of the most popular questions I am asked by students and graduates is 'How did you make it into sport? What's the magic ingredient?'. And whether it is sport that is your passion or private clinic (the joy of your new found skill set... you have options!) the answer is experience. How did I end up where I am now...

The teaching and education that I received from NLSSM put me in the best possible position going out into the big wide world of Sports Massage, but, I used my initiative and people skills, called various clubs and asked if they would be willing to take on a newly qualified therapist to help out with their medical department for the season. I ended up assisting the lead physiotherapist at Saracens Academy once a week. It wasn't long until they asked me to begin helping out with the senior squad as my skills and confidence progressed. After the first season, they asked me back and we agreed on an hourly fee.

If it wasn't for this experience and opportunity I would not of been able to apply for the job at London Wasps RFC when it came up and it's where I stayed for three seasons. Do you see where I am going with this? Because of my time volunteered I now had the background in sport and gained positive references from those I had work alongside.

Fast forward three years later I found myself sitting on the interview panel to find my successor at the very same club. It came down to two final candidates and one of them was a graduate of less then a year from NLSSM. While that graduate strongly impressed the panel (they had just graduated and they were being interviewed for a professional sports club!) they narrowly missed out because they lacked the actual hands on experience and practical application. However they were asked back to the club to help out throughout the season to use their newly acquired skill set and develop their practical application of techniques in 'real life' situations. Yes they did this for free but what they gained in return was a future that offered more opportunities.

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So what am I trying to tell you here?

Take the opportunities that are presented to you.

While I know that not everyone has the luxury to take time away from work with full time jobs, child care etc...I make no qualms about it, juggling life as such to fit in my work placement was by no means easy but am I glad I did it? Without a shadow of doubt. I am not saying that every work placement or volunteer opportunity will lead directly to a paid job and may not be measurable in terms of employment right there and then BUT it does give you:

- Networking - meet others in the industry. You are your best advertisement. Show it off!
- Potential to gain further work - it may not be returned right away but you never know what the professional relationships you build may bring you later.
- Gain confidence in working with real bodies and real situations
- Work alongside and observe other professionals. This is continuing professional development in it self.
- Expand your knowledge in a way that a classroom cannot

Take the opportunities that are out there. Some will not work but many will. Know your worth and set yourself boundaries of how much you are willing to give for 'free' and remember it needs to be a two way agreement. But most of all grab the opportunities out there and make the most of them for your own future progression.

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