

joining a local club or association, or volunteering at the local library. It can mean leading a local boy or girl scout troop, working with your neighbors to start a child care center, helping to spur a community drive for the collection of recyclable aluminum cans, even joining a bicycle touring club or signing up for a weekly game of mixed doubles tennis. And, at the very least, it can mean taking the time to read the local and community newspapers, making an effort to keep yourself up-to-date on the news and events shaping the lives of your new neighbors and neighborhood. You get the idea.

Getting involved means keeping active in all manner of things outside of your new career—something, we'll admit, that will not always be as easy as it now sounds. Recent graduates often find the grind of a first job leaves time for little else, that the work world is taxing in more ways than they'd been taught to expect. But you can find the time to get involved if you make the time to get involved, and once you make the time you will no doubt find the energy. Somewhere.

Getting involved is a way to stay connected with the world around you. People with significant interests outside the workplace are far less likely to suffer from job stress and fatigue; young professionals, living on their own for the first time, in a strange city, are likely to feel depressed and isolated without significant off-the-job interests and activities. Meeting new people and forming important new relationships is not always easy outside of the planned social environment on most campuses, and getting involved in any organization—social, political, civic, community, religious or charitable—is one very good way to make that process much easier, and much more bearable.

Do something. Anything. Do something you've always thought about doing, or do something you've never thought about doing. Do something that's expected of you, or do something to take everybody who knows you by surprise. Go for it. The point here is not so much what you do, as much as it is that you do something. Get involved. Stay involved.

CASE IN POINT

We talked earlier about getting involved by coaching a local Little League team in your area, and so we went out and found someone who has done just that. Jeff Needle, 26, works as a water resource engineer for the South Florida Water Management District by day, but by night and on some weekends he can be found coaching a group of West Palm Beach area kids in organized sports.

"It wasn't something I ever thought I'd do," Needle says, "it wasn't something I thought about at all. But then I saw an ad looking for coaches for a youth basketball league and I thought, hey, why not? I thought that maybe I'd be able to teach something to the kids, and that I'd have a good time doing it. And

besides, I wasn't doing much else on Saturday mornings at 9, except sleeping."

Let us get one thing straight: Jeff Needle, who spends his working life reviewing applications for surface water management permits, is a jock. As an undergraduate at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, he would drop everything for the chance at a sporting game of softball, basketball, touch football or golf. "I was playing intramural sports all the time in Madison," he recalls. "At one point I was in four different intramural basketball leagues, playing four different nights a week. But then I moved to Florida and I didn't really know anybody, and I wanted to keep busy in some kind of organized sports, and so there I was, me and a bunch of eight-to-twelve-year-olds."

After his first Little League basketball season (his team finished in first place, by the way), Needle was recruited by a co-worker to manage a Little League baseball team, and again he thought, hey, why not? "I had a good time with the basketball," he says. "The kids were good kids and it was a real challenge and it gave me something to do. Not just something to do, you know, but something worthwhile. It was fun for me, sure, but I think the kids got something out of it, too. I think I taught them something."

And so he warmed to the idea of doing more of the same as a manager of a team in the Phipps Park Little League, coaching eight-to-ten-year-olds on the finer points of our national pastime. "I really didn't know too much about baseball," he admits, "but I knew more than enough to coach kids that age."

The Phipps Park Little League is a heavy-duty Little League, with uniformed umpires, public address announcers and concession vendors. Games were played at night—in the aptly named Phipps Park—under the hot glare of the bright lights, and the hot glares of screaming parents. "I was the only manager in the league without a kid on the team, and that made things a little strange," Needle says. "Some of the parents get out of hand and say things like, 'You don't have kids, what do you know?' But I think the kids can learn more about the game and about sportsmanship and everything like that if the guy teaching it to them is not somebody's dad. It's hard to take somebody's dad seriously."

And yet, even though he has no immediate plans to join the ranks of fatherhood, Needle admits he sees his coaching experiences as a chance to check himself out as a future dad. "Sure," he says, "you can look on something like this as a chance to see what kind of parent you'd make. I mean, you can think about having kids, but you can't really know what you'd be like with them. You can't know how you'd react to certain kinds of responsibility, certain kinds of situations. Coaching a Little League team or something like that is one way to find some of those things out."

"The whole thing was a tremendous learning experience, and it gave me a tremendous sense of accomplishment. You know it's strange because here is something I never thought about doing, coaching little kids, and now I can't approach the new season and think about not doing it. All of a sudden I was involved in something outside of work, and I wasn't just involved for myself, but for a whole bunch of kids. You learn how to deal with all sorts of people, and you feel like you're doing something worth something, you know, something that's good for the kids and good for the community. It makes you feel a part of things. Besides, they needed managers. I guess most of the parents are too busy to get that involved."

