

By [Sarah Miller](#)

Sarah Miller leads the Employee Development efforts here at Blink UX and decided to go out and get some dirt under her fingernails last Friday. Here's why.

What is Community Day?

Blink UX encourages all its employees to take one workday a year to volunteer at any charity or organization of their choosing. It's really special that we can pick any organization that matters most to us as individuals, whether it's supporting a cause that is close to your heart or working a day at your church. The only rule is that you must share what you did with the rest of the staff.

Why does Blink UX have a Community Day available for everyone?

Community service falls right in line with Blink's core values (empathy, authentic, collaborative, and integrity), so it's natural to encourage employees to be actively involved in our communities. Sometimes it's not easy to give to a charity financially, but giving time is something everyone can do (especially when you would have been at work otherwise!). Blink makes it easy and simple to give back.

What did you do for your day?

I chose to volunteer at EarthCorps, which is a non-profit founded in 1993. They bring environmental leaders from more than 80 countries to Seattle to work in the green spaces

around the Puget Sound and the Cascades. These leaders learn restoration techniques, project management, and leadership and team building skills. These alumni then go back to their countries and lead their own restoration projects.

EarthCorps holds projects in parks around the city all month long. The work ranges from removing invasive plants to planting trees and native species to site maintenance.

A long time ago invasive plants (specifically English ivy and Himalayan blackberry) were brought to Seattle and planted in the parks. Both are hearty, fast growing, and very green, so they looked pretty and didn't take long to blanket the parks and forests. However, these invasive plants started to take over the parks, creating a monoculture. The ivy grew up the trees causing unnecessary weight and eventually started killing them. The blackberry plants created dense and robust thickets that choked out all native plants. You can find blackberry and English ivy in every park in Seattle. If left alone, these plants would eventually take over the parks and wipe the trees and native species out altogether. EarthCorps has made it their mission to put every park in restoration.

Hand Tools

Some of the tools required for Sarah's project.

For my particular project, we worked in Magnuson Park by the park's beloved kite hill. Invasive blackberry had grown throughout the woods there and needed to be removed. Although a lot of work had already been done to the site, blackberry continues to spring up. We went through a site that had already been cleared and removed any remaining re-emerging blackberry. For four hours, I removed the invasive plants by using a shovel to dig out their roots (stopping only once or twice to eat the actual berries!).

Why did you select EarthCorps?

The work that EarthCorps is doing is important to me for a lot of reasons. Parks offer so many benefits to a city! They are the natural life support system and provide sustainability for cities. For starters, they prevent erosion and help to keep the air clean. Magnuson Park specifically helps to absorb the pollution from the houses that line the park and provides a buffer for the runoff that might end up in the lake below. Parks also provide shade, which helps to bring the core temperature of the city down, not to mention our own core temperatures when we are visiting parks in the middle of the summer! Parks also provide habitats for animals, recreational benefits to community members, promote public health, and have been shown to alleviate stress.

Sarah & Anders Miller

Sarah, Anders, and Maggie enjoying a Seattle park.

On a personal level, my husband and I use the Seattle parks on an almost daily basis. It's not uncommon to find us walking our dog in a park after work or hiking one of the many trails on the weekends. We love the outdoors and are so appreciative that Seattle has a dense park population. Because of my constant park use, it seemed fitting that I would spend my community day giving a little love back to the parks that provide so much to me.

How did you feel when you were done?

Aside from my stiff back, I felt great! There were about ten of us working that day, and you

could literally see the progress we had made by the end of the day. Our park section was clear of all the emerging blackberries. Last year, EarthCorps had come into this park and replanted some evergreen trees. The trees are still small and trying to grow strong, and the blackberries had started springing back up around them just waiting to take over. I was able to clear the area around the little trees and left the park knowing that they would have a better chance because of me. I can't wait to come back and see how tall they have grown.

Sapling Tree

A sapling tree Sarah saved from the strangling thickets.

If you want to find out more about EarthCorps, you can [visit their site here](#). You can [go here to see a calendar](#) of projects for the rest of the year.

Sarah Miller handles employee development at Blink UX. When she's not at work, you can typically find her vacationing at an exotic location such as Thailand or Illinois.