

WHY COMMUNITY SERVICE MATTERS

This is one of a series of occasional papers by The Dilenschneider Group to bring clients and friends a different perspective. We hope you find it of interest.

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Today, we hear of new horrific disasters around the world in a matter of minutes. The West Africa Ebola outbreak; the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines flight 370 and the crash of a second Malaysia Airlines jet after being shot down by a missile; the abduction of an estimated 276 girls and women from a school in Nigeria; the loss of a Korean ferry that capsized and sank, killing more than 290 people, mostly high school students; and much more. Many economies are still in free fall while others are recovering so sluggishly they are unable to provide employment for those seeking work. If workers cannot find jobs, everyone suffers. The very young and the very old depend on the support of others for survival. From tent cities to tenements around the world, there are countless millions in dire need of the basic necessities of life—food, shelter, clothing and medicine.

Hurricanes, floods, and similar large-scale natural events generate extensive media coverage and an outpouring of individual and corporate donations and volunteer services. When the need is immediate, fueled by a great “buzz factor,” the media are saturated with calls to action. Yet, many ongoing, long-term needs remain unfilled and urgent, failing to capture the mainstream media’s attention. These days, no one can claim ignorance of the deprivations of others. If mainstream media are not reporting this global reality, a

window to the needs of the world is still at our fingertips via the Internet. Empty platitudes expressing concern for the dispossessed and vulnerable help no one. Nor is it only about distant peoples around the world. Individuals just around your own corner may need meaningful help.

We all have a responsibility to care for the less fortunate in our communities.

True, governments, as well as philanthropies and charities, play a central role in mitigating human suffering. In that realm, few will dispute that the U.S. and its generous citizens are, by far, the global leaders. Nevertheless, what any single individual does still counts a great deal—more so than most imagine. Because community service is required today more than ever, each of us should ask: “What am I personally doing to help?” No man (or woman) is an island unto himself. We are all part of the human family. Yes, there is a certain nobility in helping the needy—doing the right thing, as it were—but also one must never forget that there, but for the grace of God, go I.

*“The best way to find yourself is to
lose yourself in the service of others.”*

— Mahatma Gandhi

COMMUNITY SERVICE AND YOU

The basic way to engage in community service is, of course, to think of those about whom you may especially care. Supporting charities and causes that are meaningful and close to your heart is an added incentive to fulfill one's social responsibilities. Whether you live in a large metropolitan area or a small rural community, there are organizations that cannot function without the volunteerism of concerned individuals.

Laying such a foundation of community service can in time extend to national and world organizations. Community service is now commonplace for many schools, sports, religious and related youth groups. These youth-led service projects create leadership opportunities based on both the participants' intellectual and physical assets. Recent research by Youth Service America also demonstrates that "youth service is a fundamental correlative to lifelong volunteerism and philanthropy as adults. Surveys show that the majority of caring adults who volunteer actually started the practice as children."

Community service, through an affiliation with some kind of organization is, of course, the way most people make their contribution. There are thousands of such bodies around the world. Religious groups have always been in the service vanguard—perhaps most notably, the Catholic Church with the countless hospitals, soup kitchens, senior centers, and educational institutions it supports. The 132-year-old Knights of Columbus is an exemplary case in point. Its members are committed to service. Last year alone, the Knights gave some \$170 million directly to charities and members performed more than 70 million man-hours of voluntary service.

Today, not only are we alerted to others' needs almost instantly, but we have the ability to connect and provide services in ways and on a timeline never before possible. This era's "connected" young people have an awareness of what is happening around them like never before. The efficacy of engaging in community service at a young age and seeing that service continue and grow with maturity into wider commitments is indisputable.

People can be motivated to serve at any age. In 1961, John F. Kennedy encapsulated that universal call to action in his inaugural address when he said so memorably, "And so, my fellow Americans: Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country."

That sentiment is more relevant than ever in this second decade of the 21st century.

Are you in?

*"If you want children to keep their feet on the ground,
put some responsibility on their shoulders."*

— *Abigail Van Buren*

IT'S GOOD FOR YOU

The Dalai Lama stated the whole concept cogently when he said: “The more we care for the happiness of others, the greater our own sense of well-being becomes. Cultivating a close, warm-hearted feeling for others automatically puts the mind at ease. This helps remove whatever fears or insecurities we may have and gives us the strength to cope with any obstacles we encounter. It is the ultimate source of success in life.”

People who volunteer regularly with an organization normally evolve into trustworthy individuals that others can always depend on. Helping in most any situation engenders respect for others’ differences and, in many cases, affords a new appreciation of one’s own circumstances. Volunteering can also be a vehicle for both young and old to develop new skills and sometimes even learn a new occupation. Working in hospitals or crisis centers or schools has often provided valuable new knowledge and skills, even motivating many to start, or change, careers.

Besides the satisfaction that comes with helping others, community service has many benefits for those who serve. Those intangible benefits—pride, satisfaction, and a sense of selflessness and accomplishment—are alone worthwhile reasons to serve. Serving others can also add new purpose, quality and health to one’s life. Author Dr. Larry Dossey wrote: “Altruism behaves like a miracle drug, and a strange one at that. It has beneficial effects on the person doing the helping—the helper’s high. It benefits the person to whom the help is directed, and it can stimulate healthy responses in persons at a distance who may view it only obliquely.”

“If you want to lift yourself up, lift up someone else.”

— Booker T. Washington

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

More so than ever, corporations are adopting social challenges as part of their missions. They are encouraging employees to dedicate skills and energy (on company time) to make a positive impact in their respective communities. The private sector has been, and can be, a major catalyst for change by sharing resources and in-kind services that meet pressing social needs.

Typically, the Points of Light & Hands On Network presented its “Awards for Excellence in Workplace Volunteer Programs” to Disney Worldwide Outreach, which donated over \$177 million in cash and related support to international charities and to Disney VoluntEARS, which contributed more than 466,000 hours of service to the building of playgrounds and homes for low-income families and assisted with disaster relief efforts.

Other recipients have included Booz Allen Hamilton, which donated more than 8,500 pro bono hours, valued at over \$3.1 million to non-profit organizations worldwide; Ben & Jerry’s for its three-year partnership with a local youth mentoring organization; and Genworth Financial, where 40% of its employees logged more than 17,000 volunteer hours and completed close to 200 separate projects to aid the poor.

This community consciousness in corporate culture has carried over into how people are hired. An overseas survey by the TimeBank organization found that among 200 of the U.K.’s leading businesses, 73% would recruit a candidate with volunteering experience over one without such a credential, and that 94% of employers believe that volunteering “can add to skills.”

*“Because I know I can contribute, I therefore believe
I can volunteer my contribution.”*

*— Preston M. Tulay
Former Peace Corps and U.N. volunteer*

A CALL TO ACTION

Rich or poor, young or old, regardless of education level, everyone can be supportive of their neighbors and fellow human beings. To use the biblical phrase, we are all our brothers' (and sisters') keepers. Do you feel as if you do not have the time to volunteer? Think again.

Whether you are donating blood, tutoring disadvantaged children, helping hurricane victims on another continent or hauling trash for a town-wide clean-up, volunteer services are as varied as the talents of the millions who endeavor to make a difference in their community and country. Do you have an instinctive feeling of concern? Then turn that feeling into action and do what you know is right. Go out and make a positive impact on the world around you.

Everyone has a different skill set. For some, community service means the donation of money. There are times when that is a most valuable service. During natural disasters, donations of goods and services are often delayed because of under-funding to pay for transport to distant locations difficult to access. Dollars can make a huge difference.

The notion of doing small acts of kindness recently went viral after NBC News reporter Ann Curry tweeted "26 Acts of Kindness" as a simple call to action to honor the 26 Newtown murder victims. In response, school children, teens and adults around the world soon began doing acts of service, kindness and generosity in the name of the Newtown victims.

Our one world cannot afford indifference. There needs to be a resurgence of the mindset that calls upon all to "do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

“Why Community Service Matters” is the latest in a series of “Little Red Books” published periodically for our clients and friends. We hope our readers find them relevant and of value. Previous titles include:

- “Have You Done Enough?”
- “The *Underappreciated* Art of Saying Thank You”
- “The Age of Apology”
- “Managing Uncertainty”
- “C.I.V.I.L.L.I.T.Y.”
- “The Lost Art of Listening”
- “Two Decades (1991-2011): The Words and the Deeds”
- “The Art of Disagreement”
- “Why Accountability Matters”

If you would like additional copies of this or previously issued booklets, please contact Joan Avagliano at jma@dgi-nyc.com.

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