

## Getting the Most From Volunteering

Shirley C. Eagan, Ed.D.  
Extension Specialist  
Program Development

Sir Wilfred Grenfell, who spent a lifetime helping the people of Labrador, said, "Real joy comes not from ease or riches or the praise of men, but from doing something worthwhile. " To many, volunteering for one or more jobs or projects is a way of experiencing this joy.

Most people volunteer for a variety of reasons. The need to be needed and feel useful is a major motivating factor. The Gallup Organization, in a 1987 survey, found that more than half of those who volunteered, did so because they **wanted to do something useful.** Other major reasons for volunteering included: **thought they would enjoy the work, a family member or friend would benefit, or for religious reasons.**

People at different stages of their lives volunteer for different reasons. Young people might volunteer to increase their chances of attending the college of their choice, to experience the joy of service or to have fun with their friends. Young adults might volunteer to improve job prospects, to clarify career interests, or to get to know their community better. Senior citizens may volunteer to relieve boredom, to feel productive, to continue to have responsibilities and challenges, or to be with their friends.

As a volunteer, you should benefit from your voluntary activity. It is

OK to fulfill your personal need for self-expression, self-development and self-protection while you give of your time, skills and energies to others.

Sometimes people give up their volunteer efforts in order to work for pay. To some, this is beneficial. Others may find that something is missing. They find that the personal benefits they gained from their volunteer activities are not present in paid employment. For them, finding beneficial voluntary activities to accompany the paid employment is important.

Voluntary services are valuable to the beneficiaries--the people who receive the service--plus the giver. Volunteerism is a two-way street. You are served as you serve others.

Take a few minutes to think about the various voluntary activities in which you participate. Using the chart on the back, answer these questions. Why are you involved? Be honest. Identify what you get out of the activity. Remember it is OK for you to get while you give.

What are some of your current needs? Are your volunteer activities meeting these needs? Now, think about what you would like to do. Is there something you've always wanted to do? Is there a volunteer activity that relates to these needs or desires?

---



---



---

What are your reasons for wanting to volunteer?

- \* To improve or learn new job skills. Will the activity fit with your career goals? Will the contacts be helpful? Will you grow because of the training received and responsibility taken?
- \* To help other people, perform your civic duty or effect change. Is the project worthwhile? Do the paid staff care? Will you have the opportunity to see results?
- \* To meet people. Are you new in the community? Stuck in a solitary job? Do you want to meet people similar to or different from you?
- \* Just for fun. What do you like that you don't seem to get the time or chance to do? What's missing in your life?

Now outline your capabilities.

- \* Inventory the expertise you've acquired through your life.
- \* What are your untapped resources?
- \* How much time can you plan on giving? Can you volunteer during the day, on weekends or evenings?

Once you've answered some of these questions, look at your community. Is there a volunteer job where you could fit? Before agreeing to a volunteer commitment, consider the following:

- Is there commitment on the part of the agency to the volunteer?
- Have they analyzed the job they want the volunteer to do? Is there a job description? Find out duties, hours, responsibilities.
- Do they keep records of the work done and the skills acquired?
- What kind of training, supervision and evaluation will you receive? Is there paid staff involvement?
- Will you have input into the job? What is the impact of your job?
- What is the climate of the agency; the attitude of the staff?

Volunteer consultant Marlene Wilson in her newest book **You Can Make A Difference**, discusses an analogy from **Is It Worth Dying For?**

The authors outline the difference between the Red Sea and the Dead Sea. The Red Sea is fed by several tributaries and empties into others--it has beautiful, sparkling, life-sustaining water. The Dead Sea is locked into itself and neither gives nor sustains life. Their conclusion is, "Giving is getting. . . don't dam yourself up. Let your water flow."

Volunteering is an opportunity for you to get while you give. Have fun, enjoy, benefit from your worthwhile service to others.

1992: 4M