

# **Volunteerism: A Lifestyle with Advantages**



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Volunteer administration can be a daunting task, so every tool available that will make that easier we should seek it out. This is such a tool.

Volunteering has often gotten a bad rap. The presentation of volunteerism has been convoluted by manipulation disguised as volunteering and nobody wins.

In addition it has become very difficult to remind people why volunteering is still important, why it is necessary and why it should be woven into the fabric of everyone's lives.

Being the pastor of very recent church plant in Downers Grove, Illinois we have had to define the church's direction, mission and vision. We even changed the name in order to redefine our focus.

We have an approach that includes overwhelming service in the community. Embedding a natural feeling of service in the culture that pours over into the communities and I say communities because fortunately churches have two communities that they are committed to. The community within the walls and the community beyond the walls of the church. Unfortunately churches can feel that the service that is done within the walls meets the service quota and sometimes the politics within a church does not allow for the right motivation, let alone the residual benefits.

I often encourage my members to involve themselves in one individual and one church or family volunteer service activity a month. I am working to have someone to be the contact and liaison for volunteer opportunities instead of myself to ease the load and keep things moving. This person would be responsible for seeking and securing opportunities that line up with the mission of the church.

One of our favorite volunteer service activities is the Feed My Starving Children packing events. I try to have us scheduled for at least one packing event a month and we invite anyone who wants to join us and they usually do. Most often if people have the time, they will volunteer.

What is so attractive about the packing events are:

1. They are for a short amount of time
2. You can bring young children
3. People are so excited and energetic
4. You are able to have maximum impact with minimum investment
5. It is so much fun!

The goal is not to get people to volunteer all the time, but to get them to “want to volunteer”. Not because the bible says you should or the pastor said you better, but because volunteering has this irresistible selfless component or quality that while you are doing volunteer service it is almost impossible to make it about you. Still some people will ask silently “what’s in it for me?”

The reason we don’t want to publicize that we want some reward or benefits from this sometimes difficult sacrifice of time and energy called volunteering, is because those thoughts wreak of selfishness and not selflessness or it makes something that should be a good thing, dirty and salacious.

We can put the “G” rating back in volunteering and regain the volition (which is the heart to do) volunteering. This is the original idea of volunteering, people giving freely from their heart.

When I talk about volunteerism from the aspect of it being a lifestyle with advantages. I do so having seen many presentations on the benefits of volunteering like giving back, making a difference, helping others or to keep busy. Alternately I am talking about advantages opposed to benefits because I want to replace one for the other for the moment. Eventually advantages will become benefits. You just have to be a great salesperson.

Salespeople must have a concise yet interchangeable understanding of features, benefits and advantages. Also they must be able to slide from one to the next during a potential sale. This knowledge is the difference between making a sale or not.

- Features-Simple facts about a product or service
- Benefits-Aspects of a product that is of value to the customer
- Advantages-Something that the customer did not know was of value to them

So when what I am going to tell you about volunteering was a secret to you it was an advantage and hopefully when I am done you will see it as a benefit (something you see as of value)

There are many words and ideas associated with volunteering like charitable, caring, passionate, thoughtful, and selfless and the list goes on and on. These are somewhat the features of volunteering. What we want to get to are the benefits and advantages.

I have to admit that the approach that led to the discovery of these advantages that I speak about here were somewhat self-centered. At a time when my job was devoid of opportunities and financially I was struggling. I needed to increase my household income by about \$10,000. I was working at my job at Job Corps in the evenings so I was available mornings and I thought that volunteering my time would be an excellent way to combat idleness, challenge my introverted behaviors and meet new people.

I was hoping that by entering different circles, I would see the opportunities increase. So what I did was go on the volunteer website. I began looking through the volunteer opportunities. I clicked on several different opportunities thinking “who would call me, right?” Boy was I was wrong. I got more calls than I expected and definitely more than I could handle. Each call more

interesting and exciting as the next. It was so difficult to choose. There was mentoring, advocacy, administrative support and even a seat on a board of directors. When the smoke cleared I chose two different opportunities. One was a Child Advocate for CASA DuPage, where I would report the well-being of children in DCFS placement. Also I chose to volunteer as phone support for a Christian Resource Center named Love Inc., who biggest struggle was having resources but not enough people to answer phones and conduct phone screenings for potential resource recipients.

For both of the volunteer opportunities I received very rigorous training. Performance and commitment expectations were more present than in my other jobs. So much that I was fired from one of the volunteer positions for not meeting the reporting deadlines. This is serious stuff, but not without a myriad of advantages, so let's talk about those advantages.

**The first advantage to volunteerism is:**

### **The Development, Improvement and Attainment of Skills**

If you always wanted to learn a new skill or have a skill you have not used in while, non-profits usually lack the resources to hire skilled professionals. Often non-profits have to focus much of their funding on the delivery of services, so they bring in someone who is willing to volunteer the skill, teach the skill to someone else, so they can teach it to others. Habitat for Humanity operates in this fashion. Some people come and volunteer barely knowing how to hold a hammer and leave thinking they are Bob the Builder. Volunteering helps you learn new skills, keep skills sharp, or use existing skills in new ways.

**The next advantage to volunteerism is:**

### **Networking and Career exploration**

In your current career you may feel like you are in a rut or reached the ceiling. Regardless of your age or career level, volunteering will introduce you to new professional paths. Your volunteer service may expose you to possibilities you never considered or imagined. Volunteering can be an excellent way to learn more about particular job functions in varying environments. You may seek the fulfilling work that a not for profit organization offers.

Also, know that networking is a huge advantage of volunteering. You never know who you will meet and most times it's not what you know, it's who you know. When people serve towards a similar cause or tackle tasks as a team, bonding seems to occur at a faster rate.

Volunteering may put you in the path of someone you may have not crossed paths with or had contact otherwise.

*During my training I met people from all walks of life. I got business cards and we shared great stories on how volunteering brought us where we were.*

**Then the advantage after that is:**

### **Personal growth and gaining new knowledge**

We should strive to be life-long learners which includes experiences you have as a volunteer which can make you aware of issues that you may not have known existed or social needs that are consistently ignored.

These various experiences can assist in making you a better-rounded person, giving you more insight and increasing knowledge of various topics of debate. Now you can speak on things from a first-hand perspective that you gained from volunteering.

Sometimes being around your friends and family can make you forget your value. Especially if you suffer from depression of any kind, you can volunteer and be around people that see you as their irreplaceable hero and it may help to remind you that you matter and you make a difference.

*There was a massive amount of paperwork involved in the CASA volunteering. Also reports had to be timely. This was one of the things that I struggled with at my for profit job. Though I lost the volunteer opportunity for failing to turn in reports on time, I definitely learned the importance of deadlines.*

**And the final advantage to volunteerism is:**

### **Making a Social Connection**

Enlarging your social circle is vastly different from professional networking. Volunteering can be a fun, meaningful way to make new friends. If you are new to a community volunteering is a great way to meet friends in a very disarming environment where you already have something in common, you volunteer.

*Though I had friends, I felt like my social circle was small. Volunteering has given me opportunities to make many life-long friends that I probably would not have met otherwise.*

So the point would be in Volunteer Administration that if you want more people to sign-up you have sell it. And you are not just selling what people already know about what volunteering will be, but how being a volunteer can actually have surprising rewards for those who choose to get involved.

They won't have to worry about if their motives are right, because the advantages of volunteerism are a win-win.



Pastor Philanders White

New Manna Community Church

PO Box 881, Downers Grove, Illinois

Phone: 630 358-5159

## **Volunteer Assessment Tool**

This tool is designed to help you find the best volunteer opportunity for you.

- 1. What is it that you like most about volunteering? Please explain.**

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- 2. Do you prefer to volunteer as an individual or in a group?**

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- 3. Do the volunteer opportunities you choose often relate to current skills or are they something new and exciting? Describe what you enjoyed the most.**

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- 4. Do you like using your hands or more technical volunteer work?**

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- 5. When was the last time you volunteered?**

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- 6. What are you waiting for?**

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