



Giving the Gift of You

WHEN WE HEAR THE WORD PHILANTHROPY, most of us have a mental picture of some grey-haired Warren Buffett type giving away so much money that he gets a building named after him. Or perhaps our somewhat younger, hipper crowd thinks of Mark Zuckerberg raining down chunks of his Facebook stock like confetti on New Year's Eve. (Ironically, Zuckerberg was the second biggest "giver" in 2013, with a \$500 million gift of that valuable stock confetti going to his local community foundation in Silicon Valley.) What we don't often think of, however, is that the gift can actually be just us. It can be our time, our talent, our labor, our commitment and our kindness.

While Americans donated an estimated \$317 billion of their hard-earned money to charitable causes in 2012, we also remarkably donated \$7.9 Billion—yes, Billion with a B—hard-working hours to the missions that move us. There are some really amazing statistics about how much we give of ourselves, dispelling the assumption that we are all over-stressed and over-committed. In 2012, one in four

adults volunteered their service, altogether nearly 65 million of us. Those of us with children in our home, contrary to what we would assume, helped even more than the rest of the population, showing our children the importance of that service and the real value of our precious, limited time.

Though the obvious benefits of volunteering are giving back to your community and serving your neighbors in need, there are other by-products of this kind of service that can be deeply personal and incredibly rewarding. People volunteer for a myriad of reasons. Some volunteer to connect with others and expand their network, some because it is good for the mind, and others because it simply makes them happy. They do it because it makes them feel good.

Once we are out of school and have joined the ranks of fully-fledged adulthood, it is often hard to make new friends, primarily because we don't know where to find them. They are no longer sitting next to us in class or riding the same bus. Volunteering for a cause that matters to you immediately puts you in a circle of others who share the same passion and interest. Sharing activities with people with a common interest is an amazing bonding experience that is hard to find elsewhere. Swinging a hammer to

help build a house for a family who could otherwise not have one is powerful; doing that next to a newfound friend is even more moving. Through experiences such as these, you can expand your network, make friends and build social and relational skills while giving to the community and those who simply need your help.

Volunteering benefits your mental health in ways we don't even realize. Giving of oneself creates a level of self-confidence and self-satisfaction that is very hard to replicate. It stems from a sense of accomplishment. Outside of our jobs, we are offered few opportunities to build pride and create an identity in something bigger than ourselves. Importantly, community service combats social isolation and creates opportunities to share with others. According to the Harvard Health Publication *Simple Changes, Big Rewards*, when researchers at the London School of Economics examined the relationship between volunteering

and measures of happiness in a large group of American adults, they found that the more people volunteered, the happier they were.

Simply put, it is fun. Volunteering creates new ways to explore your passion and discover meaningful interests. It can be relaxing or it can be exhilarating. It can be calm or it can be active. It can be a wonderful change from your daily routine. It can be outside or it can be inside. You can get energized or get tranquil. The options and opportunities are endless—and they are waiting for you.

So how do you find the right fit? Well, what matters to you? What are you passionate about? Those questions are a great place to start. Now, what are you good at—what skills could you bring? How much time are you willing to commit, and does your time match the need? Do you like to work alone or in a group? Do you like to be behind the scenes or out front leading the charge? The answers to these questions will point you in the direction of your opportunity. If you ask around, you will be amazed at what others are doing and all the ways you, too, can get involved.

And if you can't find that right fit, give us a call. We exist to link resources with need and would be happy to help you find the charity in our community that can spark your passion and help you use it to serve your fellow man. That is true philanthropy.

And at the end of the day, it feels really, *really* good. 🌱

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