CHANGES, CHALLENGES, AND CHOICES,
NOW AND IN THE FUTURE

by

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Volunteering is In, In, In, and it is both visible and powerful!

It is wonderful to be alive in interesting times, say the Chinese, and they are so right. It is a challenge to know and to keep up with all the changes, and to make creative yet appropriate choices and decisions.

Changes, Challenges and Choices are but three of the "big C" themes; let me add: Creativity, Communication, Cooperation, Collaboration, Caring, Courage, and Competence.

These are the themes of our times, and are the challenges for us to meet.

I want to enumerate six major changes, and some of the challenges that eoach of these bring to the Volunteer World, and then the choices of roles we have now and in the future as leaders, as professionals, and volunteer persons working to implement action programs. When we look at change, we must be clear that it is an inernational phenomenon,m and that it is here to stay. Changes anywhere effect us, be it weather, wars, assassinations, economic upheavals, power shifts, elections, inventions, or --. Thus an international volunteer movement and network has developed, including the Voluntary, Corporate, and Government Sectors. An example of one of these networks is the International Association of Volunteer Effort (IAVE), which was founded in 1970 at UCLA, and is going strong with international conferences every other year, and with more than sixty countries represented at the most recent one in Paris.

Volunteering is good for the health of the person volunteering; it is good for the d evelopment of new and additional skills; and volunteering makes people feel worthwhile.

Changes and Challenges

I selected six changes that I think have particular implications for the Volunteer World, and offer the kind of changes we invite.

1. Paging the Aging

Changes:

We are a country that is getting older and so are its people. The older population has new economic and political influence and power. According to the May/June 1991 issue of THE FUTURIST in an article Future Work, 12.4% of the U.S. Population is 65 and over, and by 2020 20% of the population will be over 65. Indeed, by the year 2020 seven million persons will be over the age of 85.

It is interesting to notice the polarities involved here, in that many olders are living longer, healthier lives, and many are not. There are other indirect circumstances, because of changing economics and retirement funds many older people do not have the money to cover the cost of living as they had planned it, and a large number have now lost their money due to the Savings & Loan, Insurance, and Banking crises.

The effects of these changes mean changes in buying habits and consumer preference for goods and services, and it means further increased need for health care and productivity for more yaers of living, and it also means that some of these older people are part of four generation families, in which the older person is active and would like to remain independent rather than totally dependent.

Challenges:

The challenges of this trend include:

1. We need to understand what is happening to and with older persons. It is important not to generalize and pigeonhole people. There are great energy, social class, experience, education, religious, racial, and ability differences among the people who belong to this older population. Indeed, it is diversity within a diverse group.

2. We need to develop programs where olders can help each other, such as peer counseling, visiting, telephone support, teaching, problem solving, mediation, and many others.

3. It is important to encourage older persons to develop their advocacy skills.

4. To offer intergenerational opportunities which benefit the olders, as well as the middlers and the youngers.

5. Another important challenge is to utilize and tap into the expertise, experience, and resources of the older person.

6. They need to be offered opportunities for fun.

7. It is important to develop different recreational, different recruitment and interviewing as well as training techniques in order to maximize senior participation.

8. We need to develop a creative recognition system both on an informal as well as formal basis.

2. America The Wonderful

Changes:

We are moving from a monocultural consciousness to multi-culturalism and diversity. This consciousness raising of the importance of difference is a major trend worldwide, and certainly in the United States.

Diversity includes ethnicity, race, gender, age, able or less able, education, income, life style pattern, and life style preferences, social class, native, or foreign born. All of these, and perhaps other aspects can be put in the category of diversity, and of course they make for beautiful, qualitative, value and behavior differences.

In our country the fastest growing population is the Hispanic group. Of course there are also many cultural and language differences within that group, but if taken all together, we have an increase from 14.6 million in 1980 to 21.9 million in 1990 of the Hispanic population. According to the above mentioned article, most U.S. Hispanics live in nine States: Mexican Americans live in California. Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado and Texas, Puerto Ricans live in New York, New Jersey and Illinois, and Cubans in Florida.

Challenges:

What are the challenges of this kind of diverse population?

We can tap into the beauty of difference and be sensitive to the language others speak, as well as the language we use. For instance, it is better to talk about residents, rather than citizens, since all persons living in a community are not necessarily citizens. We must also get away from the expression "using volunteers", but rather talk about encouraging or offering opportunities to persons to volunteer.

Among the cultural differences that we need to take into account when we plan recruitment or training activities are values around time and timing. What we mean by being on time is not necessarily what other cultures mean. Also foods and refreshments needs to be tailored to the group participating.

Another thing that is challenging is to know what kinds of manners are considered polite, for instance, direct eye contact

or the lowering of eyes? Body contacts - like a pat on the
shoulder or a hug or not?

We need to decrease the barriers to participation and increase
both psychological and physical access for all people.

We must also develop reciprocal learning opportunities for volun-
teers with volunteers, and volunteers from staff, and staff to
volunteers. There are opportunities to do this during training
as well as times of evaluation and feedback.

3.   Complexities and Perplexities

Changes:

Changes are here to stay, and that is perhaps the one thing we
can predict to always be with us. But it is not only change,
but rapid and complex change, which lead to new, not before ex-
perienced social problems.

Certainly these include the problems of alienation and homeless-
ness, inadequate housing, abused people, conflict, hunger,
health problems and inadequate health services.

These changes also include the environmental factors which have
become so serious from pollution of air and water to pollution
of food and total environments.

We can also talk about human pollution in that the stress,
noise, strife, and speed experienced particularly in urban
areas makes living less than satisfactory or happy.

We also live in a society that values youth and youthfulness,
and not the wisdom and experience of age, and add to this that
in our information society so many persons are better known as num-
bers than they are by their names, so they become lost in a com-
puterized world.

Challenges:

The challenges here include the need for involvement in the plan-
ning of programs by those who are going to be effected by pro-
grams and services and decisions.

We could also collaborate better with the work place, particu-
larly with Employee Assistance Programs, and find what kind of
additions or therapy volunteering could offer to people who are
being counseled in these programs.

Have we thought about pairing the able with the less able, or
the well with the less well?

We have the opportunity to develop social advocates, especially
in neighborhoods, and particularly those older people who have
experience in advocating. Cooperative housing for older people

where they can support and help each other, and information and referral systems that are known about and accessible twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

We also need to increase the number of programs in which volunteers are helping olders who perhaps can't volunteer, such as people in hospice facilities, or the possibility of respite care, or friendly visitors to those who are homebound, or in hospitals or nursing homes, whose families are too far away or do not visit them.

There is also the possibility of olders helping youngers, such as in childcare programs.

The challenges are many, the opportunities vast.

4. Independence and Interdependence

Changes:

This is the age of collaboration, this means that diverse people or systems are pulling together to meet common, agreed upon goals, purposes and visions. John Gardner once said that "necessity is the mother of collaboration. Certainly the complexities of the time require many heads to solve problems or ameliorate conditions. These times require a pooling of resources, rather than any kind of overlapping services.

We need to increase the competencies and collaboration, so that joint effort towards common causes through unlikely alliances can be developed.

Challenges:

The challenges really include our need to decrease our joy of turfdom, and to find satisfaction in the possibilities of collaboration, so that we can do together what we could not possibly do alone. We have the opportunity to create and involve new and different volunteer opportunities in the arenas of child care, cultural opportunities such as theaters and museums, zoos, park and recreation environments, which already have the forresters, the master gardener, and volunteers to help keep parks clean.

Private, parochial and public schools need volunteers, and the Dedicated Older Volunteers in Education (DOVE) program demonstrated the fact that students learn better when they have more adult role models that help and support the learning environment.

High schools, colleges, and universities could recruit and utilize alumni volunteers in ways they have not begun to think about.

As professional people we need to develop additional competencies, such as: negotiators, mediators, creative compromisers, poolers

of resources, sharers of research, leadership sharing, developing the art of "footnoting", or recognising people, developing the art of bartering and of co-production.

Yes, collaboration calls us to have an exciting, challenging, growth producing time with new friends, colleagues, and systems.

5.   Spaces and Places for Lots of new Faces

Changes:

There seems to be no doubt that volunteers can be found in every sector of society, in government, in the voluntary, and in the corporate sector. Volunteering is seen as being good for the communty, but also as good for the person who does the volunteering. The corporate workplace is encouraging its employees to volunteer, and is recognizing their volunteer efforts.

Within the workplace volunteers are acting as trainers, counselors, mentors, and coaches, and often work in the whole arena of transition for persons who are coming into a new workplace, or leaving the workplace not of their own volition, or changing jobs within the workplace.

Also, some employees are finding the transitions in their personal lives effecting their work, and thus require counseling assistance.

The shrinking labor pool may create volunteer opportunities for the underemployed, the unemployed, and the highly expert. We are moving towards having more part time workers, which means that there may be more non-work time for volunteer work.

Also, older people are becoming available at a younger and younger age, and thus need to have worthwhile work, and need to be recognized as persons who can contribute to a number of program services and causes.

Challenges:

The challenges here include to develop relationships with the corporate and the not for profit work places so that there can be a connection between those who may have volunteers available, and those who need them.

It is also important to tap into transition planning activities of all types.

To develop volunteer opportunities that prepare people for a second or third career, or at least encourage them to explore new work possibilities.

To refine the development of Technical Transfer Volunteers, who act as short term or time limited consultants to government and other systems who can't afford their technical expertise and have no budget for it.

There needs to be an increase in the development of short term and time limited opportunities for volunteers in all of the sectors of systems.

6. Obedience to the Unenforceable

A saying that Lord Moulton is credited with.

Changes:

Obedience to the unenforceable means an emphasis on the ethics and values of the volunteer world. Independent Sector had a National Committee that worked on the ethics of the nation's voluntary and philanthropic community, and came up with some guidelines for the organizations in that community.

Today over 56% of hospitals have Ethics Committees, because we live in a litiginous society were there are many cases of mal-practice, conflict of interest, unsafe workplaces, etc.

There is not enough emphasis in the development of professional persons on the importance of values and ethics, and professional associations are just beginning to offer workshops and discus-sions on this subject. Of course in the field of social work, psychology, the law, and medicine, confidentiality issues have long been seen as highly important.

Challenges:

The challenges include the need to develop ethics committees in the voluntary and philanthropic community in systems. Also, it becomes increasingly important to prepare both professionals and volunteers to meet and handle ethical dilemmas, and to raise the consciousness regarding values and ethical issues.

These changes and challenges leave us with some choices, and parti-cularly with some choice of roles, or we will suffer for sure from "stuckness".

Which ones do you choose for now and for the future? Here are your choices:

1. Initiator or Follower
2. Mover and Shaker or Non-ruffler of the waters
3. Risk Taker or Passive Onlooker
4. Negotiator or Dictator
5. Collaborator or Isolated in own Turfdom
6. Motivator or Idea Killer
7. Action Taker or Inactive
8. Crusador or Traditionalist
9. Advocate or Passive Participant
10. Super Star, Leader. Manager, or?

We need to move forward. We have changes, challenges, and choices, now and in the future. Margaret Mead once said: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has".