

Comparison between Japan and America

regarding

"Volunteerism"

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What I did first was I asked several of my Japanese friends what they think of when they heard the word "Volunteer."

They answered;

- 1) Work without pay
- 2) Good-natured
- 3) Only the work for person who has  
time and money
- 4) less responsibility
- 5) self-satisfaction

I have been surprised many times since I came here. For example, right after I came to the United States from Japan, "Welcome Wagon" came to my house and told me many things that I didn't know and I wanted to know.

In Japan, we do it differently. Suppose, I moved to a new place (in Japan). Nobody came. I knew there was no organization such as "Welcome Wagon." We had only the new neighbors.

We have a self-governing body in each neighborhood(it comprises 25 to 30 families). We select a chief. The chief (usually a man) is not paid, he controls and rules this body. Usually, the chief and three or four representative families have a meeting every month to discuss a leisure program, winter, summer and spring vacation plan for our children. (We have no autumn vacation.) We also discuss child care within the school zone (protect them from the cars) etc.....

So, my new neighbors help me in every way, even providing lunch and dinner for the first few days. But we never thought of it as "Volunteer work." We consider it only human and the obligatory thing to do.

When my friend's daughter was in North Shore Hospital, I met several person who came into the room and asked my friend whether she needed any help or she had problems about anythings. Or my neighbor told me that she also worked at the hospital as volunteer when she was in high school (it was more than 20 years ago). It seemed to me in the United States there were many many people who were interested in "Volunteer Activities," Their ages ranged from young to elderly people. In Japan, we have no hospital volunteers.

I have an American friend who is divorced with 2 children. Her parents live near her (about 15 minutes by car). I wonder why she doesn't live with her parents. She is an only child. In Japan, in 99 percent of such cases, we live with the parents and help each other. The parents take care of their children. The children, in turn, take of their parents when they become old. Sometimes, the parents take care of the grandchildren.

In America, I can see many old people who live with their spouse or alone who work as "Volunteers." In my mind, I compared the differences. I think, first of all,

American people are much much more religious people than Japanese. I realize that the church involves many "Volunteer Workers."

Japan is a small and crowded country, thus it is more competitive. When we are students, we are busy studying. So, I would say most students have no "Volunteer" experience. The parents want to let them study or practice rather than to be "Volunteers." The parents work hard for their children.

When we get married, we are so busy struggling for a better living and better education for our children. This means we need more money.

I am sorry my country does not have more "Volunteers." But I say frankly, it is not only the national character, but also our situation.

Of course, I know there are people who are deeply involved "Volunteers" in Japan, but not so many. They are very very rich and famous so some of them use their money to build a home for the handicapped, or some of them offer their performances for an orphanage.....

When I think about my country's future regarding "Volunteers," a real necessity is publicity. I can't say Japanese people are unfeeling, cold-hearted or cruel. I think we are exact opposite, but unfortunately we have a tendency to be family-oriented or work in small groups rather than to make an organization nationwide. But I

still have hope that the time will come when Japan, the Japanese, and the Japanese Government will be concerned "Volunteers."

The reason why I have such hope in the future is that recently I read in the Japanese Newspaper about "Volunteer Activities." It told that the Japan Youth Volunteer Association will dispatch the young volunteers all over the country to develop their activities and to let people understand and to be in communication with each area of the country. Also this association asked the general public for donations to support these ideas.

I guess, it seems to you too slow. But we, in Japan, have been developing many things under the Western influence, especially America after World War Secand. I think now it is time to learn about "Volunteers" more deeply and more widely.