

Business People Volunteer 1986: A Survey and Analysis

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THE VOLUNTEER IN THE BUSINESS WORLD

When I retired from high volunteer executive positions with two national organizations in Washington in 1981, it was not my intention to become a business-woman. Even when, in 1983, I decided to become a "sole-owner entrepreneur" of a small training and consulting service, I considered myself still in the volunteer administration profession. I was simply offering workshops and training sessions in volunteer-related subjects, introducing my colleague trainers from that other world to persons who saw the worth of investing in such learning opportunities. For me, "for profit" meant "for break-even," in the best case.

I think the "lightbulb went on" one evening in the spring of 1986. I found myself standing on a chair propped up by one of my contracted staff helpers, hanging a sign saying "Patton Consultant Services" over my booth at a Chamber of Commerce Expo Fair. To the right of me was a sophisticated exhibit representing a well-known New England bank. To the left was a glamorous office furniture display. I was setting up a small area which I had been granted in barter for a workshop, in lieu of the hefty exhibitor fee which my small business could ill afford. As the Chamber spokesman had said: "We want you to be part of it. After all, you *are* a member of our Board of Directors!"

I believe it occurred to me just then, surveying the colleague/exhibitors spread out around me, that I truly had joined the world of business and that, because I was the only member firm even remotely representing the volunteer sector, they really *did* want me there! I was pleased to find myself on the Board of

Directors of this regional Chamber of Commerce, even as a "token woman" with one other female director, a college president. Long ago I had made my peace with "tokenism" so that I could get into the action and begin to make things happen, perhaps even a little faster for other women, while I was at it.

In this, my first big trade fair experience, I was presented the golden opportunity of "taking the pulse" of a fairly representative sector of business: the exhibitors and participants attending this significant regional event. For a number of weeks I had been preparing an informal survey document, one designed to get some quick answers to relatively simple questions about volunteer attitudes and involvement, from people whose minds were definitely on business and who could not be expected to give time to an involved questionnaire. For my own interest, I designed the questions loosely on the 1981 Gallup Survey, "Americans Volunteer 1981,"¹ tailoring them to fit my business-oriented potential workshop participants. (The Gallup Survey, "Americans Volunteer 1985"² was not published until after I had administered mine.)

Attracting the public was all-important to the success of the survey, and certainly to the business I was attempting to promote. Having discovered that the fair's backdrop curtains were royal blue throughout the hall, I had carried in yellow and white patio furniture from my home, and put black and white graphics and photos against yellow posterboard for dramatic effect. The centerpiece of my booth was a large sign offering a drawing for one free workshop from the business cards which only survey participants were invited to drop into a fishbowl on the

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table. My assistants and I took turns "hawking the crowd." We visited every booth in the hall, passing out questionnaires and inviting fellow exhibitors to our area.

STATISTICAL RESULTS OF OUR SURVEY

When the fair ended, we found that we had persuaded 291 busy people to complete our survey, the results of which follow. In the interim, we have added those 291 new names to our mailing lists and welcomed a fair number of these to our subsequent workshops dedicated to "improving the effectiveness of volunteer service." Our survey statistics are being shared with the business world and we intend to press hard on some of the issues the results have surfaced.

In all, 291 persons who completed the survey, of those who identified themselves, they consisted of:

- 76 (32%) Senior Executives
- 134 (56%) Middle Managers
- 42 (17.5%) Entry-Level
- 89 Not identified

- 65 (25%) Under 30 years of age
- 176 (73%) 30-50 years of age
- 37 (15%) Over 50 years of age
- 13 Not identified

- 50 (21%) From large company
- 71 (29.5%) From medium-size
- 51 (21%) From small-size
- 119 Not identified

The vast majority, 240 (82%), of the persons participating in the survey said they had volunteered service over the past 12 months; 45 (15%) said they had not volunteered at all. This was a significantly more positive picture than either the 1981 or the 1985 Gallup polls had given of national volunteer participation. Gallup 1981 gave 51% and Gallup 1985, 49%, as cross-the-board volunteer participation figures. Certainly, we recognize the impossibility of equating the results of our separate surveys, particularly since ours was consciously skewed in favor of a business-related respondent group. Also, many of the respondents were already involved with the Chamber of Commerce, itself a volunteer-run organization.

Nonetheless, it makes interesting reading and speculation to see where the separate polls parallel or differ, at least as trends or indicators.

When we analyzed *who* the volunteers were in our survey, we found them to be top-heavily weighted with senior executives. Perhaps we should not be surprised that within the range of volunteer hours served in the previous month (1-200), the "200" figure was given by a senior executive of the 30-50 age range. The average donation of eleven hours per month by our volunteer business persons was only slightly below the overall 1985 Gallup rate of twelve. I found myself speculating, however, about the thirteen managers in our survey who had considered their past month's activities and pinpointed a single hour each that they had found time to give away!

Of these business respondents, 85 (35%) established that areas "Related to my profession" were the most popular choices for service. While neither the 1981 nor the 1985 Gallup surveys included that exact category, our business respondents did not follow Gallup trends perfectly, even when the options were paralleled (see Table I).

It is interesting to note that least popular with both Gallup and the business survey participants was volunteer work in the "Justice" field. The only other direct parallel was "Political," which ranked tenth in both surveys.

It might be surprising that "General fundraising" ranked only ninth place with the business persons, given that it is often an accepted business-related activity. Perhaps for that very reason it is not *sought out* by these people. On the other hand, they just may not have been asked to serve in this most obvious activity!

We could not help noticing that 25% of all business persons who volunteered said that the *only* reason they had done so was that "someone asked me." That has long been accepted as the general rule—and best secret of good marketing/recruiting—in the realm of volunteer administration. It would follow naturally in our business survey, then, that only 7% of the volunteers said they had learned of their volunteer position from any media means (radio, ads, TV, etc.).

Table I. Areas of Volunteer Service in Order of Frequency of Response

North Shore Chamber of Commerce respondents:	Gallup 1985 respondents:
1. Related to profession	1. Religious
2. Educational	2. Informal or lone projects
3. Recreational	3. Educational
4. Religious	4. General fundraising
5. Board of Directors	5. Recreation
6. Community Action	6. Health
7. Arts and culture	7. Civic, social, fraternal
8. Health	8. Social service, welfare
9. General fundraising	9. Work related
10. Political	10. Political
11. Social welfare	11. Arts and culture
12. Citizenship	12. Community action
13. Justice	13. Justice

VOLUNTEER MOTIVATORS

Most business persons (19, or 42%) who had turned down a volunteer opportunity in the past year cited "lack of time." Yet only 18 (7.5%) volunteered because they had "free time." Two of these (8%) said this was the *only* reason they volunteered, but both of those used their "free time" to volunteer with a cause "related to my profession"!

Asked why they continued to volunteer, once involved, 62.5% (150) said they enjoyed the work, 55% (133) said they liked helping others, 25% (60) said they liked the people, 24% (57) said it enhanced their company's image, and 22% (52) said the activity was their specialty or profession. (As noted earlier, multiple motivators were acceptable.)

Somewhat surprisingly, families and religious concerns seemed considerably weaker reasons for volunteering in our poll than in either of the Gallups: 18% (31) gave volunteer service because it helped a "child, relative or friend," 12.5% (30) cited "religious concerns" and scarcely 2% (5) continued the activity because the "family volunteers together."

CORPORATE VOLUNTEERISM

We were particularly interested in determining the climate of volunteer support in the workplace itself. Anticipating more of a negative, we found that 196 (82% of the respondents) believed their associates (employers or employees)

would think kindly of their volunteering. Even those who *did not* volunteer indicated they believed their business associates would view their volunteer activity *positively* (38%), or at the very worst, would take no interest in it (29%). In the entire survey, only two respondents declared that they thought their employers or employees would look on their volunteer activity negatively!

Although most of our respondents (52%) were persuaded to volunteer because "I wanted to help others," most *continued* to volunteer because they "enjoy the work" (62.5%). For all the promotion of volunteering as a stepping-stone to business, only 18 of our participants (7.5%) said it was a motive in their volunteering. Business-related though they were, only two respondents thought volunteering would help lower their taxes!

SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS

Accepting the fallacies in the informal survey we administered at the North Shore Chamber of Commerce Expo Trade Fair, with multiple answers allowed and gaps existing where persons had failed to indicate a status (age, for instance), we still believe there are some valid messages here.

Striking to me is the strong involvement by top executives, for whatever reason (but mostly for traditional altruism, they indicate). In contrast we have the major void of middle managers who, while not

hearing negatives from their bosses about their volunteer potential, apparently are not receiving a positive *corporate* boost for it either. Since there is such a "nose-to-the-grindstone" bent to this group, it would seem natural for the senior executives to take advantage of it to promote strong business backing for collective (company) or individual volunteer community contribution. Since all it may take is for "somebody to ask," if the boss were to be the one who asked, or better to make it known that company policy favored employee and staff volunteering, a measurable improvement in volunteer participation seems soundly predictable.

I would certainly hope that those senior executives who themselves are so personally committed to volunteering would take a look at what they might contribute to the well-being of the full company family, if they got behind a *family* volunteer effort. It seems safe to say that all those workaholic middle managers might begin to see more of spouse and the kids and everybody would be better off! Moreover, as Gallup '85 clearly indicates that people who volunteer are more inclined to give dollars to charities than those who do not, the smart non-profit fundraisers, board members, or United Way leaders among senior executives might do well to start laying groundwork now for the leaner giving years predicted for post-1986.

Looking back on our survey statistics, the group about which we are most concerned is that of the "30-50" middle managers. Most of them are hard at work, back at the office. If they are involved as volunteers, it is most apt to be in that inevitable requirement "fundraising" or in seeking the learning/work experience. That may be the plight of most middle managers, but with the help of their seniors, and remembering that the latest Gallup poll indicates Americans prefer to volunteer when their group does, a company volunteer effort may be able to gather them into a real team, with a multiple happy result to follow!

Not all respondents to our survey questionnaire fitted comfortably into the categories we had listed. Three of our participants listed their respective activities last year as "yard work," "odds and ends," and "personal favors." We hope they may

someday meet another survey participant whose response, when asked why she continues to volunteer was, "I am trying to remove myself from volunteering, but after ten years of full-time volunteering this is difficult!" (If not impossible. We know that the volunteer, once hooked, is apt to be his or her own best recruiter!)

CHALLENGE TO THE SURVEYOR

It is relatively easy to be a "reporter" for a survey such as ours. It is only slightly more difficult to serve as an interpreter of it, either to the business world on behalf of volunteerism, or as an apologist for the "better nature" of business to our colleagues of the nonprofit sector. Much harder, but a challenge that I see as my own privileged opportunity, is to try to effect actions which may help synchronize our separate efforts to improve at least part of our world.

Last year, *Journal* Editor-in-Chief Susan Ellis presented a workshop under our sponsorship entitled, "Volunteerism is Good Business!" When an up-and-coming business woman called to challenge me on the topic (saying "I can't imagine why someone speaking on volunteering would be worth the attention of a business person!"), I knew I had a mission. Within the evidences produced by the North Shore Business survey, we see many opportunities for linking volunteerism's need to enhance its efficiency with the business members' "ripeness" for gathering into volunteer participation. I hope that soon I will see more of our volunteer administrator colleagues joining the business world as emissaries of our field, helping "credential volunteerism" by their contributions to it in this important sector of American life.

FOOTNOTES

¹*Americans Volunteer* 1981, The Gallup Organization, Inc., Princeton, 1982.

²*Americans Volunteer* 1985, The Gallup Organization, Inc., Princeton, 1986.

APPENDIX



PATTON CONSULTANT SERVICES

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EXPO SURVEY ON VOLUNTEERISM

1. Do you volunteer your services (i.e., work in some way to help others for no monetary pay) in any of the following areas? If so, please indicate how many hours per month you contributed to each in the past 12 months. (Average):

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| a. Health _____ | i. Political _____ |
| b. Education _____ | j. Arts and Culture _____ |
| c. Justice _____ | k. Related to my profession _____ |
| d. Citizenship _____ | m. General Fundraising _____ |
| e. Recreation _____ | n. Board of directors _____ |
| f. Social Welfare _____ | o. None _____ |
| g. Community Action _____ | p. Other (please specify) _____ |
| h. Religious _____ | |

2. How did you learn of the volunteer opportunity?

- a. Sought it on my own _____
- b. My company sponsored/participated in program _____
- c. Saw an ad _____, TV _____, radio _____, article _____, flyer _____, poster _____
- d. A group I was part of got involved _____
- e. Someone I knew had benefited from the activity _____
- f. Someone asked me _____
- g. Other (specify) _____

3. What persuaded you to volunteer at first?

- | | |
|---|--|
| a. Thought I would enjoy it _____ | f. Religious concerns _____ |
| b. Wanted to help others or meet a need _____ | g. Had free time _____ |
| c. Wanted the learning/work experience _____ | h. Had interest in the activity _____ |
| d. Had a friend/relative involved _____ | i. Thought it would help cut taxes _____ |
| e. Other (specify) _____ | |

TURN PAGE OVER, PLEASE!

(Survey questions based on 1981 Gallup Poll - "Americans Volunteer")

4. Why do you continue to volunteer in this activity?

- a. Enjoy the work _____
- b. Like helping others; feeling useful _____
- c. Am getting job experience _____
- d. Work helps child, relative or friend _____
- e. Religious concerns _____
- f. Have a lot of free time _____
- g. Like the people _____
- h. Activity is in my specialty (professional) _____
- i. Activity is in my hobby area _____
- j. Work helps keep taxes/costs down _____
- k. Enhances my/my company's image/stature _____
- l. Spouse/family volunteers together _____
- m. Other (specify) _____

5. In the past 12 months, if you turned down a volunteer opportunity, why?

- a. Lack of time _____
- b. Health reasons _____
- c. Working _____
- d. Lack of interest _____
- e. No training offered _____
- f. Not available at the time _____
- g. Won't go door to door _____
- h. Too costly _____
- i. Have done enough volunteering _____
- j. Other (specify) _____

6. a. (Of senior executives) — I believe my employees would view my volunteer activity as:

Positive _____ Negative _____ No interest _____

b. (Of middle managers) — I believe my employers would view my volunteer activity as:

Positive _____ Negative _____ No interest _____

c. (Of entry-level personnel) — I believe my employers would view my volunteer activity as:

Positive _____ Negative _____ No interest _____

7. My company size is: large _____, medium _____, small _____

(Optional): Name _____
Address _____

My age range is: Under 30 _____ 30 through 50 _____ Over 50 _____

THANK YOU!