

Volunteerism in a World Turned Upside Down and Going Round and Round

Marlene Wilson

For some reason, when I think of the world today images of carnivals come to mind--at times things seem to be turned upside down (like a ride on the Octopus). There are hair-raising ups and downs (similar to a roller coaster ride) and it's certainly spinning 'round and 'round (like a merry-go-round). One thing seems evident ... We're all in for the ride of our lives! The question that seems appropriate is: how are we going to handle it?

Let's just take the analogy of the merry-go-round for a moment and try to recapture a bit of our childhood. I vividly recall two kinds of merry-go-rounds.

The first was the one in our school playground (right next to the swings). It was simple, round, and had bars for us to hang on to. It was powered by two or three kids who ran along beside and pushed it. It was usually a lot of fun--except when some of the bigger kids realized that by pushing hard, they could make the merry-go-round go very fast--and everyone on it would start screaming or crying. Then the ride wasn't fun anymore, because it was too fast and too scary. It became a "white knuckle" ride and the goal was to get off without getting hurt or sick.

There are some people who seem to view the world today as that kind of a ride--and they also have the same kind of a goal: to simply keep from getting hurt or sick. They seem to be echoing that old movie title, "Stop the World--I Want to Get Off!"

But I remember another kind of merry-go-round, and I'm sure you do, too. It was the carousel at the carnival. It not only went 'round and 'round, but also up and down. But instead of being frightening, it was a magical, mystical ride. There was music and wonderful prancing horses (which we looked over ever so carefully before deciding about) and the only limitations as to where we went and who we were on those rides was our own imagination. (Sometimes we even dared to try for the gold ring.) The only worry was would we get to go for another ride? I know some people who view the world today as just that kind of a ride--exciting, stimulating and fun!

Which merry-go-round are you on ... in your life and in your work? The choice is yours to make!

The one thing we really don't have any choice about is the fact that we are living in a rapidly changing world--whether we see it as upside down or 'round and 'round ... the fact is, things are moving at a dizzying pace!

In U.S. News and World Report (March 19, 1984) an article on the "10 Forces Reshaping America" began this way:

From Eisenhower to Reagan--it is a span of only 20 years, yet a period of change so dramatic it has left many Americans both dazzled and bewildered. In virtually no aspect of life does the U.S. of the early 1980's resemble what it was in the relatively simple days of the late 1950's.

Marlene Wilson is an internationally known trainer and consultant in volunteerism. Her most recent book is How to Mobilize Church Volunteers. This is the keynote address she delivered at the 1984 National Conference on Volunteerism.

What's more, the pace of change will quicken as the turn of the century approaches.

Peter Drucker calls it a "sea-change":

One of those periods when all the familiar landmarks of life are re-arranged ... it is as though a great wave has been gathering momentum--building up for decades--and it became a roaring tidal wave. And now that wave is cresting, breaking over us in all its awesome power, wrecking old structures and floating them out to sea.

One thing seems certain--as our world is changing, so must we as leaders and managers, or we become not only ineffective but, worse yet, obsolete. Karl Barth once said "the road back leads nowhere." So our challenge today is to carve new roads, chart new courses and build new carousels. Are we up to that job?

It would seem that if we are to attempt it (and I have every faith that we will!), we must first understand the changes that are occurring.

I would like to focus our attention on these basic areas of change:

1. What is happening to the make-up of our population?
2. What is happening relating to jobs and the work place?
3. Where are people living?
4. What are the attitudes and values of Americans in the mid-1980's?

And from this information, I want to share some observations with you regarding: 1) implications for volunteerism; and 2) implications for us, personally, as leaders.

My resources include: Mega-trends, by John Naisbitt; a U.S. News

and World Report article, "10 Forces Reshaping America" (March 19, 1984); a Business Week article, "Baby Boomers Push for Power" (July 2, 1984); and countless other books and articles.

WHAT IS HAPPENING TO THE MAKE-UP OF OUR POPULATION?

There have been some enormous shifts in demographics and we must be aware of them.

1. The "baby boomers" have grown to maturity and have hit the work place. They contribute a gigantic bulge of 56 million people between the ages of 25-39 years old (in 1975, there were only 39 million). Nearly 70% of the women in this age group now work (double since 25 years ago). They outnumber the 40-54 year olds by 55%. Lou Harris, the pollster, says: "This is the generation that has the weight of numbers behind it." Someone else observed: "There's a sense of a new generation coming to power." (We'll deal with this more later, as we talk about attitudes and implications for volunteerism.)

2. The second major shift has to do with the opposite ends of the age spectrum--the young and the elderly. There has been a dramatic decrease in the number of babies born the past decade or so ("baby bust") and an amazing increase in life expectancy for our older people. These two phenomena come together and create a dramatic demographic shift as America becomes a "Maturing Society" vs. a Youth Culture.

For the first time in U.S. history, there are more people 65 and over in the population than teenagers and, by 1990, the number of older citizens is expected to surpass 31 million, while the teenage population shrinks to 23 million. We are older than we have ever been as a society and we will get even older.

Some interesting implications of these two trends are:

- It is projected that the health care bill for persons over 65 will rise from \$332 billion to more than \$800 billion by the year 2000.
- At present, there are 3.2 workers to support each retiree. By the year 2000, the ratio will be about 2 to 1.
- There was a 7% drop in almost all categories of serious crime in 1982 and 1983. (The demographics predicted this 15 years ago. As it is related to the shrinking of the teenage population--late teens and early 20's who are most likely to be law-breakers.)
- We are moving toward a paperless society.
- Information will double every 20 months. The danger will be "drowning in information and starving for knowledge."
- Computers now design products, operate robots that paint cars and weld metal, and control production lines. They send bills, analyze data, and check us out at supermarkets! People use them at home to play games, prepare tax returns, monitor investments and trace family trees. The computer has truly revolutionized our lives!

3. Our work force is more educated:

- The number of students earning bachelor's degrees doubled between 1960 and 1980.
- More Ph.D.'s were conferred from 1970 to 1981 than in the previous 100 years.
- 9/10 of all scientists who ever lived are alive today.
- 23 million Americans are involved in Continuing Education programs.

4. Women are on the move in the work place!

- 2/3 of all women between 25-44 are employed.
- 57% of married women with children work outside the home. Six million of them earn more than their husbands but, over all, women earn 62% of what men make. Still a great discrepancy.
- One in every seven families is headed by a woman.
- More than 1/3 of U.S. law students are now women, and women outnumber men in undergraduate programs.

5. Organizational structures are changing all across America. Megatrends noted the following major shifts:

- from centralization to decentralization

Do you see the implications of these numbers changes for what our organizations do--whether we are programming for churches, criminal justice agencies, youth agencies, or senior services? Are we paying attention to who is out there--or are we still doing business, as usual?

WHAT IS HAPPENING TO THE WORK PLACE REGARDING THE ECONOMY AND JOBS?

1. One obvious outcome of the arrival of the "baby boom bulge" in the work place is increased competition for desirable jobs and promotions. There is increasing pressure on management to provide professional challenge, recognition, and satisfaction for this group.

2. Undoubtedly, the biggest trend, however, is that the basic nature of our economy is shifting. As Naisbitt points out, we are changing from an Industrial to an Information Society:

- This shift is as significant as when we changed from being an Agricultural to an Industrial Society (early 1900's).
- It started in the 1950's with the development of satellites and computers, and has escalated rapidly. It is now affecting all of us!
- By the year 1985, 75% of all jobs in the U.S. will involve computers in some way.

- from hierarchies to networking
- from short to long range planning
- from autocratic, order-giving leadership to true participating styles.

If you doubt the success of these changes, read In Search of Excellence, the story of the 20 most successful corporations in the U.S.--they've tended to all of these trends!

Lest we get overwhelmed and discouraged by all of this, let's look at what six experts have predicted in the book, Work in the 21st Century:

If you had a crystal ball and could look at work in the next century, you would probably see a world greatly changed. In the work world of the 21st century, you'll more than likely see:

- Fewer numbers of people going to work, though more will be working at their own pace, in their own homes.
- People going to work more willingly, and enjoying the work they do.
- More robots doing routine jobs.
- More employees involved in creative, meaningful kinds of jobs.
- More compassion.
- Fewer factory workers.
- Large numbers of entrepreneurs.
- Retirement will have become obsolete.
- More training for all employees, spurred by intense foreign competition for global markets.

It sounds pretty exciting to me!

WHERE ARE PEOPLE LIVING?

Americans are on the move in such numbers that it is reminiscent of the migrations of our early settlers.

1. The move this time is from the North and East to the South and West. This is one of the results of

becoming an Information Society. The South and West have the high tech jobs. (2 out of every 3 new jobs in the last decade sprang up there.) The other lure of this region is the sun--people attempting to beat the high cost of fuel. This trend won't reverse in our lifetime. We might see the formation of three "mega-states": Florida, California, and Texas (Metro Houston is now larger than the populations of 23 states!).

2. The second major move is from cities to suburbia, rural areas or exurbia (areas just beyond suburbs). As they say, you know you are in a small town when:

- ... You speak to a dog that you pass and he wags his tail.
- ... Someone asks how you feel, then listens to what you say.
- ... You dial a wrong number and talk for 15 minutes anyway.
- ... You miss church and receive "get well" cards.
- ... You skid into a ditch on a rural road and the word gets back to town before you do.
- ... You write a check on "insufficient funds" and the bank covers it for you.

WHAT ARE THE ATTITUDES AND VALUES OF AMERICANS IN THE MID-1980's?

1. High Tech/High Touch: In Megatrends, Naisbitt states that:

Whenever new technology is introduced into society, there must be a counterbalancing human response--that is, high touch--or the technology is rejected. The more high tech, the more high touch ... we must learn to balance the material wonders of technology with the spiritual demands of our nature.

We're finding the information/tech age people have a greater need to: be out in nature, have hobbies and leisure activities that are physically active (as jobs use minds, not bodies), want to be needed as a person (volunteering), and desire balance between physical and spiritual realities.

2. Five of the ten trends discussed in Megatrends have to do with people's growing need for more involvement and participation--in decisions affecting their lives and in the quality of life in their communities and organizations. Isn't that exciting! Yankelovitch said: "Throughout history, and certainly during the last century, American individualism stopped at the workplace door. Now it is knocking that door down, demanding entrance."

3. The baby boomers have different attitudes towards work and those values are reshaping corporate cultures. The shift is to participatory decision-making, team work, flexibility, autonomy, and close contact with others. As one 33-year-old executive put it: "Many people who came of age in the 1960's share a common set of experiences and values. It's possible to make money and at the same time to have a company where people are proud to work and can be happy." You need an organizational philosophy that features the dignity of the individual, ethical behavior, and a sense of humor! And, don't forget--there are 56 million baby boomers out there in the workplace, most of whom ascribe to this philosophy.

There are, of course, many other changes occurring--but these give us a good sense of that tidal wave of change that Drucker described. In order to keep our perspective, it's helpful to listen to the words of a philosopher, Reinhold Niebuhr, who spoke about the tumult and said:

Nothing worth doing is completed in one lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope.

Nothing true or beautiful makes complete sense in context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith.

Nothing we do, no matter how virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we are saved by love.

And now, may I share just a few observations about the implications

of these trends as they relate to volunteerism, and to us as leaders in the field.

IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTEERISM AND HUMAN SERVICES

1. We must heed the mood of the people and their desire for more involvement and participation by reaching out and enthusiastically inviting them to join us. That very likely means we need to totally overhaul our recruitment plans, targets, techniques, and materials. Marketing is the name of the game and we must learn it well. Are we reaching the "baby boomers"? They're our future!

2. We must be daring in expanding opportunities for volunteer improvement. Remember, when we used to say, "I never ask a volunteer to do anything I wouldn't do myself"? Well, how about asking one to do something you cannot do yourself (use a word processor, do computer programming, create videos)?

3. We must be aware of and responsive to the new realities of both our paid and volunteer staffs. They are more educated and can't be treated like children or robots. Their lives are more complex, so we need to be better organized, have greater options regarding time and place and shared jobs.

Such life changing events as divorce, single parenting, geographic relocation, loss of job must be acknowledged and caringly responded to ... the trends are real, and they are affecting everyone.

People want their time and commitment to make a difference--take them seriously and ask for their best. The real tragedy of our society, in my opinion, is our wasted and squandered human resources. It must stop!

4. We must assess and respond appropriately to the changing needs and realities of those we serve. I suspect that human services all too often are busy meeting needs that no longer exist, while missing those that

are overwhelming people. As society changes in all the ways we've described, our service must change as well!

And here is where we must realize that there is a tremendous movement towards self-help versus institutional help in this country. (15 million Americans now belong to 500,000 self help groups.) People seem to want helping professionals to be resources, catalysts and conveners of these groups, rather than "fixer-uppers." This is enormously threatening for many human service professionals. It really means re-defining helping. Rather than showing clients how much they need us, we must help them learn independence and self reliance. It is a tricky thing to balance their need not to need us with our need to be needed! This may be our greatest challenge of all.

5. We must also come of age as a field and let the other sectors (public and private) know what we in volunteerism contribute--not just in hours and dollars-- but in people involvement, and skills, and in SPIRIT!

IMPLICATIONS FOR US AS LEADERS AND AS PERSONS

1. As leaders, it is essential that we realize we have a whole society that is fed up with organizational gamesmanship and pseudo-participant management. Someone has observed that the most dangerous individual of all is the articulate incompetent. People are weary of having their personhood violated and of being regarded as "slot fillers" or roles rather than as persons. They have had enough--and are demanding a new kind of leader.

The biggest challenge to us as leaders is to stop being doers and to start leading. This is the Achilles heel of our profession. We must learn the art of sound delegation.

Robert Townsend, who wrote Up the Organization, shares this excellent advice:

People who are normally half dead from boredom or frustration during office hours come alive when given a whole job and their abilities take a quantum jump. It's better to have champions working for you than zombies! ... Make sure the jobs you give to your people are whole and important, and that you really give them the jobs. Ask them not to report unless they're in trouble. Then grit your teeth and don't ask them how it's going.

2. The information age opens some terribly exciting avenues for us. We can have access to better data in our planning. We can stop spending so much time on paper and devote that time to people. We can free our minds from being "memory banks" (machines can do that for us) and use them for conceptual, imaginative, creative thinking. The only limits as to where we can go in this field are self-imposed. Let's get back on that carousel!

3. We must care about ourselves enough not to burn out.

In The Caring Question, the Tubings state a rather startling reality:

If you seek wellness by loving and caring for yourself with no regard for your neighbor, you cannot be whole. If you try loving your neighbor without also loving and caring for yourself, God help your neighbor.

It has do with caring for yourself by "taking care"--that is--to value your health, energy, attitudes and emotional well-being enough that you plan in time to renew yourself. The frantic activity must be balanced by times of quiet and solitude, or we use ourselves up.

One of my favorite authors, Henri Nouwan, in his book Out of Solitude says it so beautifully:

Somewhere we know that without a lonely place our lives are in danger.

*Somewhere we know that without
silence words lose their meaning.*

*That without listening, speaking
no longer heals,*

*That without distance, closeness
cannot cure.*

*Somewhere we know that without
a lonely place our actions quickly
become empty gestures.*

*So may you have quiet times of
aloneness--just for you!*

4. And finally, my deepest desire
of all for you, my friends and col-
leagues, is that you have fun! I agree
with the person who said, "Nothing is
really work unless you'd rather be
doing something else." I, personally,
can't imagine anything I'd rather be
doing--and that was also true of the
seven years I spent as a VAC Direc-
tor. How lucky I am!

But how do we keep the joy in the
work when it seems so overwhelming
at times?

Ray Bradbury, author of seven-
teen novels and consultant to
Disney's Epcot, gives us a fascinating
recipe for staying creative by asking
these intriguing questions:

*When was the last time you went
into a stationery store and bought
\$40 worth of stationery you didn't
really need, because it looked
rainbow bright and all noonday
sun?*

*When was the last time you ate
lunch alone, so you could find
your own thoughts and know just
who you were--instead of giving
your energy away at lunch with
people you didn't really want to
be with?*

*When was the last time you took a
train across country for 2½ days
away from telephones, with that
book you've been wanting to read
and a bottle of champagne at
midnight to be drunk as you watch
little towns go by and wonder who
all those people are in the houses
with bright windows.*

After I read Bradbury's images, I
really got into it and I've added a few
more of my own:

When did you last lay quietly by a
mountain stream and let it sing to
you (and maybe even hum along)?

When did you last lay on your
back in the grass and imagine
cloud figures overhead?

When did you last walk in a wheat
field at dusk--surrounded by a sea
of gold--caressed by air so soft
you could feel it?

When did you last run on a beach
in the moonlight--with the sand
glistening like silver and the surf
singing a lullaby in your ears?

And the final question:

When did you last ride on a carou-
sel--a magical, mystical ride,
with only limitations as to who
you are and where you are going
being your own imagination?