

## NEW CAREERS FOR EVERYONE

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One of the more familiar quotations from Sigmund Freud concerns his observation that the two indispensable ingredients for a successful life are loving well and working hard. In the intervening years there is little doubt that western civilization has been working hard at the problem of loving well but there is little evidence that the question of work has received an equivalent amount of intensive study. What efforts have been directed towards the study of work have been concerned with questions of "Human Engineering," the efficient and, if possible, humane utilization of human beings in production and management structures where the objective seems to be the smoothing out of the annoying and inefficient disruptions which human unpredictability introduces into the economic process. Only within the last few years have questions about the satisfactions which the individual gets from his work begun to divert some attention from the questions about what the work system gets from the individual.

Once the basic survival issues have been taken care of by the economic structure human beings look for a variety of psychological wages from the enormous portion of their lives devoted to work activity. Certainly one important return is a sense of personal competence in the performance of meaningful work. The inner certainty that one can do something well, and can face new situations with the secure knowledge that one's skills and ability will probably be equal to the demands, is a major source of enhanced self-esteem. Related to competence is the gratification which comes from the knowledge that one is making some kind of personal contribution to the world's functioning. The sense of contribution can be around relatively small issues but most people, even if only implicitly, want to feel that their work is of importance to some one other than themselves. And finally, for the hours spent in work to be rewarding there is the need for a kind of social gratification which can only come from a community of one's working peers, that is, the good regard of those who are able to understand the technical complexities of the job and appreciate the skill with which it is performed.

It hardly requires any elaborate field surveys to establish the fact that the entire drift of events is in the direction of shrinking and perhaps eventually eliminating all three of these major forms of psychological compensation. As more and more work becomes systemized and routinized, thereby calling for less personal judgement and less individual skill, the sense of personal competence declines. Think, for example, of the growing armies of office workers whose jobs essentially consist of endlessly transferring various kinds of information from one place to another; in such a structure people are completely interchangeable and no sense of personal competence can develop. Similar deficiencies exist with respect to the peer gratifications that can be obtained in such a job structure, and certainly very little sense of personal contribution to the world's work can emerge.

As this kind of erosion of the gratifications that come from work spreads through higher levels of work activity, people turn to other sources for gratification for what are after all fundamental human needs. Increasingly, people are trying to get some of this basic psychological supply not from the work they do, but from what they do with the money they make; since more and more jobs are becoming equally barren of psychological rewards it doesn't really matter which one you have as long as it returns sufficient money to provide diversion, new experience, and the continuous acquisition of goods.

At least it seems as if it doesn't matter until alternatives are offered which do have the possibility of reestablishing the sense of competence, peer gratification and personal contribution. Such alternatives, to which people respond with amazing intensity, exist, literally by the millions, in the area

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of human services. Personal attention and assistance to the emotionally disturbed, public school teacher's aides, retraining and remediation programs with school dropouts and with delinquents, programs for introducing discharged mental hospital patients back into the community, - these are forms of work which cannot be routinized into pursuits devoid of psychological satisfactions. A major portion of such human services activity can be made available to non-professional manpower and appeals to a variety of people from all levels of society.

At the South Shore Mental Health Center in Quincy, Massachusetts, we have been experimenting with a variety of uses for volunteers in a number of settings, some of which are within the traditional scope of mental health, and some of which have very little to do in any direct fashion with mental health programming. Our first involvement developed through the Commonwealth Service Corps, the Massachusetts version of the domestic Peace Corps, which I had some part in bringing into being. The South Shore Center was asked to form the first unit of part-time volunteer corpsmen around a project in the juvenile court designed to produce a remedial intervention in the lives of first offenders.\* The details of the selection and training of this group of people, ranging in situations all the way from retired school teachers through pharmacists to a senior executive in an automatic machinery corporation, is beyond the scope of this paper. But of considerable relevance is the extraordinary dedication which developed among these people and the very obvious psychological returns which they got from what they were doing, and which, they were able to say, they could rarely get from their regular employment. An identical response was obtained from a similar group of people working in an aftercare project with discharged mental hospital patients. And again, programs to develop a social work case aide role in our child guidance clinic and a teachers' assistant role in our pre-school retardation nurseries, have elicited a similar reaction from mothers recruited from the public welfare rolls as well as from college undergraduates. It still comes as something of a shock to hear bright college students indicate that their college careers provide little opportunity for either a sense of competence or a sense of social contribution.

The commitment elicited by such programs strongly suggests that people concerned with volunteer manpower programs are going to be under increasing pressure to develop part-time work experiences relevant to these major psychological needs. Several examples will suggest the issues to be met on the road to such a goal.

As we began our program with first offenders referred by the juvenile court to the South Shore Center, we were approached by two volunteers of diverse talents and backgrounds. One was a senior executive of a large corporation which designed and produced automatic machinery. The other was a retired vocational high school teacher who had spent thirty-five years teaching mechanical drawing and shop work in the public high schools. Both of these gentlemen told us that they felt they had skills and capacities which were not being tapped in their present activity and which they would like to put to work helping adolescent boys who had not been able to accept the disciplines, and indeed, the impositions of the typical college-oriented high school. After much effort, ranging from interesting the boys to persuading local schools and business groups to donate space and equipment, these two volunteers, working with a group of twelve boys, set up first, a training program in which the young men were trained in drafting and mechanical drawing; and secondly, an operating business, run by the trainees, which sold a blue printing and drafting service to local industry. These were, let me remind you, boys who had been dropped from the public high schools as simply incapable of "tolerating frustration, planning their time, and accepting necessary restrictions and discipline." However, in the atmosphere of acceptance and responsibility which the two volunteers were able to help them generate, and when time became a commodity with which they could operate rather than an imposition which they had to tolerate,

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\*This project was under the dedicated immediate supervision of Mr. John Collins, Director of Court & Police programs, Community Consultation Service, South Shore Mental Health Center.

most of their assumed psychological burdens and deficiencies disappeared in a purposeful blaze of productive energy and studious application.

As part of a cooperative effort with the Community Action Program of Quincy, Massachusetts, several community psychologists from the South Shore Mental Health Center undertook to assist in developing the anti-poverty program for the area. We began by selecting and then training a group of eight mothers from the Welfare rolls to serve as neighborhood research aides. Their task was to assemble accurate information concerning the needs and resources of the poverty areas of the city and the desires of the low income residents. The training included instruction in questionnaire design, interviewing skills, data tabulation and understanding of the structure of the community. Once the survey was started the consultants met regularly with the aides to help them learn from the experience and, via an ongoing sensitivity training group, to attend to the issues of competition, status, etc. which developed among them. The product turned out and the enhanced sense of self-esteem generated were both so impressive that we had to start thinking about "new career" possibilities; after such a taste of honey the mothers really demanded the chance for further growth.

Our eventual answer here was the development of a social work case aide role in the child guidance clinic of the South Shore Mental Health Center. Under the aegis of our social service staff, the mothers were given training and ongoing supervision in the process of conducting intake interviews and reporting their findings at regular staff diagnostic conferences. A group of college undergraduate majors in social science was given identical training and both mothers and students are now performing all of the centers' intake interview functions. They work well together and the professional staff finds their work to be a major contribution to the effectiveness of the clinic functioning. Many crises occurred, and many adjustments of attitude - as much from the professional as from the volunteer side of the table - had to be made but in the process both groups benefited.

The keys to such endeavors are the imaginative use of volunteers, the generation of appropriate roles and a reasonable kind of selection and training by professionals willing to adapt their concepts and knowledge and skills to the special capabilities of volunteer manpower.

If the notion that volunteer activities in the area of human services has as much to offer to the volunteer as to the recipient, then the question of who is appropriate for such work becomes important. There seem to be two quite distinct modes of selection in operation in volunteer programs around the country. One approach, usually taken by agencies and institutions attempting to "free the time of qualified professionals for therapeutic activity," involves setting very rigorous and high selection standards. In one instance intensive advertising attracted some six hundred applications out of which the twelve "best qualified" candidates were chosen following elaborate personal interviews, the writing of autobiographies and extensive psychological testing. These chosen few were then given extensive training and close supervision over a six month period following which, to no one's surprise but to everyone's delight, they were indeed able to perform the arduous function of taking intake case histories. At the end of one year, and now to the surprise of the professionals involved, these volunteers decided to go to graduate school and become "fully qualified professionals" which is probably what they should have done in the first place. The appalling waste of the other 588 applicants, their disappointment and perhaps even their resentment at not being allowed to try out for a role simply was accepted as part of the price of "maintaining standards."

The other selection mode involves the basic principle that participation should be available on as wide a basis as possible. It involves the recognition that there are many things of real value which people who do not have professional training can do, which would be inappropriate for professionals and which, indeed, they very often may not be able to do. (I would cite here Robert Reiff's example of the neighborhood service worker who spent almost forty-eight continuous hours mobilizing the neighbors to help a lonely Puerto Rican mother in the slums of the east Bronx who was found holding a dead baby in her lap and refusing to

give it up for burial). Rather than searching through vast numbers of people to find those few who could easily qualify for graduate school, this approach recognizes that rather than any overall excellence most human beings including graduate students, have some areas of strength as well as many weaknesses but that it is the strengths which are to be played to in these undertakings. With the kind of supervision which groups of people can be helped to offer one another, the individual weaknesses of people can be compensated for and their combined strengths can be magnified into truly impressive works. The experience of the Howard University project in the slums of Washington, D. C., the Lincoln Hospital project in the low income areas of the Bronx in New York City and the volunteer projects at the South Shore Mental Health Center suggest that far more can be accomplished in many directions by taking this open approach to selection. Volunteers, it turns out, are capable of more significant work than professionals previously imagined, and it may be that one excellent role for the professional is the training, supervision and evaluation of the efforts of the army of volunteers waiting in the wings to be given a chance at work which so badly needs to be done and which we all know there will never be enough professionals to carry on.

For my part I would like to see several major centers undertake a total commitment to volunteer programs. I would like to see each professional agree to train and supervise fifty volunteer nonprofessionals in a massive program designed to bring a variety of human services to the many people who need them. It is only by some such imaginative use of manpower that we can ever hope to get on top of the serious manpower shortage situations we face in the areas of mental health, education, medical care, foster child care, the involvement of our older population in satisfying work, etc.

From this perspective it seems clear that the field of volunteer manpower has relevance for a vast range of influence in the not so distant future. While we may be dealing with specific programs in hospitals and clinics and in the poverty program at the present time, future possibilities are many and may very well lead to a situation where everyone can have at least a part-time new career. It is not only the poor and the college students who need such opportunities; salesmen, secretaries, and insurance actuaries also need the spice of personal involvement which so many trends in contemporary social organization tend to take out of life. The leaders of the new breed of volunteer manpower, even if not yet fully aware of it, are developing resources for the renewal of the human spirit in the midst of what could become a spiritual wasteland of efficient production.