

The Changing Role of Women In Voluntarism

INDIVIDUAL GROWTH AND WORTH

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GOOD AFTERNOON. It's a pleasure to be here today. And it's especially appropriate that the YWCA should be sponsoring this seminar on civic responsibility and the corporate woman. Few organizations have put themselves on the line quite the way the Y.W. has in its concern to provide equal opportunities for growth and development to everyone.

Looking back through history, whenever there's been an important women's issue, or relevant needs to be addressed, the Y.W. has been there. This includes being in the forefront in initiating programs for women returning to the labor market after absences of many years; offering career-oriented workshops for teenagers; and using "Y" buildings which were formerly dormitories as shelters for battered women or as senior citizen centers.

And just a couple of weeks ago, Rita Ryder took me on a tour of the *Daycare* center in our downtown "Y." Rarely have I seen so many happy, well-cared-for, contented babies and toddlers.

The Y.W.'s primary goal has always been to help create a society free from oppression where *all* people are equal, where *opportunities* are open and where each *one* of us is enabled and encouraged to make his or her greatest contribution.

That's really why most of us are here today. And that's why it's particularly appropriate that the "Y" is directing our attention to a topic we'll all hear more about in the future "*Civic Responsibility and the Corporate Woman.*"

Too often in the past there's been a tendency to look upon the two as mutually exclusive. Voluntary participation in community groups and agencies was long considered the undisputed province of the *non-working* woman. Yet working *men* for the most part have held positions on *boards* of non-profit groups and agencies, and frequently enhanced their careers through doing so.

Therefore, today I'd like to take a few minutes to speculate a bit on the future of voluntarism in our society and share some ideas with you on the *changing* role of women in the voluntary sector.

We'll also talk about the implications of this change for the corporate world, for the various civic, cultural and social-service agencies, and, of course, for *women themselves* as they juggle commitments to careers, families, and outside activities.

But, in order to speculate on the *future*, it's usually a good idea to have a firm grasp on the *past*. However, instead of going as far back as de Tocqueville, who first noted the impact of voluntary "associations" on American society, I'll quote from the Filer Report of 1975 which capsulizes the rise and development of the non-profit sector.

"Few aspects of American society are more characteristically, more famously American, than the nation's array of voluntary organizations, and the support in both time and money given to them by its citizens," the report says.

"Our country has been decisively different in this regard from the beginning. As the nation was settled and moved westward, communities existed before governments were there to care for public needs.

"The result was that voluntary collaborative activities were set up to provide basic social services." *Government followed later.*

"This practice of attending to community needs outside of government has profoundly shaped American society and its institutional framework. While in most other countries, major social institutions such as universities, hospitals, schools, libraries, museums and social welfare agencies are state-run and state-funded, in the United States many of the same organizations are privately controlled and voluntarily supported."

So the concept of voluntarism is deeply ingrained in the American experience. As a nation we've developed three distinct ways to address problems too large for the individual — through government, through the private sector, and through the voluntary sector.

In recent years this third sector has come in for its share

of criticism along with the rest of our institutions. This has meant that someone who believes, as I do, that the goal of full equality for women in our society is necessary and must succeed — has had to justify, to myself and to others, my advocacy of voluntarism. — despite the fact that many women whom I respect in the feminist movement expressed the view that it is just another way that women have been “used” throughout the years.

But, it's also interesting to note that some of these same people who have been critical of women volunteers are now advising women to use volunteering as a ticket to the workplace. Which many are successfully doing, I might add!

Overall I believe that airing the subject for discussion has had a healthy effect. It served to focus our attention on what we've been doing as volunteers. And perhaps we are *all* now agreed that volunteer work doesn't simply have to consist of licking stamps or answering telephones — that's a necessary part of it, of course, but we discovered that men are as fully capable of performing those tasks as are women!

We've also discovered that voluntary service offers a fulfillment often not found in the home *or on the job*. There's no denying that homemakers in this country still form a large part of the volunteer corps — their contribution is of inestimable value. And surely the work they do has to be its own reward because they generally receive little recognition for their many efforts and leave themselves open to being dubbed “do-gooders” and other unflattering labels.

We all owe the homemaker/volunteer not only our support, but also a debt of gratitude of long standing.

Yet, although homemakers *are* essential to the non-profit sector, a change took place in the 70s that may surprise you. The largest proportion of volunteers in this country *now also hold full-time jobs*. In a recent survey done in New York City, more than 70 percent of the men and women seeking volunteer jobs were already in the labor market!

So the face of voluntarism has been changing.

And the 1980s will accelerate that change.

Why do I say that? Well, for several reasons. But let's just talk about the most obvious one.

Cutbacks in the size and cost of government will translate into cutbacks in a variety of programs that now cut across the entire spectrum of our society. And even if the American people *were* willing to pay more taxes to provide needed services, a strong feeling exists that government is simply too cumbersome to be effective. President Carter's pollster Pat Cadell perhaps expressed this best when he said, “People feel unable to get control of their government and make it respond. They don't have a handle on getting government to pay attention to them or their problems.”

Well, what *is* the answer to ineffectiveness and the curtailment of programs on the part of government?

The profit and non-profit sectors of our society will have to take up the slack! And they can be *twice* as effective if they do so jointly. Moreover, their collaboration is a logical step in a progression that the 60s set in motion.

A close relationship between the two has been recognized and even promoted by enlightened business and community leaders for years.

That's understandable! The profit and non-profit sectors share much in common. As George Romney has said, “Both are founded on a belief in individual initiative, in the wisdom of collective action, and in maintaining independence from the public sector. Now they must seek to

build mutually supportive and beneficial relationships that maximize the inherent strengths and the tremendous human and financial resources each possesses.”

There's no doubt, as Anne Moe confirmed this morning, that the corporation is a powerful institution in our society — a citizen which because of its size — has a potentially greater impact than any other.

And because business *is* so important in contemporary America, and is dependent upon healthy communities and cities in which to exist, it's quite properly been called upon to make contributions in proportion to its size and scope. With bigness comes power — perhaps not as much power as some people think, but enough! And with power, of course, comes responsibility — no parent needs to be reminded of that.

In the past, corporate responsibility was handled primarily in two ways — through cash contributions to individual or collective charities and through top management assuming leadership positions in the community — serving as directors, fund-raisers and policy makers.

Some corporations went further — encouraging their employees over the years to become involved in community activities.

And a few tried a bold new concept called released time — based largely on the tradition of releasing executives for board service in the community. That concept is growing — *and is being applied at all levels in some corporations.*

Interestingly enough, it came into being and has flourished during the same decade that women have entered the workforce and management ranks in unprecedented numbers.

So it stands to reason that women will be increasingly called upon to serve in the voluntary sector as representatives of their respective corporations.

For many women, volunteering may be a totally new experience. Others may have volunteered in a service capacity such as working in a hospital, or acting as the leader of a youth group. Today we are looking at a different sort of volunteer role — the **administrative volunteer** — characterized in a nutshell as going from baker to policy-maker.

Think of the opportunities this opens for you.

First of all, there's the opportunity to learn about a totally new field or a new organization. This not only broadens your base of your knowledge but — I'm speaking from experience — can become a *major* interest in your life. And the increased skills and competency you develop can usually be transferred to the other important areas — family, career, education, or personal pursuits.

Voluntarism also allows for a good dose of variety in your lives. Most jobs — even executive jobs — have a certain amount of routine in them. As a result of specialization in the business world, people often get channeled into narrow slots.

Taking on a voluntary commitment can help break routines which — if left unchecked — can become somewhat stultifying.

Still another factor not to be overlooked when weighing the benefits to be derived from serving the non-profit sector is the new contacts you'll make — the new people you'll meet who can add richness and diversity to your life.

And this may be a *very* pragmatic way of looking at voluntary service, but it unquestionably provides great visibility in the community.

When you think of the women leaders in town there are a few names that automatically come to mind. In Seattle that means people like Dorothy Bullitt who has given unstintingly of her time to a variety of worthwhile endeavors and non-profit institutions such as the University of Washington and Children's Orthopedic Hospital. It also means women like Betty Fletcher, U.S. Circuit Court Judge, who has given years of service to the Children's Home Society of Washington both as a board member and its president. Of interest to *this* audience should be the fact that both of these women have pursued successful careers of their own while serving a wide variety of non-profit boards and agencies.

Along these lines, there was an article in a recent edition of *Harvard Business Review* regarding the recruitment of women for *corporate* boards. The authors said that almost without exception the women who have been selected by the corporations were highly visible for their achievements in government, education and *non-profit circles*.

Moreover, it's no secret that many large companies put civic activities on the score sheet when considering promotions — in some, this may not be formally stated but in others it is. Bank of America, for instance, is on record as saying employees are evaluated on their community involvement activities. And I'm told by friends in the personnel field that in most organizations there's a startling coincidence between progress up the corporate ladder and significant community leadership.

These are possible benefits that the corporate woman should keep in mind.

But the best benefit of all continues to be the opportunity voluntarism provides to do something you may believe is truly worthwhile — to make a difference — to feel responsible for helping to improve the quality of life in your community. That's an immeasurable plus which can bring great personal satisfaction.

Well, these are some of the positive factors. But I'd be giving a less than candid appraisal if I didn't mention a few of the hazards in the 1980s world of administrative voluntarism.

An early Yankelovitch study of 400 executives serving as policy makers in voluntary organizations showed that nearly half the group felt *under-utilized* in their voluntary posts.

When this occurs it results in a loss both for the volunteer and the agency to which he or she has committed a substantial amount of time.

In the past not enough emphasis has been placed on preparing corporate executives or managers for work in the non-profit sector. It was simply assumed that business skills and expertise were transferrable. Yet frequently when corporate volunteers attempt to transplant business management styles to the voluntary sector, tension and misunderstanding result. The business world has a clearly drawn top-down hierarchy whereas the non profit sector has a more flattened out-partnership-structure. If corporate volunteers are to serve in a most effective manner, it's essential that both they and the volunteer staffs have a good understanding of how they can best relate to one another.

Fortunately this problem has been brought out in the open and some possible solutions are in the mill. United Way of America has proposed that corporations sponsor programs to provide training for their corporate volunteers who will be serving non-profit organizations in a leadership

capacity. This would serve to clarify volunteer and staff roles and promote productive partnerships between the two.

It would also enhance corporate volunteers' understanding of the community and the non-profit organizations which might benefit from their skills.

Topics which have been suggested for inclusion in such a program are: an introduction to the private, non-profit sector and how it operates; organizing and governing the agency; and board-staff relationships.

These subjects provide background on the basics of voluntarism and on the responsibilities and duties of board membership.

The program would be taught by managers within the corporations who have had volunteer board experience and have been trained to teach the various components.

In addition, some businesses now have volunteer coordinators on their staffs and a program of this kind would be a natural extension of the services the coordinators can supply.

One of the offshoots of the program is the possibility of coming up with the right "match" for the corporate volunteer and the organization looking for executive talent.

After all, if your interests are art and music, you would probably be most effective in a cultural setting. Whereas, if you're interested in history and political science, you'd probably be more of an asset on a governmental commission of some kind. It's important in volunteer work, wherever possible, to expand your own interests and talents.

I say this fully realizing that the corporate volunteer is often "recruited" for voluntary service. That may strike you as a contradiction in terms, but, as many of you know, in the real world that's frequently how things happen.

But however the volunteer commitment develops, I'd encourage you to use every one of the opportunities to acquire additional knowledge, learn new skills and to share whatever expertise you have with the recipient organization. Then go back and share the experience you've *gained* with your own organization — it can be a reciprocal process.

Some of the areas in which you may become involved are fund-raising, recommending operating procedures to accomplish a particular goal, recruiting other volunteers, budgeting and fiscal control, public relations activities, providing legal advice, liaison with other groups — a variety of problem-solving situations.

And just as there's a vast array of projects and many roles to fill, so too are there a variety of arrangements with individual companies when a corporate volunteer becomes involved in the non-profit sector.

Some companies with formal community relations programs encourage involvement, but on your own time.

Others expect their *management* people to be involved during working hours. However, that may translate into extending your work day in order to get your own job done. That may have been the case for the woman whose story was reported in the brochure announcing this seminar.

If you recall the story, a woman who had recently been promoted to an executive position was asked by senior management to become active in a civic organization. This new executive reportedly said she was too busy on the job and would not be able to do so. Her manager's response was, "She's made it to an executive position but she still doesn't think like one."

I don't know the details. Perhaps the pressures of career,

family and outside commitments were very strong at the moment she was approached. And, of course, we must all be careful to prioritize our efforts so as to leave time for some pleasures as well as responsibilities.

However, instead of an outright refusal, there may have been some negotiating she could have undertaken in order to balance the many facets of her life. She might have delegated the authority for carrying out a particularly time-consuming project to a subordinate in order to free her own time for the voluntary commitment.

At the very least she might have expressed a willingness, even an eagerness, to take on the voluntary project. She might have inquired about released time and sought her manager's assistance in prioritizing in order to demonstrate to him that she indeed did think "like an executive."

There's some validity to his assumption that she did not.

I'm yet to meet a successful chief executive in today's volatile social climate who is not aware of the obligation the corporation has to assist the larger community.

It's been estimated that when John de Butts was president of AT&T, he spent more than half his time serving the public sector. That's no longer unusual in such positions.

And, furthermore, it's understandable! Because the greatest personal need for human beings at any level is not necessarily big money or great power but a sense of individual growth and worth. And this can come through the voluntary sector.

I remember visiting with a service volunteer who, as we talked, continued to tack up the finger paintings her class of brain damaged children had just made. "Ultimately it's not what you get from volunteer work, or even what you give," she said, "it's what you can become."

That's true for the administrative volunteer as well.

So I encourage you to take on the challenge, when it's offered you — even seek it out.

You'll be the richer for the experience.

Thank you for inviting me to be with you today. Now I'd be happy to try and answer any questions you may have.