Facing Realities: The Need to Develop a Political Agenda for Volunteerism

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The following essay is based on a speech delivered to leaders of forty-seven nonprofit agencies in the Philadelphia area at the opening session of a management training series sponsored by The Philadelphia Clearinghouse.

We, and with us our volunteers, are under siege. Attacking us from one side are demographic trends, social values, economic forces. From the other, we are threatened by political actions and the public policies used to support such actions.

The former is more familiar to many of us. It would not be suprising to most of us to be concerned with issues around, for instance, the growing percentage of our citizens who are elderly; decreasing reliance on traditional "nuclear families"; or increasing numbers of women joining the work force. Precisely because they are more familiar to volunteer leaders, and certainly more written about, I will basically but allude to them within this essay.

Thus, I will focus on the political flank of our attackers. Most importantly, what follows, I hope, will convince you that *politics* IS relevant to our future. That volunteerism is anything but *apolitical*. That if we do not develop and implement a political strategy to get what we want and need for our future we should not be surprised that others will use us for their ends ... not ours.

What should guide our political agenda? Why do I see us under attack by those who now control public policy and what is placed on the table of political action—what issues are seen as of public concern and what words are used to "define" them?

Remember that volunteer energy is the single largest source of in-kind support provided to nonprofit organizations, and thus provided almost 35% of all the support given to nonprofits in 1984. At an estimated value of over $80 billion, it was almost 20 times as large as the contribution provided by corporations ($4.3 billion in 1985) or by foundations (also $4.3 billion).

Thus, volunteer activity is the *largest single source of private philanthropic support* donated to the nonprofit sector. Once we realize this, we can see the relevance of the position of John Schwartz, President of the American Association of Fund-Raising Counsel:

> *Our public policy should be to encourage and strengthen the role of philanthropy in America, rather than impair its ability to meet important needs of our society.*

It is high time that those of us who see ourselves as guardians—trustees—of this largest single source of private philanthropy take as clear a stand as our colleagues involved with the foundation, corporation, and individual donor communities. We should not hesitate to see that, to put it bluntly, current public policy is doing anything but this. Once we see it, we should not hesitate to be honest, and talk about the fact that while the lips articulating public policy mouth the right sentiments, the actions of its body put a lie to the words.

But we do hesitate to say this. Even more difficult to overcome, most of us may not even see this.

For this reason (and perhaps for only this reason) we are fortunate that many environmental trends have coalesced in a way that has given us a primary concept—term of policy—that enables us to see their implications for the nonprofit sector in general, and volunteer efforts within that sector in particular. The advantage of having one word is that it provides

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focus; it strengthens our ability to concentrate on its impact.

Otherwise, we could get confused simply by the sheer number of "environmental" (that is, external to one's own particular nonprofit organization or community association) trends that impinge upon our efforts. In the short-term they present myriad influences, sometimes contradictory and often difficult to differentiate in terms of long-term impact. We might not see how each, in its own way, moves us just a little closer to extinction.

Or, perhaps even more likely, the sheer breadth of the obstacles put in the way of our short-term success by these environmental trends saps all of our energy. Trying to hold together our immediate projects, we have no energy left for long-term issues. In fact, we see concern for political issues as somehow counter-productive, diluting our available resources. Distracting our attention. Divisive to our volunteers.

THE PRIMARY TREND

No one issue better gives us an opportunity for seeing the affects of the trends attacking us from all sides than that of *privatization*. Perhaps no other trend in the environment so clearly shows how fundamentally the "Social Contract" is being redefined before our very eyes. It will help us see how we may support one or another specific expression of its position because what appear to be immediate opportunities or benefits blind us to its long-term impact in advancing privatization. Or, more often the case, how we might ignore or not struggle against a particular expression of its policy because what appear in the immediate as consequences are seen as irrelevant to us.

Privatization gives us the ability to see both of these as seriously flawed responses when we confront any public policy which advances its agenda—to the extent, that is, that we are acting as trustees of tomorrow's altruistic volunteers (and we all should acknowledge that we have other concerns in life which might outweigh our commitment to volunteerism in particular circumstances). But for it to provide us such a tool to chart our future, we will first need a definition of terms.

"Privatization" is the turning over to the PRIVATE sector the development, production, and/or distribution of goods or services once provided by or assumed to be the responsibility of the PUBLIC sector. In the United States, read "for-profit" for "private" and you'll realize what we're talking about. For-profit health care is the most obvious iceberg in this sea change. For-profit organizations are running jails; taking care of Federal parks; offering day care. These are but the newest tips we can see on the waterline.

Now, here and there, I have been as guilty as others in attempting to present privatization to nonprofit agencies in a positive light. If the government is to contract out the provision of goods and services, we can compete, and often compete effectively, with for-profit institutions. And we even have the ability to develop for-profit subsidiaries of our nonprofit corporations.

BUT . . . that is dealing with specific contracts. With particular opportunities. Such a perspective can blind us to the ultimate results of this trend if it is not critiqued effectively.

Privatization is not designed for the nonprofit sector. It is NOT 1980's terminology for the 1960's and 1970's behavior which found the government, and particularly the Federal government, turning to the nonprofit community to offer many of its goods and services, particularly to minorities, poor communities, and others in need. The result of that behavior was that between 1977 and 1982 the nonprofit sector grew faster than any other sector of the economy. This was reversed as of 1982.

Privatization is not intended to reverse this reversal. Though it is kept quiet by its prime advocates, privatization is today's strategy to make this reversal permanent, and to turn a retreat in support for nonprofit services into a rout.

Is this language too strong? I fear it is, if anything, not strong enough.

It is to our peril to forget what we don't say when we state we are nonprofit organizations, or that we are tax-exempt, or that we are 501(c)(3)'s. When we are careful, we remember that our full name is a PUBLIC NONPROFIT organization. We are PUBLIC, not private, charitable organizations.

Am I simply playing a word game with no substance behind it? Obviously, I think not, and am asking you to take a significant amount of time out of your hectic day to read this essay to convince you that this is not simply a real distinction, but also a *critical* one. To explain why this is true, however, I will need to take you through a little of the legal history behind the establishment of our nonprofit agencies.

LEGAL RESPONSIBILITY

In almost every state and commonwealth (pardon that, but I happen to live in one of those few things not technically called a state . . . blame it on Pennsylvania chauvinism) of our Union, when we incorporate we establish what is called a fiduciary relationship with the public. What this means (*inter alia*, or among other things . . . a caveat quickly thrown in for all you lawyers out there) is that we are entrusted to be doing something that a reasonable and impartial member of our community would think is a "public good."

There it is. The social contract between us and the public. Our "tap root," needed for the very survival of our volunteer tree. In our case, the social contract is no mere Rousseauan theory. It is a *legal fact*, and binds us accountable to whatever the public comes to use as a definition. Within its terms rests what is acceptable services; what the public will fund. What a court, or a state (commonwealth) will allow us to even try to do. Indeed, within its definition rests our very existence as nonprofit corporations.

And what comes to be defined as a public good is precisely the source of a person's very *ability*(let alone willingness) to see something as worthy of his/her altruistic volunteer donation, or not.

Privatization is, at its core, nothing but the most radical attempt within my lifetime (and arguably, more radical than that which occurred, in the other direction, during the depression) to redefine what is a public good. It seeks to justify the actions of the current Federal government in declining support for nonprofit services, foremost among them support for social services, smaller nonprofits, and programs for our poorest citizens and most overlooked of neighborhoods. It seeks not just to delegate to the private sector the undertaking of projects here and there, but rather to create the day when the private sector will see it as the sector first to be concerned with THE VERY RESPONSIBILITY FOR the health, education, civic welfare, and social welfare of the public.

This hit home for me when I recently testified in the defense of the nonprofit sector before a Pennsylvania committee investigating the profit-generating activities of nonprofits. I was asked if I thought the government was fundamentally responsible for health care. Not realizing the degree to which privatization has already affected the social contract, I answered that of course it was. Who else should be the guardian of the health of our society? For this, Republicans and Democrats alike branded me a "socialist."

Now I am not writing to defend my political allegiances. This is not the main issue. What is, is that this labelling is not nearly so much about me as it is about the social contract. While it does not say much about me that is accurate, we can see how it exposes a lot about what is changing, and is now true about how many have come to define the social contract . . . what is in the public good. It appears that privatization has already advanced to the extent that the assumption that health care is a public responsibility can be dismissed as foreign, alien . . . un-American. And not by some "right-wing" crazies, but rather by men and women sensitive to public sentiments because of their desire to be re-elected.

It follows that what is not a public good should not be carried forward by nonprofit organizations. And, even if you don't agree with this, it remains true that if we do nothing we will likely awaken one day and discover that privatization has so changed the social contract that those that would volunteer to help meet such needs as were once the responsibility of the public sector will, instead of gaining praise, be stigmatized as unAmerican. Socialists. And that is not the best motivator in the world for most of us.

Even in such a world, some will, no doubt, continue to volunteer. For example, I will continue to volunteer in the fight against AIDS because my own life is on the line. Having already been called

many not-so-wonderful things for such volunteer efforts, I cannot imagine that being called unAmerican would deter me. So, too, the self-interest of some will continue to lead them to volunteer for projects that, for most people, come to consider the responsibility of the private sector. Pure humanitarianism even may lead some to continue to respond to volunteer opportunites, over the nonrewarding passivity, if not downright opposition, of most in their social group.

Would not most, however, be deterred? Would not such a radical redefinition of the social contract turn social pressure that once was useful to us in rewarding volunteers to a serious disincentive? Would it not help turn pride into guilt?

I realize that, at least for some, this argument may appear as too theoretical (though for those of you with interest, I recommend literature about or by such people as Michael Foucault). But consider some more practical questions. Regardless of changes in the "social contract" or what comes to be termed a "public good," would you rather recruit a volunteer for a service *most often* offered by a nonprofit organization or a for-profit corporation? By a division of your local government or by local small business entrepreneurs? To my mind, the answer is obvious.

As soon as most in our community—which is, after all, the potential volunteer pool from which we must draw—come to assume that most services in our area of concern are, and should be, offered by the private sector, our recruitment efforts will become far more difficult than they have ever been. It is hard enough for many of us to "sell" to the community why they should volunteer to do a job that once was done by nonprofit staff. Will it not be far more difficult to "sell" a job that they assume is most often done by a for-profit businessperson? It is already difficult to recruit volunteers to augment services offered by local governments rather than nonprofits. How much harder when the community at-large, right or wrong, has been so swayed by a rather tough understanding of privatization that they assume you are now recruiting them to augment services offered by the for-profit sector?

I don't want that job. Do you?

SECONDARY ENVIRONMENTAL TRENDS

We can review other trends external to the particular nonprofit site of our volunteer efforts for one of two reasons. On the one hand, it allows us to see the full strength of the armies allied against our continual effectiveness in meeting human needs, addressing community problems, and bringing beauty and new ways of appreciating our lives through art and cultural activities. Thus, it may give you pause, even if you are able to dismiss my concerns around privatization *per se*. On the other hand, particularly for those of you who are concerned with privatization, a review of these trends will help you see how far our society has already come to accept its dogma; how much support there is for making its ultimate consequences all that more possible within the foreseeable future.

Tax "Reform"

In considering recently enacted revisions in our Federal Tax Code, keep in mind the impact of other costs and benefits on voluntary endeavors. And remember that the key concept for philanthropy in analyzing tax reform is its impact on what is seen as a discretionary resource.

With that said, let us first acknowledge that there has been little analysis of Federal reform of income tax on future volunteer efforts. I would say none of consequence, but it may be simply that I have failed to see something; nevertheless, I remain struck that even such a responsible organization as Independent Sector, with a special project targeted on increasing volunteer efforts within the nonprofit world, has failed to analyze this act of "reform."

Let us secondly admit that any analysis of the impact of this Act on the nonprofit sector that has appeared has been highly partisan and, therefore not surprisingly, highly contradictory. Some say its impact will be devastating, especially in terms of fundraising, and particularly certain types of individual contributions. I tend to agree, especially in a limited number of areas:

— Those depending on gifts of property are likely to be hurt; recogniz-

ing that, for instance, such contributions account for some 40% of the income of colleges and universities, this fact will likely have a "trickle down" impact as university fundraisers increase the competition for other types of individual contributions.

— Those among the wealthy primarily motivated to give by tax attorneys, investment counselors, etc. will likely give far less.

— Those who today are beginning their careers and therefore do not have income adequate to itemize, but who in the future will likely earn far more and will itemize, very likely may fail to "get into the habit" of giving.

— Perhaps of greatest concern is the impact of these reforms on the perception of the business sector, and particularly corporations, on their "discretionary income" available to corporate contributions budgets.

Some say there may be little or no negative effects on individual contributions. For most, and particularly for the relatively poorer of our citizens who are likely to remain non-itemizers, I agree. For the itemizing middle- and upper-middle classes, in fact, lower maximum tax rates very likely may increase their perception of their discretionary income.

But, as in other things, we can get so caught up trying to find our way through these conflicting analyses that we fail to see the underlying tragedy that this Act constitutes. It is a blunt expression of the public sector's abdication of responsibility for funding health, education, social service, and civic/cultural programs. It is a statement that the Federal government wishes to PRIVATIZE these decisions among its citizens. These programs now become increasingly dependent on our personal decisions of when and where to make individual, private donations; rather than the public sector's seeing that it has the power, right, and/or responsibility to declare that it is appropriate for the PUBLIC sector, through its revenue generating activities, to take responsibility for the continuation of such services.

Now, there are some of us who can always see a silver lining in even the darkest of rainclouds. I could, perhaps, understand making an "individual rights"-type argument in favor of such a move to this privatization. But we need to be careful that we do not so latch onto a theory like individual rights, that we do not base our final conclusions on the ultimate *ends* or *goals* that the support of our theory is being used to accomplish.

And once we look at the goals of the Act, I can see no silver lining. The very silence over the impact on the Act troubles me. It's as if our industry—for the nonprofit sector is surely that, employing more people than the automobile industry—is, in the end, unimportant. Unworthy of direct consideration. Secondary. Superficial to public policy.

The silence is most damning. Most suggestive of how far privatization has already come.

We should also consider what the impact of tax reform is on volunteerism directly. As donating money depends most specifically on one's perception of discretionary income, donating efforts depends most specifically on one's perception of discretionary TIME. Here, as we have just experienced in considering the impact on financial contributions, the likely impact is contradictory.

My best guess is that these reforms taken as a group, will increase the discretionary time seen as available to the most wealthy of our citizens. While losing many so-called "loopholes," the major reduction in tax rates for the wealthy will likely result in their ability to maintain a lifestyle with a somewhat lessening time commitment. As we found above, it will likely have no significant impact on the time given by the poorer of our citizens. But also like before, it could have very serious implications for the middle-class, the upper-middle class, and the "yuppie" folks (notorious already for their lack of volunteering), all of whom confront new rates that tax them on the same level as the Kennedy's and the Rockefeller's. This may make them feel they must give even more time to increasing their earnings. The need to monitor the impact of tax changes on the corporation and its market(s)—let alone the likely negative effect

of these reforms on the profits and markets of many corporations—will no doubt increase the work load of most pesonnel, thereby decreasing their perception of discretionary time; I cannot imagine how this will have anything but negative effects on what has been, until now, a growth market for many recruiters of volunteers, and for which most all of us had great future hopes.

We should also consider "other costs and benefits" again. The loss of deductibility of interest rates and sales tax will affect the perception of time available for altruistic volunteering from many, but particularly from the newly married, from the newly "babied," and from older individuals. These, and others with significant histories of expenditures for items seen as necessities, will all feel more constrained in taking time away from income-earning activities as the marginal rate of expense for such items increases along with the new tax act's implementation.

All of this, however, again only suggests ways of identifying short-term advantages and disadvantages to these tax reforms. They should never allow us to see the almost wholly negative long-term implications of these reforms to our survival, and to the health of the nonprofit community.

FUNDING TRENDS AND IMPACT ON VOLUNTEERING

While this is not an essay on nonprofit fundraising, the impact of nonprofits' ability to attract sufficient income on its ability to attract volunteers can be appreciated by considering that people do not volunteer if they perceive that their time and efforts will be wasted. A sense of futility is among those most deadly to recruiting and managing volunteers.

Once we focus on the connection between volunteering and the perception that one can be effective, the implication of other funding trends is clear.

First, the massive retreat of the public sector from supporting nonprofit services (in 1984, governmental funding accounted for 27% of all monies to nonprofit organizations; upwards of 70% of that money now goes only to the close to 3% of all nonprofits which are hospitals and related health-care operations; most other funding is skewed towards those some 2% of nonprofits which are universities, and some of those additional 14% of nonprofits with income over $1. million)—let us admit it here—puts the basic effectiveness of most of our organizations in question. Outside of earned income and professional-level solicitation from a large base of individual contributors/members, public sector income was, for most of us, our most certain source of support. It covered many of our core operating expenses; those central obligations needed to "keep the doors" open.

Is it necessary to discuss the impact of volunteer recruitment and management when, more and more, we are in doubt that the doors can be kept open? Do we really think we can keep this doubt from our volunteers? Can we pretend, as a volunteer, that the short-term increase in our feeling of self-importance that might arise in such an environment is more powerful, over the long haul, than our increasing questioning of the effectiveness of our efforts?

The largest non-public source of support is, as you no doubt know, individual giving, accounting for some 80% of non-public support. Can we be secure in this for the future?

Raising this question shows why the impact of tax reform discussed above is so critical. But the tax act is not the sole force increasing the uncertainties in individual giving. Among other trends are:

- A significant shift in giving to single-issue causes, often of a political or "controversial" nature.
- A main donor base that is growing older and not being replaced; heavier debt obligations for all consumers, and especially for new families and households.
- Rapidly decreasing attendance at religious organizations or other civic associations which promulgate a need to support charitable activities.
- Increasing skepticism in any organization, institution, or sector of society (an assumption of selfish motives that might be thought to mirror

the increasing self-absorption of our citizenry).

— An increasingly consumption-driven citizenry, decreasing perceptions of discretionary income even before the loss of interest rate deductions, etc.

And things are no less troubling in the foundation world, which provided $4.3 billion of the $79.84 billion supporting philanthropic activities in 1985. In part perhaps because wealth derived from manufacturing was the historic source for the establishment of new foundations, there has been over the last years a major leveling off of the creation of new private foundations. For a while, there was a great increase in community foundations, but this, too, is now leveling off. Thus, we should anticipate that there will be no large increase in foundation sources in the years ahead. At the same time, foundations remain adamant at staying in the private sphere; that is, in not being a source of lost public sector support and in not providing funds sufficient for core operations.

Corporations matched the level of contributions given by foundations: $4.3 billion in 1985, for them a 13.1% increase. Like foundations, corporations are continuing to resist replacing public sector funds, particularly becoming directly involved in providing increased human services to the community. As the Conference Board put it in their report "Matching Human Needs and Corporate Programs and Partnerships": "maintenance of basic services for those in society who cannot become self-sufficient, or who will do so only over the long-term, is considered a public-sector responsibility"—regardless of what the public sector has begun to think!

Most corporations continue to see their civic obligation fulfilled by giving to the United Way. It appears that the most significant way by which corporations revised giving patterns to account for the major changes that have hit the nonprofit sector has been through their instituting formal assessments. Yet few do such work, and fewer are likely to do so in the future. In the short-term, personnel will likely be allocated to analyzing the impact of tax changes on their corporation and its markets; the consequences of this analysis make it doubtful that corporations, in the years ahead, will see that there is sufficient self-interest or "discretionary" personnel to motivate their allocating resources to such "tangential" work.

As with individuals, other trends impact the corporate sector's increasing uncertainty as to the amount of support that will be available to nonprofit services in the years ahead. Among these are an increasing global orientation; an increase in foreign ownership of U.S.-based companies; and a flattening of corporate hierarchies which will shift control to ever-fewer individuals.

All these trends seem to make our lives as recruiters of volunteers more difficult. Our agencies become weaker; the future, more uncertain. And our difficulties are not increased only because these changes make it harder to give volunteers the conviction that their efforts will be useful.

We also, by our own actions, make it hard on ourselves. As lost funding forces us to lose paid staff positions, as other agencies die and those they served now put more pressure on our service delivery resources; are these not the very times that we try to recruit more and more volunteers? We may be one of our own worst enemies, adopting volunteer goals at the worst possible time and refusing to develop effective techniques and good track records in better times.

Currently, as budgets become more restricted, whose budget gets cut the quickest? Surely support for volunteer programs are often high on any agency's hit list. This makes life all-the-harder for volunteer management. It makes long-range planning almost impossible to consider, dismissed as an exercise of futility.

It is almost a vicious circle. As our funding becomes more uncertain or decreases, the more we seek out volunteers; but as we lose funding we have less available for even the rudiments of adequate volunteer management, and as our future becomes more uncertain (and perhaps our survival, paradoxically, becomes dependent on effective volunteer recruitment), we have less and less to meet volunteers' needs to see their efforts as

useful—not to the agency, but to society.

One final fundraising trend bears mentioning. Since 1980, with all these problems, nonprofits as a group have not lost any money. In fact, they actually have managed to increase their total income, if only barely.

At last some good news? Well, not really...at least not for prospects for future volunteer recruitment. 70% of all these new funds found by nonprofits has come from but one source, and it is a source not inclined to increase our attractiveness to volunteers. What could it be? Earned income. And in earning income, don't we more and more look like a profit company? And in looking like one (even though we know we are very different), do we not diminish the likelihood that a prospective volunteer will look at us with interest?

RESPONSES TO FUNDING TRENDS

While they are reasonable responses to these trends, two of the major changes occurring within the management of nonprofit agencies complicate our lives as volunteer program leaders all the more.

The first is a growing move to professionalization of service, in order to accommodate the attitudes of many foundations and, especially, corporations. While volunteers need be no less credentialed than paid staff, in our economy the fact is that, as a group, those available for volunteer positions often have less credentials, even as their skills may be as good as, if not better than, others. This makes it increasingly difficult for us to increase volunteer recruitment while projecting an image that will assist our fundraising from these sources.

And, though I wish it were otherwise, within much of the donor world there is a stigma placed on volunteer efforts that almost translates into being seen as second-rate, credentialed or not. Undependable. Transitory. You know the prejudices as well as I, for we confront them daily, inside and outside our agencies. While lip service is given to support of volunteer efforts, the closer the volunteer sits to non-Board management of the agency, the more unwilling the donor community appears to have confidence in that organization.

The second change may be even more troubling to our long-term success. In the face of decreasing funds and donor desires, more and more agencies have found a new survival strategy: collaboration, joint ventures, merger. One way or the other, these strategies make for larger organizations. This goes diametrically against a social trend of growing distrust in institutions. While, to survive, we are discovering the advantages of economies of scale, many in our potential volunteer pool believe that only small is good, or even to be trusted. At the same time, the social group from which we must recruit our volunteers increasingly believes that power is gained only through independence from others, while we are increasingly projecting an image of interdependence.

There is one final aspect of this trend which affects volunteer involvement. Collaborations and mergers establish far more extensive projects than each agency, on its own, would undertake. And where, besides behind the eight ball, does this put us in relationship to showing volunteers a relatively small project that will, nevertheless, have a real use within society?

OTHER TRENDS

We could go on and on in finding additional trends which have fostered the growing acceptance of privatization to the detriment of the volunteer component of the nonprofit sector. But I think only so much can be taken in at one time. So let me simply sketch out several others that, for whatever reason, appear to be of primary importance to me, hoping that they have some relevance to you as well.

The social contract that induces volunteer efforts is best enforced by people with repeated contacts and familiarity. Now you could dismiss all my concerns about privatization's potential for destroying any social contract supportive of volunteerism and still stumble on this one. The most recent demographic data suggests that fewer and fewer people in the years ahead will seek residence in communities that foster such familial ties. At the same time, both a gowing self-referential concern and increased individualization of work (be it fostered by task di-

vision or technology making it unnecessary for frequent face-to-face encounters) make it less likely that people, even in smaller communities, will have the kinds of contact making social pressure an effective system of reward and sanction for volunteer efforts.

And finally there is the need for *trust* as the glue that holds all this together. And, time and again, all I see is growing distrust. Distrust in institutions. Distrust in other people. Distrust in another's honesty. Distrust in one's own abilities to do anything REAL in the world. While I am ever-more attracted to arguments that technology and nuclear arms contribute much to this, you need not accept my explanation of its cause to see this trend every day of your lives, as you watch others' behavior—and as you look honestly at yourself in the mirror of your own critical self-analysis.

And, in ending here, I ask us to ponder what effect there is on this need for trust as it relates specifically on our efforts at volunteer management—on our own desire to volunteer—when we have a public sector leadership that more and more tells us of the need for volunteerism, of its noble purpose, of its being in the best tradition of America . . . while all the time, if you really look at things, the very same people, by their actions, make it all the more problematic to obtain volunteers, and for us as volunteers to feel noble, to be effective?

And, perhaps even more difficult, what are *we* doing to prop up this trust from such a battering when we misadvertise volunteer opportunities? When we don't give, if only because of limited agency resources, what we promised? Or when we can't have the effectiveness we promised, if only for the same reason? And, worst of all, when we fail to let volunteers in on all this when we, and they, come to recognize it?

CAVEAT(S)

There are certain types of volunteer activities that may remain untouched by this root disease within our society. We might begin by noting what is likely not to be at risk if we do nothing. This will help us determine, in our individual situation and for the field as a whole, if the real costs of attacking the underlying disease are worth the price, given what is not at risk.

Some volunteer opportunities promise that participating volunteers will gain something from their donated energies. And not just a vague something in the way of self-satisfaction, for instance, but rather something that is tangible and clearly in the *self-interest* of the volunteer; something that helps volunteers in their own lives, or in the lives of their own families or neighborhoods.

Such volunteer programs don't only promise such tangible benefits. They *deliver*. From my work as a consultant in this field, an obvious example that comes to mind is parent involvement in school boards and P.T.A.-type organizations in small, often rural or Southern, school districts. As a manager of volunteers, I have seen such benefits delivered through the involvement of a parent with a developmentally-challenged child in an effective mental health/mental retardation advocacy organization. As a volunteer, I see this daily as I and many of my peers volunteer to work in organizations combating prejudices which prevent this society from providing the services needed to address the AIDS crisis.

In all these cases—and there are many more—the motivation for the volunteer is self-interest. There is a clear connection that the volunteers can see between their donated efforts and their own future well-being, or that of ones very close to them. Another way of putting this motivation is that volunteering translates into real *power* to obtain or affect something that positively impacts one's own interests.

Self-interest has always been the most effective motivator of volunteer efforts. The trends under review will affect this motivator less than any other. In fact, this essay means to suggest that if we fail to turn society around by significantly altering these trends, REAL self-interest—not just the false promise of same—may, in the years ahead, be the *only* means of volunteer recruitment.

Is that the type of volunteer world you and I want?

It *may* also be the case that the motivation for volunteer effort that truly emanates from disinterested humanitarian

concern will remain basically unaffected. My doubt here is not with what will be the impact of the trends we have reviewed on this motivation. Rather, I am very skeptical as to whether, in 1986, *selfless humanitarianism* is ever a real reason for volunteering. If it is an effective motivator in your situation it is likely that it will remain such. I simply continue to doubt whether this is ever true for more than the "exception to the rule."

I know from training session after public talk, that many volunteer managers—and as many, if not more, volunteers themselves—argue with me over this point. I continue to find, if one looks closely, more self-referential motivators under a claim of humanitarian concern. This does not make such concern false; it does indicate it is only a partial explanation. We all want to be seen as humanitarian; it is harder to express relatively more "selfish" interests. My fear is that if my skepticism is correct, these trends will expose the weakness of selfless humanitarianism as the motivational "glue" for our volunteer programs too late for us to stop them from falling apart, when the disease spread by these trends hits with full force.

While I have yet to be provided evidence that selfless humanitarianism exists to any significant degree as an effective motivator, I will defer to the possibility that some's experience may be wildly different from my own. Thus, I am willing to propose this conclusion. While it will remain, as it is today, the least powerful motivator for recruiting, motivating, managing, and maintaining volunteers, to the extent it is one it will likely remain one in the years ahead.

THE FUTURE

I realize there is a lot of negativity in all this. Primarily, there is this emphasis on the negative so that we might look at it directly. Like any normal person, I shield my eyes from what I do not want to see. Given the choice between viewing a tragedy and an opportunity, I will almost always take the second option. I do not doubt that there are qualifications and exceptions to what I have presented; I simply did not want a consideration of them to distract our attention from the main issues.

At the same time, I DO believe that there are things we can yet do that will be effective in responding to these challenges. Such hope will be necessary for those of us who will continue in this field during the coming years.

While I did not want to present some initial ideas on what can be done in a way that would distract us from seeing how immense the problem is, I believe it is crucial to close by giving us each something we can use to build hope for our own future within the volunteer community—and for our future constructive impact in the world. This is because I believe that these obstacles are so large that it will take all the best efforts and ideas of us all to overcome them.

In closing, I invite you to begin a dialogue with me—with each other—that could lead to pooling our experiences and expertise to develop such effective strategies. To stimulate discussion by preventing our dismissing highly political issues as irrelevant is the main purpose of this essay, not to point fingers of blame. Certainly not to simply bemoan our fate at others' hands, and give our task up for lost. But rather to make sure that we know the enemy for what it is as we work together to win the war.

To offer only a few possible ideas from my perspective, if only to get the POSITIVE dialogue going, I would suggest we consider:

1. Those motivations for volunteering that have been exempted in the preceeding section. More and more, we should find ways of establishing volunteer jobs and advertising and managing volunteer opportunities that act on those motivations that will continue to be effective even in the face of privatization's advance. We have the ability to do much better in developing volunteer opportunities which both promise and deliver real rewards in areas of volunteer self-interest.

2. In recognizing that most volunteering is "irrational" (in that the "costs" far outweigh the "benefits"), we can become much better at offering irrational rewards. For instance, it is not just our responsibility to help volunteers understand the effectiveness of their efforts and, within our power, to be much better at demonstrat-

ing to each volunteer in regular, systematic ways the direct connection between his/her efforts and constructive changes that he/she cares about that we have fostered in the world. It is also within our power to help all volunteers FEEL it.

3. Insist that our agencies, in their collaborative work especially but in general within all their planning, stress that their work is part of a larger partnership between the public and private/volunteer sectors. We not only must stress this; we must INSIST upon its perpetuation. Each time we, as volunteers, fail to do this, especially when we take on as ours and ours alone a responsibility that once was shared by the public sector, we destroy by that much the potential for our own long-term survival. What rewards in the short-term are so powerful as to justify such self-destructiveness?

4. It is our responsibility, as those most unselfishly committed to this partnership, to find ways by which it can be so easily expressed to the public at large that volunteerism and the public-private partnership become inextricably linked terms. In short, we must redefine the very terms of debate. We must find a way to show that it is not that volunteer efforts are the more needed the more the public sector is unable to meet certain needs. Rather, it is the case that volunteers can only help address such needs so long as the public sector remains a partner.

5. Develop methods of volunteer management that create the social bonds internal to our groups that provide the rewards, support, and incentives for continuing with altruistic volunteer efforts that are being eroded externally.

6. Begin overtly to link volunteer opportunities with individuals' growing sense of social dislocation; alienation; sense of powerlessness. This not only affects how we create and package opportunities. It also affects how we ensure our projects which utilize volunteers really are effective at correcting a social problem or meeting a human need . . . and in actively helping them see this positive impact of their work.

7. Actively empowering volunteers to political action. In providing funds for our survival. In helping secure funds from others. And, most urgently for our long-term health, in fighting against privatization.

8. Actively involving our Board, our constituents, and our staff, in these efforts, to the extent we can do this (and there is much we can do) without jeopardizing our 501(c)(3) status.

9. Refusing to further trust's deterioration by being honest with volunteers, and honestly communicating to them the reasons why you cannot do what you said you would or know you should, as such occasions arise.

Volunteers are at the center of a profound paradox. On the one hand, they personify what indeed is best about the privatization of our society's concern for human needs, culture, and community problems. Our volunteering speaks to the uncoerced action of individuals donating resources to address such issues without receiving monetary compensation. And, in a sense, receiving no public compensation at all, for the rewards of volunteering—social support and approval or individual satisfaction and growth—emanate just as surely from the private sector as does its motivation.

On the other hand, we have learned that such rewards will not long be available if we lose public support for our efforts. And that this is the likely result if we allow the public to abdicate its responsibility for the issues we address. Once we were to allow these concerns to become seen as irrelevant to the public, how much longer could we assume their support to continue?

Because we personify such a paradox, we are given the potential to be the best advocates for maintaining public-private cooperation—and the potential for being the most effective traitors to its perpetuation.

Our pride, our desire to feel important, our refusal to acknowledge our own self-interests and take steps to advance them; all these can lead us to betray our future. We can follow those who will tell us how important and how wonderful we are as they come to deny, themselves, any responsibility. But are these not, in the end, the very actions that will turn off the public—tomorrow's only source of new volunteers?

If we think clearly, and act carefully but

nonetheless effectively, we can expose the peril hidden within privatization. Is it not up to us to establish what will be the social contract of our society?

If not, let us not be surprised if the contract that is adopted has little in it helpful to our needs, and ultimately, the needs of those we volunteer to serve. If we hand over our future to others, the world portrayed for 1984 might simply have been a few years too early.