



Yellowfire
Press

BEYOND MANAGING VOLUNTEERS

by

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[Editor's Note: The following is excerpted from a talk Mrs. Naylor gave at the national conference of the Association for Voluntary Action Scholars in Autumn 1984 at Blacksburg, Virginia. Mrs. Naylor should not be held responsible for any dilution or distortion of meaning which may have occurred in this editorial condensation process.]

In a world torn by political, social, and economic evolution, the profession of Volunteer Administration is challenged as never before to identify its role in society, its values and perimeters in the wide amorphous field of practice. Volunteering is found in all recognized voluntary organizations and many governmental for-profit ones in our transitional society, from self-help groups to the most rigid and technical programs. Very understandably, such breadth creates uneasiness, and values and perimeters are hard to define. When experts are uneasy, they retreat into technology, where they are more comfortable. The universal search for certainty goes on, discovering more and more about less and less.

Most speakers on volunteerism deal with techniques of management. While it has been essential to have these mastered, we seldom attend to the implications beyond. We must remember, too, that people don't seek volunteering to be "managed". They do have a right to expect an orderly and appropriate placement, orientation and training, supervision in the sense of a knowledgeable person to turn to, and recognition for their uniqueness, abilities, accomplishments, growth, and changing objectives.

Growth and change have occurred in our profession and in many of its individual practices. As an honorary life member of the Association for Volunteer Administration, I am proud of the Journal of Volunteer Administration, an impressive body of knowledge, an ethics statement, and the calibre of emerging leadership—all developed during intensive and conscientious practice in a burgeoning constituency. Still, individual improvement has led many potential leaders out of our ranks into higher levels in their own or other organizations. We hope that there they are advocates for the volunteer potential, but we have lost them to organizational loyalties and higher salaries. Loss of their experience and wisdom is hardly balanced by the constant influx of new practitioners and new fields of practice, since newness means backtracking to build technical

competencies at the expense of attention to important political, social, and economic developments and values with implications for volunteering.

Another concern I have is the political pressures on volunteering. In this sense volunteering may be getting more attention than we'd like. We feel a danger that volunteering is being manipulated into partisan programs with partisan priorities, which may exploit public good will and honest concern about community needs temporarily, and lose rather than gain momentum for other volunteering. Working Partners,* for example, regards cooperation among government, the for-profit private sector, and voluntary groups on local projects as a partisan political achievement.

Another broad concern is the relationship between volunteers and government, especially at federal and state levels. We still believe that volunteers are needed to humanize governmental human services. Yet, beginning in 1976, citizens were discouraged from participation in development of public policy, and advisory committees have been severely reduced at the federal level. Nor is there visible impetus to eliminate the old law against voluntary service to federal agencies (U.S. Code 31, Sec. 665b), although many exceptions have been approved by Congress.

On the other hand, we have had some advocacy success. For example, the Volunteer Mileage Equity Campaign was an effort to equalize the income tax allowances for volunteer travel with those for business. At least, we achieved a raise from 9¢ per mile to 12¢, though this is little more than half the standard 21¢ for business.

I do believe we have much more important issues than volunteer mileage, but the success of that advocacy campaign may have taught us how to become effective advocates on other fronts.

Economic conditions have decimated support for human services on every front. As the gap widens between haves and have-nots, we still have to worry about social Darwinism. And the learning about doing with instead of doing for persons in need of human services, which we gained from the War on Poverty, seems to be needed now more than ever. Experiential learning and re-learning of this lesson, via volunteering, is not only for the very young, but essential for everyone in our segmented society. Only the knowing of victims as persons can break down the mythology rampant in a materialistic society—that if a person is really good he will not be poor or afflicted but will prosper, if he really wants to work.

*WORKING PARTNERS: THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME, Republican National Committee, 310 First Street S.E., Washington, D.C.

Some of the people we used to do to and not with now present themselves to do for—themselves and others. Newcomers to volunteering include consumers of human services, court-referred miscreants as an alternative to jail, and sophisticated condominium owners who are concerned with their environment too. In volunteerism, the shift from WASP domination to rainbows calls for skilled leadership. I believe that democracy can survive if volunteering does!

And, finally, work in America is evolving faster than we realize. Studs Terkel* has demonstrated that this could be a good thing, since so few people are fortunate enough to have work they can enjoy. One dramatic change is from the turn of the century when 90% of our economy was product-related and only 10% services, whereas today when 35% of production is in factories or on farms, and 65% services. By 2000 AD, the proportion of work opportunities will have reversed to 90% services and only 10% products.** According to Dr. Edward Kafrissen, Director of the Robotics Institute at the New York Institute of Technology, robots will take care of the dirty, dangerous, and dull jobs.***

What we expect of volunteers could seldom be done by robots; volunteer work is about as far away from robots as anyone could imagine. And we who work with volunteers have insight and skill in making work better. Many services are offered by unhappy people in our present economy—sales people, auto bureaus, self-service gasoline, (especially where you have to walk to the cash register and pay before you draw your own gas!). You can think of as many for—instances as I can. My point is that we do not prepare people adequately for service roles, nor do we seem to know how to make service work enjoyable in the marketplace. Yet in a volunteer setting, people perform similar services prodigiously and with enthusiasm. Perhaps volunteer administrators have something to teach government and business. I think we have learned that appreciation of individual uniqueness—and skill in accurate placement—characterizes the difference. We respect the right of choice. We appreciate effort, reliability, and commitment. Job satisfaction is "pay" for volunteers. Instead of relying only on salary, we must touch the interests and objectives of each worker, each in appropriate ways. Thus, volunteer administrators do everything personnel administrators do with a much more complex reward and recognition responsibility.

In all these ways, I believe we need imaginative inspiration, to dream of what could be and all the implications of what is that we haven't yet noted.

*Studs Terkel, Work in America, Pantheon 1983.

**From my notes taken at the annual meeting of the American Public Welfare Association, Washington, D.C., 179.

***"Robots will do dirty, dangerous, and dull jobs." This Week, August 8, 1984, by Bernadette Barone, NYIT News Service.