

Some Reflections On: Who Are We?

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I have had the pleasure of hearing many speakers talk about what volunteer program administrators do. Most say it is hard to describe, and I agree, but that is mostly when you are talking to people outside the field of volunteerism. Insiders seem to talk the same language, or at least they are more polite, and smile knowingly and grunt in understanding occasionally. At least, their eyes do not glaze over when we tell them what we do.

So, let me tell you what I do. I *administer* several grant *programs*, or *supervise personnel* who do. I *hire* some *staff* and *establish performance plans*, and *evaluate* their performance. I *prepare* organizational *goals and budgets*. I *chair* working groups and *task forces*. I *conduct workshops*, *network* with folks like you, *refer* folks like you to other folks like you, *give technical assistance*. . . .

A simple example of technical assistance: I was talking on the phone to a volunteer administrator friend of mine who said she was having some problems with a mailing. She was having trouble getting her envelope stuffers motivated and they were just about on strike. It seems she had neglected to bake anything the night before, and they were used to having something to munch on as they did their volunteer work.

In a moment of blinding insightfulness I understood not only the crumbs in the envelopes I had been getting from her agency, but also the volunteers' grievance: that she had deprived them of a basic benefit . . . her prize coffeecake! I made a recommendation: "If you've got to get the mailing out today and don't have cake, give them I.O.U.'s, to be redeemed at some near future date. That way they'll work in anticipation of that

reward, which is almost as good as having it now, and certainly makes for a less crumby job."

The volunteers loved their I.O.U.'s, which is why I can claim some of Solomon's wisdom for that day's advice and another satisfied customer . . . and yes, I have stuffed envelopes too, so I understand the need for appreciation for doing that task.

At the 1985 AVA National Conference on Volunteerism in Seattle I heard Steve McCurley talk about the many jobs that volunteer administrators do. We are *planners*, *budgeters*, *personnel directors*, *supervisors*, *facilitators*, *conveners* . . . we are everything to everybody . . . and as he spoke about all we do I began to identify a feeling, that I had felt before, at the VOLUNTEER conference in Los Angeles in June, and again since I had arrived in Seattle. Going to the registration area, seeing all those people, hundreds of them, I was overcome with a feeling that I was among very special people, who have a lot of knowledge about a lot of things. I was reminded of those wonderfully creative people of the Renaissance, who were skilled in all the arts and sciences. We are skilled in all the arts and sciences also, the arts and sciences of volunteer administration, and WE ARE RENAISSANCE PEOPLE.

On that first day of the Seattle conference, I had just left a training session with Tom Peters, the author of *In Search of Excellence* and *A Passion for Excellence*. The former has sold 5 million copies, in its 15 translations, to become the second fastest-selling non-fiction title in history. In it he lists phenomena observed in successful U.S. corporations, which he calls the four key sources of "sustainable strategic ad-

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vantage" for organizations. They are: 1)superior customer or client service; 2)constant innovation; 3)reliance on the ability and creative potential of all the members of the organization; and, 4)exceptional, in-touch leadership.

In Seattle, I realized that the characteristics Peters had described are possessed by volunteer program administrators. Our success depends on each of his four key sources, applied every day in our volunteer programs. We believe in superior service to our clients, and we give it through recruiting, training and placing the right volunteers in the right jobs. We must be constantly innovative in order to survive, and we adapt our programs and our marketing strategies in order to be competitive with other organizations. We rely heavily on the abilities and creative potential of our staffs and our volunteers, because we know the value of what we can do together. And we stay in touch with the latest techniques for management and marketing that workshops, self-study and networking can bring us. We stay in touch with what is happening in our field and we strive to give good leadership. WE ARE RENAISSANCE PEOPLE, IN SEARCH OF EXCELLENCE.

My research for the workshop I did on the future, "Trends in Volunteerism," led me to a book by Arnold Mitchell called *The Nine American Lifestyles*. In his book Mitchell describes who Americans are and where we are going. He categorizes each of us into four basic groups: a)need-driven; b)outer-directed; c)inner-directed; and, d)combined outer/inner-directed. The nine lifestyles are subsets of these groups, as follows:

A. Need-driven

1. Survivors: Old, intensely poor, far removed from the cultural mainstream, 4% of the U.S. adult population.

2. Sustainers: Angry, resentful, street-wise, living on the edge of poverty, involved in the underground economy, 7% of the U.S. adult population.

B. Outer-directed

3. Belongers: Aging, conventional, content, intensely patriotic, traditional Middle Americans, 35% of the

U.S. adult population.

4. Emulators: Young, ambitious, flashy, trying to break into the system, 9% of the U.S. adult population.

5. Achievers: Middle-aged, prosperous, self-assured, the leaders and builders of the American Dream, 22% of the U.S. adult population.

C. Inner-directed

6. I-am-me: Very young, narcissistic, impulsive, exhibitionist, a transitional state to inner-direction, 5% of the U.S. adult population.

7. Experiential: Youthful, seeking direct experience, artistic, intensely oriented toward inner growth, 7% of the U.S. adult population.

8. Socially conscious: Mission-oriented, mature, successful, out to change the world, 8% of the U.S. adult population.

D. Combined outer/inner-directed

9. Integrated: Psychologically mature, tolerant, understanding, flexible, able to see "the big picture," 2% of the U.S. adult population.

The need-driven groups in my opinion do not represent who we, as volunteer administrators, are, but they are our clients. They may also represent to us who we, or our ancestors, once were, but most of us are beyond their state of deprivation and need. I believe that we are various combinations of outer and inner-directed, and many of us live integrated lifestyles.

Who are we? WE ARE RENAISSANCE PEOPLE, IN SEARCH OF EXCELLENCE, LIVING A COMBINATION OF OUTER/INNER-DIRECTED LIFESTYLES.

My research on the future also led me to books by Kenneth Naisbitt, *Megatrends*; Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock*, *The Third Wave*; and Edward Cornish, founder of the World Future Society, *The Study of the Future*. Interestingly, each of them says independently, each in his own way, that there is hope for the future because there are quiet revolutionaries at work in this country and in the world. They say that these revolutionaries will profoundly affect our future in positive ways.

Marilyn Ferguson, in *The Aquarian Conspi-*

racy, brings us further into the age of Aquarius, writing about a network powerful enough to bring about radical change in our culture. The network, she says, contains those who are experiencing a growing capacity for change in themselves and know that it is possible for others. The network is working to create a society based on a vastly enlarged concept of the human potential.

I believe we, who see every day the human potential through our volunteers, and their (and therefore our) capacity to change conditions, are part of that network. We are those revolutionaries.

Who are we? WE ARE RENAISSANCE PEOPLE, IN SEARCH OF EXCELLENCE, A COMBINATION OF OUTER/INNER-DIRECTED, REVOLUTIONARIES, and we are . . .

FRIENDS.

Several years ago, I was extremely fortunate to be working with several people who were dreamers, poets, musicians, entrepreneurs, and we were friends. We used to get together, about once a week, usually on Thursday, to talk and to share, and we did it with a spirit of playfulness and good fun. We had some good experiences together and we grew, and although we are walking different paths now, we are still friends . . . friends for life.

My friends gave so much to me, meant so much to me, that I put my thoughts and feelings in a song, which I will present to you now as a poem.

*Friends
Thursday afternoon
Helping me get by
Teaching me to fly
Higher than I've ever been
Before.*

*Friends
They know how to set me free
Wanting me to be
All that I can be
Things that I can't see
In me.*

*I'm bound in chains
Of my own making
And friends can help me break those chains.
Their love can take me to the mountain*

*And bring me sunshine
When it rains.*

*It's
So easy when you realize
Any day is Thursday
Any place, a mountain
When you're with the ones you call
Your
Friends.*

It seems to me that this group of special people to which we belong does help and support its members, in the loving way that friends do. Of course, we can come together and meet, but we can also connect with one another between our convenings. When we are overcome by a world with too many problems, and by too little money and time to solve them we have only to "reach out and touch someone," another special person, to see the mountains and the sunshine. We can help each other fly because of WHO WE ARE.

It will be easy when we realize we are OUTER/INNER-DIRECTED RENAISSANCE REVOLUTIONARIES IN SEARCH OF EXCELLENCE, and FRIENDS.