

## Values in a Changing World: Challenges and Choices

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In our increasingly complex society old ways are no longer guaranteed to work. Values and ethics are changing dramatically. So, there is the dilemma to be or not to be ethical. Indeed, what is ethical has become an important consideration in our personal, professional, and organizational lives.

Values and ethics are contemplated, discussed, debated, and analyzed in many circles, i.e., medical, religious, social work, psychological, psychiatric, educational, and many more. Ethical codes are being challenged, modified, and reaffirmed.

In this fast changing world these challenges and choices surround us, and our values are being questioned constantly. On the one hand challenges and choices provide adventure, excitement, and puzzlement, and on the other, feelings of instability, anxiety, and fear. We can experience complex changes either as opportunities or as problems. The focus here is on the opportunities before us. According to John Gardner, change is a constant with which we must learn to live. Therefore, our effectiveness will be measured by our abilities to be creative, communicative, collaborative, caring, flexible, open, competent, and successful.

What fun to awaken every day with a feeling and anticipation of "I wonder what will happen today," a feeling of wonderment and puzzlement. Changes

are everywhere. They are local, national, global; they are large and small; they affect our lives, our values, our agencies, our communities, and our relationships.

Some key themes emerge, presenting both challenges and choices for the Volunteer Community:

*Transitioning:* sometimes defined as moving from the no longer to the not yet.

*Realignment:* the rearrangement of loyalties and commitments, affecting our values and ethics.

*Restructuring:* of systems and of our organizations. It is variously called downsizing, "right sizing," and reorganizing. The fact is that a large number of systems are changing the ways in which they produce and deliver programs and services.

*Holding on and letting go:* the conflict is what to hold on to and what to let go. This includes our values and beliefs, and even perhaps changing them.

*Walking our talk:* means inserting our efforts and actions where our stated beliefs are. Commitment and dependability will continue to be values that need to be translated into actions.

*Being open:* according to an anonymous quote: "The mind is like a parachute, it only works when it is open."

*Becoming unstuck:* Robert Pirsig in his book *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* talked about people getting stuck and noncreative. We get mired in our

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ways of work, our ways of life, our ways of thinking, our relationships, and our ideas. We must consciously work on becoming "unstuck."

*Increasing communication sensitiveness:* imperative so that we can communicate, interact, and practice what we say we believe with people who are different from us anywhere in the world. We need to continually seek what kind of verbal and nonverbal communications are necessary in order to make meaningful connections with others.

"Old ways are no longer guaranteed to work," says James Michener in a recent article in *TIME* magazine. With this in mind, Independent Sector established a committee to study "Values and Ethics." Their report is entitled "Obedience to the Unenforceable." In 1925, John Fletcher Moulton, England's Lord Justice of Appeals, wrote that "Obedience to the Unenforceable is the extent to which the individuals composing the nation can be trusted to obey self-imposed law." What kind of values will this require?

How do we define values? Michener defined values as the emotional rules by which a nation governs itself; that values are accumulated folk wisdom, by which persons, organizations, societies, and individuals organize and discipline themselves. "Without values they can pitch straight to hell," Michener said. Values are self-developed as a result of our parenting, education, influence of role models, successes, failures, achievement, and recognition.

What are ethics? According to the Independent Sector report, ethics is the science of dealing with the moral duty of human beings; moral value principles in practice, individually, and organizationally. The report identified three levels of ethical behaviors:

1. The basic level involves issues that are in the law. We don't have much choice here. We pay income taxes or get penalized; we stop at a red light and go when it is green. We follow the instructions and procedures of the Post Office, or our mail is not accepted.
2. The next level includes issues that are clearly ethical in nature, where

one knows what the right action is, but where the costs of taking such action tempt us to reach another conclusion. We know what is right, but we do something else. An example is that of a Board President who said recently: "You know we have a wonderful person who wants to be on our Board. His conditions are that if we do any fund raising, we utilize his firm, and we really want him." The conflict of interests was clear and led to ambivalence about the appointment.

3. The next level is ethical dilemma. Here we are in genuine conflict as to the right course of action, because there are multiple alternatives. For example, the excellent staff is the right size, but budget considerations makes it look imperative to cut the staff. There must be criteria and ways to do this as humanely as possible. Under these conditions perhaps more appropriate opportunities for volunteers could be explored. This is an important ethical dilemma in many systems today.

Some global dynamics have forced us to focus on our current values and ethics.

*Loss of security*, or what can we really depend on in our daily lives? Vast social, political and economic changes transform the world. We see nations crumbling, instability of financial systems, religious uprisings, depression, loss of jobs, mergers and take overs, and more people with unscheduled time on their hands. Teaching values, ethics, and educating and preparing young people for life is an intriguing challenge for parents and teachers around the world. Life is becoming less predictable in an increasingly unstable world, nation, and community.

*Never-ending pressures* are evident globally. Competition for education, for jobs, for goods and services; urban sprawl and gridlock; noise, pollution; substance abuse; hostility and aggression put ongoing pressures on people. Changing demographics in our country and our immediate communities bring challenges, and a need to review and renew our basic beliefs and values about how we live in a democratic system.

*Increased violence* is a menacing dynamic. Safe environments are hard to find here and abroad.

*Trust levels are unstable.* "Whom can I trust?" is a daily question for many people. Confrontation and hostility are becoming usual behaviors. Many people are so angry, that old values around appropriate behaviors are called into question constantly.

Here is a look at some *Volunteer Community issues*. There are many developments with ethical and value-laden overtones, including rightsizing the organization. Making decisions about mission, structure, the number of paid persons and the appropriate roles, jobs, and opportunities for volunteers seems overwhelming. Jobs of staff and volunteers change as fewer staff take a strong guiding role. It is important that volunteers not replace paid persons, but rather extend services, help in new spaces and places, and are trained to do so. New volunteer education opportunities must be developed. Also staff development must be redesigned, both pre-service and in-service. Staff-volunteer teams have been successfully put into place in many systems.

There is the increased concern by stakeholders of the ethical conduct of not-for-profit institutions. Constituents are worried about how and where money gets raised, allocated, invested, and used, and as always they want to know the amount of overhead costs for fund development. There is also the issue of appropriateness of themes and approaches used by fund raisers (e.g., luxurious dinners raising money for the homeless). There is a very real concern about unmet needs and what and who should address them.

Integrated into any agency must be a plan for equipping staff and volunteers to work in a demographically changing community with new publics. These include our own citizens moving from one part of the country to another, and people from other countries immigrating here. They may be young or older, poor or financially stable. They may or may not be well educated. They may or may not be English speaking. They all bring different cultural norms, beliefs, values, and practices. How do we learn to utilize the

beauty of difference, and enrich their lives with exposure to our beliefs and values, and give them opportunities for enriching our lives?

Also, there are the people who had jobs and a comfortable life style, who are now unemployed, out of money, and in great need of support services. There are additional people who need assistance with food, clothing, and shelter. And there are an increasing number ready to help provide services as volunteers.

As stated above, we must redefine roles of volunteers and staff in an effort to develop human service teams to do an even better job. Increasingly available are time-limited volunteers who can serve on a temporary, short term, or intermittent basis. A creative plan must be developed for utilizing their resources and integrating and activating these volunteers.

Our challenges and choices make new and creative approaches imperative. We must redefine the definition of who is a volunteer. Do enabling funds make a person less of a volunteer? If the employer continues payment for an employee while she/he volunteers, is that person a volunteer? What about court-referred volunteers, and volunteers who contribute not only time but expenses which are tax deductible?

In times of shrinking budgets decisions must be made as to what staffing is needed, as well as how many volunteer opportunities will be available. Child care for volunteers and staff is also a challenge and requires sensitivity and wisdom, for it sometimes presents a difficult choice.

Traditional western recruitment policies and practices need to be challenged and modified for communicating with people from different cultures and countries. Also, volunteerism is not known in every country in the world, at least not as we understand it. The matter of integrating America's newcomers into the volunteer world is a complex one, which needs study and thought.

Many systems must evaluate and redefine their goals and mission statements. We need to ask: "Do we do what we say we do? Do we communicate clearly for everyone? Are our values and our commitments explicit and understandable?"

Do we offer opportunities to all those who want to participate?"

Volunteer Administrators must demonstrate some essential values and behaviors, organizationally, professionally, and personally. The Independent Sector report includes these:

- Commitment to the agency mission
- Commitment beyond the self
- Commitment to and obedience of the law
- Commitment to the public good
- Respect for the value and dignity of the individual
- Championing diversity and social justice
- Accountability to the public
- Prudent application of our resources

Here are some of the challenges and choices for all professionals and leaders:

- Movers and shakers or creators of turbulence?
- Risk takers or passive onlookers?
- Negotiators or dictators?
- Collaborators or isolationists?
- Motivators or idea killers?
- Action takers or inactive bystanders?
- Advocates or traditionalists?
- Crusaders or passive participants?
- Effective leaders or content followers?

It is imperative to move forward with open minds and renewed spirits. Margaret Mead said: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

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