

VOLUNTARY ACTION FOR THE 1970'S*

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In talking about the potential for voluntary action in the 1970's, we first should heed the warning of Abraham Lincoln: "If we could first know where we are and whither we are attending, we could better judge what to do and how to do it."

Where are we today? Most of us, I think, are so close to the field of voluntary action that it is difficult to see it from the perspective of somebody who is fresh on the scene. So let's review the volunteer scene briefly with the aid of a survey conducted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in 1965 and entitled, "Why Americans Volunteer."

In that year, 1965, the survey tells us that 22 million Americans volunteered, a little over 10 percent of the population; 60 percent were women, 40 percent men. Ninety-four percent were white, 6 percent non-white.

The rate of voluntarism among college graduates was four times as high as among those with less than four years' college. Persons with a family income over \$10,000 were three times more likely to volunteer than those with a family income below \$5,000.

The highest incidence of voluntarism for both men and women was to be found between the ages of 35 and 44. The lowest incidence of voluntarism in the '65 survey was found among persons over 65, and I think surprisingly between the ages of 18 and 24; a young person, younger than that, between the ages of 14 and 17 was 50 percent more likely to volunteer than one between 18 and 24.

Next, how much volunteer work was done? According to the survey 46 percent served for less than 25 hours, and 79 percent for less than 100 hours. The shocking fact is that these are not hours per week, nor even hours per month; they are hours per year.

Only 4.4 percent served for more than 300 hours in the year ending November, 1965. In other words, if it takes you half an hour to get to work in the morning, you spend more time commuting each year than 19 out of 20 volunteers spend in service and compared to the population as a whole, volunteers or/and non-volunteers, you spend more time commuting than 99 out of 100 persons spend in voluntary work.

Just one final statistic. A generous weighting to the time spent in volunteer service yields a total of some 1,790,000,000 volunteer hours

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in the year ending November, 1965. Assuming a 40-hour week, that is the equivalent of some 930,000 full-time volunteers.

If our armed forces performed at this rate, the 3½ million soldiers, sailors, and marines would be the equivalent of about 150,000 men. That is enough numbers for a while.

What emerges is a picture of the typical volunteer as a white woman, middle aged, well educated, who does volunteer work a few times a year. That is where we are numerically.

The figures look impressive until we compare them with the need. I think we are all familiar with the report showing a need for four or five million additional full-time persons to be engaged in the fields of education, health, conservation, and community services; and these estimates are limited only to domestic needs.

Even in this relatively narrow framework our one million full-time equivalent volunteers then are at best answering only 20 percent of the total need. That is where we are today.

Now, whither are we tending? We have offices of voluntary action in such strategic places as the White House, the Department of Labor, Health, Education and Welfare, Housing and Urban Development, and that is fine; but their message is shattering. We want more volunteers, they say, but we don't want to spend any money on them.

We have heard this rhetoric before and it hasn't worked. We heard it in the 1950's, about the people-to-people program. I spent most of the 50's overseas and didn't see a single person, nor discern the slightest impact of the people-to-people program.

Not so in the 60's. I was overseas then for only three years, but saw hundreds of Peace Corps volunteers working in several different countries. On our present course and with a few future educators, we do have, I would predict, a 1980 survey of volunteers which will reveal about a million full-time equivalent volunteers, about the same as we have today; but our needs will have increased to the point where volunteers would be meeting only about 10 percent of the total need.

Now, for the second half of Lincoln's agenda, what to do and how to do it. First, let me say emphatically that I have nothing but admiration for the volunteer who serves whether from a sense of duty, a desire to help people, or simply because he enjoys doing volunteer work.

I'm sure all of us will recall the thrill of a meaningful volunteer experience and surely our heart warms when we learn of individual instances where lives have been enriched through volunteer service on both sides of the volunteer equation. The attitude for which I have no admiration at all is that which expresses satisfaction, whether overtly or subtly in volunteer service as it is today.

Typically this satisfaction is expressed in a way that suggests that

volunteer service is like a virgin; it is pure and should not be tainted with any of the evils of the world.

The first evil as we are told by people who are satisfied with today's volunteer service is money. Money corrupts. And to pay a volunteer anything for his services will destroy the volunteer ethic.

The second evil they tell us is a poorly qualified person. We want experienced people with a real rounded educational background, not someone from the inner city ghetto who hasn't completed high school.

The third evil they tell us is large scale programs. Recently I read a report saying that a big city's teenage volunteer program involving 4,000 young people was too big and should be cut back. The participants received little personal attention. Their suggestions were not followed up.

The real problem, although not recognized as such by the writer, appeared later on in the report. It was disclosed there was only one full-time staff person for the 4,000 volunteers.

The fourth evil, they say, is academic recognition; learning by doing has achieved the status of a cliché. Everybody knows about Don Dewey, yet to grant formal academic recognition to the learning one acquires in serving his fellow man is said to demean the service. Like money, academic credit is a pollutant.

The fifth evil is the draft. The morning after John F. Kennedy's first major speech proposing the Peace Corps as an alternative to military service, looking at the date, it seems to be just exactly nine years ago today or yesterday; his opponent retorted that it would become a haven for draft dodgers. When Peace Corps director at that time, Jack Bond, said in a speech three years ago that Peace Corps volunteers are "second to no other Americans, including troops in Viet Nam in performing service for this nation," the White House told him to shut up.

These supposed evils of volunteer service have gone unchallenged for too long. It is a serious matter, because to allow these assertions to go unchallenged means the potential of volunteer service and voluntary action will not be realized. Instead of shying away from money and poorly qualified persons and large scale programs and academic recognition and the draft, let us embrace each of these concerns and utilize them in such a way that volunteer service assumes a role in society that to date it has had only in rhetoric.

This should be our goal for the 70's. Let's recall the lessons of the 60's. Consider money. We learned in the 60's in the Peace Corps and from Vista and the Teachers Corps and other HEW programs that money and even government money does not necessarily degrade the nature of the service performed, nor distort the volunteer ethic.

Let us not use money to seduce nor to coerce people to do volunteer work; rather, let us use it to facilitate volunteer service. With

only five million dollars to provide food, clothing, and shelter, we could double the number of equivalent full-time volunteers from one million to two million per year.

Consider the level of qualifications. We learned in the 60's that persons don't need Masters' Degrees to be effective tutors. In fact, high school dropouts, members of the neighborhood Youth Corps, have done well in this capacity, in necessary training and the proper attitude and placement, and these are as important to the M. A. as they are to the dropout.

Persons with very low paper qualifications can do an effective job of volunteer service. More recognition of their capabilities would open the volunteer door to millions more.

Considering large scale programs, we thought in 1964 we would be seeing some examples of large scale programs when the war on Poverty was declared, but an undeclared war took precedence. So, we have to look further back to the 30's when 2½ million men served with the civilian conservation corps, or we can look in the decade of the 60's overseas to Iran and visit the literacy corps where tens of thousands of young men volunteered within the framework of a national service obligation to go to the villages where there are no schools and there to start teaching.

The typical Iranian volunteer arrives in his military uniform, but sheds it for mufti in a few weeks as he wins respect of his own. Even more to the point, when his service obligation is completed, the typical volunteer chooses to remain in the community, as he wins the kind of personal fulfillment that comes through service.

Consider academic credit. Here we have the lesson of decades staring us in the face, but we don't recognize it. Physicians are not turned loose on society immediately following three years of medical school. First they must serve a year of supervised internship. A prospective teacher does not get a baccalaureate degree until he has done practice teaching under supervision. Similarly for social workers, public administrators, engineers, and scientists, about the only category we have overlooked is that of the citizen; and it is evident from the strains in society today that it is exactly this category, citizenship, that is most in need of improvement.

If we want our young men to become good citizens, as we want them to become good doctors or teachers, we must permit them to become responsibly involved in the real problems of the citizenship and society, and we must do so in a manner that integrates their involvement with study and discussion reflected against the principles of the social sciences, the Constitution and Bill of Rights, and one's own code of morals and ethics.

Consider the draft. In the early 50's I tested whether I could better serve my country in the Armed Forces or in voluntary service,

and I learned I contributed more to my country and my fellow man in just one month of volunteer service than in two years in the military. Similarly from the 1960's I think most Americans feel they have learned that the millions of men who have served in Viet Nam would have served their fellow man and their country more effectively in the nation's ghettos and schools and hospitals and libraries and forests.

I believe most of them would have volunteered to do so. As Robert Kennedy wrote a few days before his assassination, "The service America needs from its youth goes far beyond their military obligations." There is, of course, a degree of interdependence among these concerns in order to broaden the base of recruitment to thus less qualified persons. Money is needed.

I used to walk to work in Washington down Massachusetts Avenue and would see the buses full of black women going to take care of white kids in the suburbs, and the limousines with white women from the suburbs going to volunteer in the ghetto schools. Something of a mismatch.

Large scale programs are dependent on money and the draft, academic recognition, and broadening qualifications. Should we find agreement on this 5-point program, and that it answers the question, what should be done? We are left with Lincoln's final query, how to do it?

The best idea can falter for lack of technique. Obviously we don't have time right now, although the agenda will take us into many of the concerns in the next two days; we don't have time now to fill this in completely, and even if we did, we couldn't finish the job, because some answers won't be found except through the empirical approach; but let us deal briefly with one issue that is central to each of our five points; that is, training and supervision.

Recall the large scale summer teenage program whose real fault was not size but lack of supervision, and no matter how well intentioned they are, volunteers cannot man a helicopter rescue service, nor survey the needs of a neighborhood, nor tutor a child without training. A major breakthrough can be made in the areas of training and supervision if we ask public employees to spend 10 percent of their regular work time training or supervising volunteers.

I am not worried about after hours. Once they become engaged in a volunteer effort, the chances are they will participate during their leisure time as well. We have got to make a quantum jump to get in there.

I suggest we be serious about this. In addition to memos from the White House encouraging voluntary action, I should like to see one telling federal employees that they should expect to be called upon to work with volunteers and similar memos should issue from state houses and city halls.

In order to get these people out we have to be strong in our conviction that volunteers do perform useful service and in the long run the public interest will be repaid many times over as a result of the 10 percent supervision and training policy.

Once it is clear from a cost of benefit analysis that such a policy is favorable to the accomplishment of needed public service, a big hunk of the problem of training and supervision shall have been solved. If we respond fully to the suggested agenda for the 70's, if we appropriate five million dollars a year to underwrite volunteer service, if we broaden the base of recruitment to all who want to serve, if we embark on truly large scale programs, if we think of volunteer service with a learning that accompanies it and give academic recognition to the process, and if we give national recognition to the fact that many young people can serve their country better in non-military service than in the Armed Forces; then we can return in ten years and find that we have met 90 percent, not 10 percent of the need for volunteer service.

If we fail in this effort and have the temerity to get together in 1979, the agenda will be the same and we shall have wasted a decade.