

VOLUNTEER WORK AND ITS REWARDS

By Dr. Benjamin Gidron

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing trend to involve volunteer workers on a sustained basis in welfare and social service agencies. These volunteers are generally assigned to assist paid professionals in providing direct care to patients or clients of the agency. Thus, volunteers are teachers' aides in schools and day-care centers, assistant group leaders in youth clubs, nurses' aides in hospitals, and are helping in various ways within agencies that serve the aged, the handicapped, etc. This involvement of volunteer workers is seen as a factor in the improvement of the quality of social services. Volunteer bureaus and volunteer units within agencies have been formed to recruit volunteers and to assign them to jobs within the social service system.¹

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From experience gained so far, it becomes clear that one of the central problems hindering the effective involvement of volunteers in social services is the problem of lack of retention, which results in a high turnover rate among volunteers.² In addition to the organizational difficulties caused by this problem, substantive difficulties are also caused since, within the social service framework, continuity is an important element in the relationship between providers and recipients of service. Volunteer work which is not regular and sustained may cause more harm than good to the service recipient. If there is an intention to involve volunteers in a meaningful and effective way within organizations based on paid work, it becomes important to develop knowledge about the motivations of volunteers to work on a sustained basis.

Past research on this subject has been mostly descriptive and has not been anchored within a theoretical framework. The most important work on the subject is Sills' classical study on volunteers.³ In his study, Sills shows that, contrary to common beliefs which relate volunteer work solely to altruistic motives, people

have both other and self-oriented motives for volunteering. Other researchers following Sills⁴ also found that volunteers have personal motives other than altruism, but none of these researchers tried to develop this concept or to use it in a systematic way in the analysis of sustained volunteer work.

In this research, an attempt is made to develop Sills' concept of self-oriented motives for volunteer work through the use of theoretical knowledge from occupational psychology and the sociology of work. Specifically, knowledge developed on the phenomena of turnover and absenteeism among paid workers is applied to the area of volunteer work.

Using Blau's "exchange theory"⁵ as a conceptual framework, some researchers have developed the "expectancy model" or "expectancy theory"⁶ to explain turnover and absenteeism among paid workers. According to this model, in its simplest form, the explanation of why a paid worker leaves his job or is absent from it can be found in the discrepancy between expectations for rewards and between the actual rewards that the worker receives in light of other possible alternatives. Thus, in order to keep workers, it is necessary to make the level and nature of rewards fit their expectations (or vice-versa).

These researchers describe, in a general way, three additional factors in the relationship between expectations, rewards and work.

1. *For paid workers, expectations of rewards from work are not restricted to economic rewards. Workers also expect to receive from their work such rewards as: interest, social relationships, challenge, opportunity for advancement, variety, etc.*
2. *There are similarities in expectations among workers of the same age,⁷ with the same educational background,⁸ or from the same ethnic group.⁹*

3. *Expectations for rewards from work are not static. They change with time and in the light of the individual's ongoing evaluation of the situation. Among workers who remain on the job, there is a process of fitting their expectations to the rewards that are found within the organization.¹⁰*

This study uses the expectancy model as a general framework to analyze sustained volunteer work. Descriptive studies dealing indirectly with the issue of rewards from volunteer work show that these can be social (inter-personal relationships),¹¹ personal (opportunity for self-fulfillment),¹² or indirectly economic (gaining work experience for the future or forming business connections).¹³

For purposes of this study, a volunteer is defined as "a person who works in a particular institution on a regular basis, of his own free will and without receiving direct economic rewards for his work".¹⁴

From this definition, it is understood that volunteer work is not a one-sided activity in which the volunteer only gives (as has often been thought) but rather an activity that includes rewards for the volunteer. These rewards can be seen as corresponding to the self-oriented motives described by Sills.

This study focuses on the attitudes towards their jobs of a group of 317 volunteers in health and mental health institutions. The rewards most often expected and received by the volunteers are identified. The study then examines the relationship between the age of the volunteers and the kinds of rewards expected and, using the expectancy model, it examines the relationship between tenure on the job and the extent to which expected rewards are received by the volunteers.

Methodology

The research was carried out in four different long-term residential institutions that provide health and mental health services in or around Baltimore, Maryland: two mental hospitals, one institution for the retarded, and one hospital for the chronically ill. Three of the institutions were public and one (one of the mental hospitals) was private. In each of the institutions there was a special unit for the coordination of volunteer activities. Each of the institutions saw volunteers as a force for assisting paid workers. The characteristic jobs of the volunteers were: building a friendship relationship with a patient or group of patients, visits, discussions, games, helping patients in their work in occupational therapy, accompanying patients on trips outside the institution, etc.

Identifying the active volunteers in each institution was a special problem due to the character of the volunteer population. In spite of the fact that, within each volunteer unit, there were lists of volunteers, it became clear that these lists were not up-to-date and that they also included many volunteers who were not active.¹⁵ In order not to include in the study volunteers who had dropped out, an active volunteer was defined as one who comes to work at the institution at least once every other week. Thus, the researcher was present at each institution for a two-week period and asked each individual volunteer who came to work during this period (unless it was the first day of work for the volunteer) to fill out a questionnaire. The entire universe of active volunteers in each institution was included in the study.

The questionnaire consisted of two parts. In the first part, the respondent was asked to answer questions that dealt with himself and the nature of his volunteer job at the institution. The second part included two lists of rewards: (1) a list of sixteen extrinsic rewards - that is, rewards that the institution can control; and (2) a list of twenty intrinsic rewards - that is, rewards having to do with the subjective meaning of the job for the volunteer. About

each reward, the respondent was asked two questions: (1) Do you expect this reward?, (2) Do you receive it in your work? For each of these questions, the respondent could answer: "yes", "no", or "I don't know". The results were analyzed twice: once in each institution separately; and the second time as an aggregate of the volunteers in the four institutions.

In this article, the results from the four institutions are presented in the aggregate because it was found that age, rather than organizational affiliation, can better explain the variance in expectations.

The total number of respondents in the research was 317.¹⁶ Among these, 84% were women. 52% of the respondents were 55 years old or older; 22% were 24 years old or younger; 26% were between ages 25 and 54. Most of the men belonged to the latter two age groups. Almost all the young volunteers were high school or college students. Also, among the rest of the volunteers, there were only a few that worked at salaried jobs in addition to their voluntary work. 19% of the respondents had worked at the respective institutions for a period of 3 months or less; 13% for 4 to 11 months; 22% from one year to 3 years; and 46% from 4 years and up. As expected, there was a high correlation between age and tenure at volunteer work.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Extrinsic Rewards:

The extrinsic rewards expected by the volunteers fell into five categories (See Table 1 on Page 26): (1) learning and self-development; (2) social interaction with other volunteers; (3) symbols of social recognition; (4) praise; and (5) authority. In a general way, the outstanding fact was that the level of expectations of the respondents for extrinsic rewards was not high. This fact is especially outstanding if one makes a comparison with the level of expectations for intrinsic rewards (See Table 2). All together, there were only three extrinsic rewards that were expected by more than half the respondents. Two

of these (" professional supervision" and "training") pertain to learning and self-development. The expectation of these rewards shows an interest in the type of work that the institution does, and a desire to better understand its nature. The level of expectation was also relatively high for the last two rewards in the category of learning and self-development ("contact with professionals" and "being consulted by staff about a patient").

"Contact with other volunteers" is the third reward that a high percentage of respondents (67%) expected. The expectation here is to work within a group of peers and not alone. Less than a third of the respondents expected the rewards connected with social recognition by means of external symbols, or praise. Many of the respondents told the researcher that "they are not volunteering for a pin". However, all four volunteer coordinators reported that the volunteers consider these rewards very important. It must, therefore, be assumed that there is a "social desirability bias" in these answers.

A small portion of the respondents expected rewards dealing with authority - rewards that are not usually connected with volunteer work. A closer analysis of the respondents who expected the reward of "supervision over other volunteers" revealed that many of them were long-term volunteers (four years or more). This fact indicates that with tenure, volunteers (like paid workers) expect more responsibility and promotion.

Intrinsic Rewards

Intrinsic rewards that were expected by volunteers can be divided into six categories (see Table 2): (1) stressing one's other-orientation; (2) self-development, learning, and variety in life; (3) opportunity for social interaction; (4) fulfilling and obligation; (5) social recognition; and (6) connection with paid work. Almost all the volunteers expected that their work would allow them to stress their other-orientation. This is, no doubt, the basis for volunteer work in human service institutions.

The findings about expectations for rewards related to self-development and to variety and a chance to build social relations, substantiate in further detail the findings in Table 1. The expectation of intrinsic rewards dealing with self-development and variety in life (expected by a sizeable percentage of the respondents) shows that people expect personal development to result from their volunteer work.¹⁷

It appears that the expectation of development social contacts in the course of volunteer work also indicates that the volunteers have personal needs that are not being met in other frameworks. Among the various rewards dealing with social recognition, there was only one ("opportunity to belong to an important organization in the community") that most of the respondents did not expect. Further investigation showed that most of those who expected this reward worked in two of the four institutions in which the research was carried out. These were considered more prestigious than the other two institutions.

Among a small and specific portion of the respondents, the volunteer job was considered as experience related to possible future employment in the health or mental health fields.

Expectations of Different Age Groups:

A separate analysis, by age group, of volunteers' expectations (see Tables 3 and 4) show clear differences in expectations among the three groups.

Table 3 shows that older volunteers were less likely than younger ones to be interested in rewards dealing with learning and self-development. Older volunteers were more likely to be interested in the rewards dealing with social interaction with other volunteers. Rewards dealing with social recognition were generally expected more often by both the oldest and the youngest groups than by those in the adult age group. Younger volunteers tended to expect "praise from professional staff" more often than older volunteers.

Table 4 shows that expectations for rewards dealing with stressing one's other-orientation tend to increase with age, although a very high percentage of the volunteers in all three age groups expected this reward. In the area of self-development and learning, the major difference appears in the expectation of "opportunity to learn new skills", and expectation which decreases as age increases. Most of the rewards dealing with social interaction and with fulfilling an obligation are expected more often by the older than by the younger volunteers. Expectations for rewards dealing with social recognition increased with age. Rewards emphasizing the connection between volunteer work and paid work (particularly in seeing the volunteer work as an opportunity for career-testing) were expected more often by younger volunteers.

From Tables 3 and 4 it is possible to draw certain conclusions as to how volunteers in the three age groups view their volunteer work and what subjective meanings the work holds for them.

The most outstanding point among young volunteers (mostly high school and college students) was the tendency to view their volunteer work as a learning experience for self-development and self-testing. At this age of planning for the future, the individual sees the volunteer work as a chance to test himself in work that he considers a possible career, to do this without the pressure of a paid job and without definitely committing himself. Rewards such as "training", "professional supervision", and "contact with professionals" are especially important to the younger volunteers because they consider their volunteer work as an initiation into the "mysteries" of the profession that they are interested in as a possible career.

Among older volunteers (55 years and older), a large portion of whom are living by themselves and lonely, volunteer work is seen more as an opportunity to stress their other-orientation and to fulfill an obligation to the community. Volunteers of this

age are inclined to see their work as a way to maintain interaction with their surroundings. Their volunteer work serves as an opportunity to prove that they are not only receiving, but also contributing to society. Their expectation for social recognition can be explained by their need to be assured that their contribution is valuable and important. It might be assumed that their volunteer work is very important to them because, for many in this age group, it is the only chance to break out of their loneliness and to be productive.

Among adult volunteers (between ages 25 and 54), most of whom were women, it was hard to find a unifying theme in their expectations from their volunteer work. It appears that, concerning "learning and self-development", their expectations were most similar to the younger volunteers and that, with regard to social interaction and the desire to stress their other-orientation, they were most similar to the older volunteers. A possible explanation for this ambivalence has to do with the questions raised by the feminist movement about the value of volunteer work.¹⁸ The traditional concept of the woman's role as housewife who participates in volunteer activities in order to keep in touch with her social surroundings has changed. Some women view volunteer work as a way of preparing for paid work and an independent career. More than a quarter of the respondents in this age category viewed their volunteer work as a career preparation; a large portion of them, for resuming a career cut short in order to raise their families. Many others in this category, however, still expected the more traditional rewards. The study did not identify specific characteristics common to this age group.

The findings in Tables 1 - 4 clearly show that volunteers expect concrete rewards from their work. Some of these rewards (dealing with stressing one's other-orientation) are expected by almost all the volunteers. The expectations for some of the other rewards are differential and the data show that the age of the

volunteer is connected with the types of rewards he expects - that volunteer work has different meanings for individuals of different ages. However, the findings presented so far do not deal with the relationship between rewards and tenure.

Negative Discrepancies and Tenure:

According to the "expectancy model", in order to retain volunteers, it is necessary to provide individuals with the specific rewards that they expect or to change their expectations so that they better fit the available rewards. In Table 5, negative discrepancies (i.e. rewards expected but not received) are presented by volunteers' tenure. The Table clearly shows that the average number of negative discrepancies per respondent decreases with tenure. It can be seen that the long-term volunteers are those who either were interested from the start in the rewards available at the institution or that they adapted their expectations to the rewards offered at the institution. Based on findings from research on paid workers, it is reasonable to argue that such an adaptation process did actually take place among the long-term volunteers.

Table 5 shows that the first six months at work are especially important in determining whether or not the volunteer will stay on the job on a long-term basis. In terms of average numbers of negative discrepancies, volunteers on the job between 9 and 11 months more closely resemble volunteers with more than 11 years service than they do volunteers with 4 - 6 months tenure on the job. *The volunteer coordinators in all four institutions reported that "dropping out" usually occurs during the first six months of volunteer work and, especially, during the first three months.*

The negative discrepancies found among short-term volunteers concern rewards pertaining to interaction with professional staff. Many short-term volunteers expected but did not receive rewards such as "professional supervision", "training", "consultation about a patient", and "praise from professional staff". In the institutions studied, volunteers expected to be

hampered by hesitation on the part of paid workers to accept and encourage such involvement. Failure to provide these "professional" rewards may well explain many cases of dropping out of volunteer jobs in these institutions.

Conclusions

While this study concentrated on health and mental health settings, the findings can be applicable to other settings as well. The assumption that volunteer work is not a purely altruistic activity has received empirical confirmation in this research. The volunteers who participated in the study expected various rewards from their work and the receipt of these rewards is important to their decision to remain in their volunteer jobs over long periods of time. These findings may guide institutions wishing to involve volunteers in their programs. In planning a volunteer program, one cannot take volunteers for granted. It is important to be concerned about giving satisfaction to the workers so that they will continue in their work on a sustained basis.

Since most of the rewards expected by volunteers are connected in one way or another with interpersonal relationships, it is important to build a system which provides volunteers with a framework for such relationships. It is also important to prepare the paid workers before the entrance of volunteers so that they know what to expect and how to help the volunteers receive the rewards they need.

Since volunteer work is a type of personal investment and since expectations of rewards differ from one person to another, research results indicating the existence of similarities of expectations among volunteers of similar age should prove helpful. It is possible to assume that various demographic and personal characteristics as well as characteristics related to the type of work or to the work situation may also influence the expectations for rewards. It is important to continue to research these areas if there is a desire to attract volunteers from specific populations.

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15. The coordinators of the volunteer programs were not especially interested in keeping current lists since larger lists (even if they included inactive volunteers) created a better impression of the activity of their units.
16. The division among institutions was: 100 from the hospital for the chronically ill; 62 from the public mental health hospital; 72 from the private mental health hospital; and 83 from the institution for the retarded.
17. As already described, the great majority of the respondents did not hold paid jobs.
18. National Organization for Women (NOW), "Volunteer- Why Not? Analysis and Answers", Chicago, Task Force on Women and Volunteerism, 1973

TABLE 1

Extrinsic Rewards Expected by Volunteers from their Work

	TOTAL	N 317	%* 100
A. Learning and Self-Development			
1. Training		208	66
2. Professional Supervision		178	56
3. Contact with Professionals		136	43
4. Consultation by Professionals about a Patient		106	33
B. Social Interaction with Other Volunteers			
5. Contact with Other Volunteers During Work		213	67
6. Banquet		63	20
7. Lounge for Volunteers		51	16
C. Symbols of Social Recognition			
8. Letter of Appreciation		98	31
9. Pin		84	26
10. Receiving an Award for the Organization (e.g., church)		43	14
11. Picture in the Newspaper		10	3
D. Praise			
12. Praise from Volunteer Coordinator		79	25
13. Praise from Superintendent of Institution		65	20
14. Praise from Professional Staff		57	18
E. Authority			
15. Supervision of Other Volunteers		61	19
16. Uniform**		30	9

*The percentage is according to the number of respondents expecting this reward out of the total number of those interviewed.

**In a number of institutions, the volunteers wore a special uniform, different from that worn by the nurses in the institution.

TABLE 2

Intrinsic Rewards Expected by Volunteers from their Work

	TOTAL	N	%*
		317	100
A. Stressing One's Other-Orientation			
1. Opportunity to be of Service to People Less Fortunate than Me		284	90
2. Opportunity to Think Less of Myself and More of Others		274	86
B. Self-Development, Learning, and Variety in Life			
3. Opportunity to Do Something Interesting and Unusual Which Adds Variety to My Life		253	80
4. Opportunity to Learn how to Deal with People		252	79
5. Taking Responsibilities		243	76
6. Opportunity to Learn New Skills		178	56
C. Opportunity for Social Interaction			
7. Opportunity to Take Part in an Assignment in which Other Volunteers are Participating		245	77
8. Opportunity to Meet New People		245	77
9. Opportunity to Share my Ideas, Opinions, and Problems with Other People		197	62
10 Opportunity to Get Out of the House		157	49
D. Fulfilling An Obligation			
11. Opportunity to Fulfill an Obligation to the Community		200	63
12. Opportunity to Do Important Work		182	57
13. Opportunity to Practice my Religious Beliefs		144	45
E. Social Recognition			
14. Opportunity to be a Part of an Important Organization in the Community		175	55
15. Opportunity to be Appreciated by my Family Members		92	29
16. Opportunity to be Appreciated by Friends and Neighbors		84	26
F. Connection with Paid Work			
17. Opportunity to be Engaged in an Activity which is Similar to Paid Work		108	34

TABLE 2
(continued)

	N	%*
F. Connection with Paid Work (cont'd)		
18. Testing Possibility of a Career in the Health Field	77	24
19. Testing Possibilities of Paid Employment	53	17
20. Forming Contacts that Might Help My Own or My Spouse's Business or Work	46	14

*The percentage is according to the number of respondents expecting this reward out of the total number of those interviewed.

TABLE 3

Extrinsic Rewards Expected by Volunteers in Three Age Categories

	<u>24 Years or Less</u>		<u>25 - 54 Years</u>		<u>55 Years or more</u>	
	N	%*	N	%*	N	%*
TOTALS	68	100	85	100	164	100
A. Learning and Self-Development						
1. Training	59	87	61	72	88	54
2. Professional Supervision	56	82	53	62	69	42
3. Contact with Professionals	50	74	46	54	40	24
4. Consultation by Professionals about a Patient	32	47	41	48	33	20
B. Social Interaction with Other Volunteers						
5. Contact with Other Volunteers During Work	34	50	58	68	121	74
6. Banquet	5	7	17	20	41	25
7. Lounge for Volunteers	4	6	10	12	37	23
C. Symbols for Social Recognition						
8. Letter of Appreciation	24	35	15	18	59	36
9. Pin	22	32	12	14	50	30
10. Receiving an Award for the Organization(e.g. church)	12	18	8	9	23	14
11. Picture in the Newspaper	2	3	3	4	5	3
D. Praise						
12. Praise from Volunteer Coordinator	9	13	17	20	53	32
13. Praise from Superintendent of Institution	4	6	11	13	50	30
14. Praise from Professional Staff	15	22	17	20	25	15
E. Authority						
15. Supervision of other Volunteers	5	7	22	32	34	21
16. "Uniform"	-	-	9	11	21	13

*The percentage is according to expectations for each reward in each age group.

TABLE 4

Intrinsic Rewards Expected by Volunteers in Three Age Categories

	<u>24 Years or Less</u>		<u>25 - 54 Years</u>		<u>55 Years or More</u>	
	N	%*	N	%*	N	%*
TOTALS	68	100	85	100	164	100
A. Stressing One's Other-Orientation						
1. Opportunity to be of Service to People Less Fortunate Than Me	58	85	75	88	151	92
2. Opportunity to Think Less of Myself and More of Others	54	79	73	86	147	90
B. Self-Development, Learning and Variety in Life						
3. Opportunity to Do Something Interesting and Unusual Which Adds Variety to My Life	49	72	71	84	133	81
4. Opportunity to Learn How to Deal with People	57	84	67	79	128	78
5. Taking Responsibilities	55	81	74	87	114	70
6. Opportunity to Learn New Skills	56	82	59	69	63	35
C. Opportunity for Social Interaction						
7. Opportunity to Take Part in An Assignment in Which Other Volunteers are Participating	39	57	65	76	141	86
8. Opportunity to Meet New People	54	79	68	80	123	75
9. Opportunity to Share My Ideas, Opinions, and Problems with Other People	32	47	61	72	104	63
10. Opportunity to Get out of the House	6	9	38	45	113	69
D. Fulfilling an Obligation						
11. Opportunity to Fulfill an Obligation to the Community	31	46	58	68	111	68
12. Opportunity to Do Important Work	30	44	45	53	107	65
13. Opportunity to Practice My Religious Beliefs	28	41	27	32	89	54

TABLE 4
(continued)

	<u>24 Years or less</u>		<u>25 - 54 Years</u>		<u>55 Years or More</u>	
	N	%*	N	%*	N	%*
E. Social Recognition						
14. Opportunity to be a Part of an Important Organization in the Community	24	35	39	46	112	68
15. Opportunity to be Appreciated by my Family Members	6	9	21	25	65	40
16. Opportunity to be Appreciated by Friends and Neighbors	10	15	15	18	59	36
F. Connection to Paid Work						
17. Opportunity to Be Engaged in an Activity Which is Similar to Paid Work	8	12	41	48	59	36
18. Testing Possibility of a Career in the Health Field	50	73	23	27	4	2
19. Testing Possibilities of Paid Employment	29	43	20	24	4	2
20. Forming Contacts that Might Help My Own or My Spouse's Business or Work	28	41	16	19	2	1

*Percentage is according to expectations for each reward in each age group.

TABLE 5

Length of Service by the Negative Discrepancies and Between
Expected and Received Extrinsic Rewards

Length of Service	Number of Respondents (a)	Number of Negative Discrepancies (b)	Average No. of Negative Discrepancies/Respondent (c) = b/a
1 - 3 months	59	86	1.46
4 - 6 months	23	27	1.17
7 -11 months	19	14	0.74
1 - 3 years	70	55	0.79
4 -10 years	82	54	0.66
11 years or longer	60	31	0.52
TOTAL	313**	267	0.85

*A negative discrepancy is defined as a case where the respondent answered "yes" to the question of whether he expects a particular reward and "no" to the question of whether he receives it.

**Four respondents did not answer the question about length of time on the job.