

Helping, Serving and Volunteering on Research

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Social and behavioral scientists need to compare trends in the field of social sciences to understand research sources and to present useable knowledge and information to the general public. The purpose is to help people, in whatever setting they are, to make better decisions. In order to achieve this civic virtue task, it is necessary for research to promote critical thinking reflections that invite readers, customers, students colleagues or the general public to assess the implications of research in their own realities, pondering the possibilities of improvement, change and transformation. The ultimate test for a piece of sound research is if can change reality!

Dr. Lea Winerman, in *Helping Others and Helping Ourselves*, Monitor on Psychology, has research some very important questions; why do people help each other?, Is their purpose is pure altruism, meaning totally unselfish concern for others without any personal benefits; Do people help others because they are doing it for themselves? The same questions can be adapted to the psychology of servicing and delighting others, thus making the statement: If we serve, we are useful, if we don't serve we are not useful...

In Winerman's profound work several theories are presented for why people help...or serve.

1. The empathy – altruism hypothesis proposes that helpers solely by their desire to help or to serve someone in need of assistance. This is not incompatible with the fact that the helper may feel very good about having helped! The helper can achieve some personal satisfaction for having done a good service. While the primary motivation may be to help others, there is always a powerful and complementary gain of feeling good after providing a good service that has constructive personal, social and organizational consequences.
2. The negative state of relief hypothesis poses that when someone is in distress or in need of help we feel bad. In order to feel better we help them. The logic here is that to feel better we help others.
3. The empathic joy hypothesis establishes that we help others because it feels good to have a positive impact on the lives (and institutions) of others.

The first hypothesis stresses helping for the sake of doing it, and the third points toward wanting to feel good about ourselves.

All three theories of helping behavior include the dimension of self-motivation. People can be self-motivated by a desire to help, to feel good, and to have a positive impact on others. The formula is something like this:

$$\text{Help} = \text{desire to help} \times \text{feel good} \times \text{positive impact}$$

Winerman shares that Dr. Mark Snyder has been studying this topic for more than 20 years. (The Motivations to Volunteer: Theoretical and Practical Considerations Current Direction in Psychological Science. Snyder and his colleagues began studying volunteers providing service care for patients with HIV/AIDS. For these researchers these people were the examples of people showing all the attributes of volunteering, developing and ongoing relationship with a complete stranger (a kind of samaritarian bond), with a backdrop of high stress for working with someone who is dramatically ill.

Omorio and Snyder (Considerations of Community: The Context and Process of Volunteerism American Behavioral Scientist) emphasize that in the context of HIV there were particularly high costs to volunteering because of prejudice and discriminations for undertaking this kind of work.

These researchers have identified five primary motivations to volunteering:

1. Values. Volunteering to satisfy personal values or humanitarian concerns. For some people this can have a spiritual component.
2. Community concern. Volunteering to help a particular community, such as a neighborhood or ethnic group, to which you feel attached.

3. Esteem enhancement. Volunteering to feel better about yourself or escape other pressures.
4. Understanding. Volunteering to gain a better understanding of other people, cultures and places.
5. Personal development. Volunteering to challenge, meet new people, make new friends, or further your career.

Different types of volunteers have different levels of these motivations. Young volunteers are more likely to volunteer for career-related reasons, while older ones express issues of good citizenship and social responsibility.

The very interesting idea of this research domain is that scientists are making the point that similarities across type of volunteering are quite dramatic!

Another very important important perspective is the acknowledgment that people have an agenda when they volunteer and this is very positive. So outcomes, consequences and results will depend on whether an organization can fulfill the volunteer's agenda. Thus organizations must strive to find the content of these agenda and structure or design themselves for this kind of people-volunteering-agenda purpose.

If the reader is thinking that there may be other related motivations like social recognition or even the desire to earn a living while doing this kind of social work, of course that this is the case! But what it is more interesting is that researchers have also found that people who have more “selfish” or personal motivations are more likely to stick with the volunteering organization than people with more “other focused” motivations.

Again, the very important organizational design aspect of this research piece is that if the organization can figure out their volunteers primary motives for volunteering, then they can tailor ads and other recruitment strategies to address those motivations, and steer the volunteers to activities most likely to satisfy them.

If every citizen in Puerto Rico spends on day a week of volunteer work we can radically transform this country. While writing this article I cannot help with tears in my eyes, but to remember Mother Teresa, which with her life and deeds presented the 6 motivation, perhaps the most powerful one: the motivation of love. From her we learned that intense love does not measure, it just gives and helps. Works of love are works of peace. Hunger is for love. Of course, we know from whom she learned... Her formula was: help = work of love

Yes, to live and work without love is a kind of slavery. The guiding rule is to never allow anyone come to you without coming away better and happier!