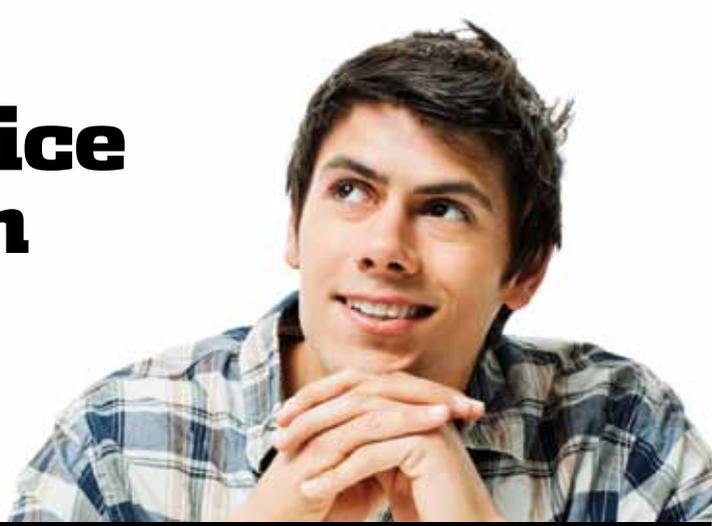


Community service and volunteerism

HOW HELPING OTHERS CAN HELP YOU

By Anne Chaconas



Everyone knows that helping others gives you good karma, but did you know it can give you career guidance, too?

Helping out with service organizations and volunteering your time and expertise to different causes not only helps out your community, it also lets you “try on” different jobs and see which ones fit the best. Wondering if teaching is a path you’d like to follow? Consider volunteering at a school. Thinking about being a doctor or a vet? Volunteer at your local hospital or work with a nearby animal shelter. Considering a career in the environment? Look at Greenpeace. Want to work with kids? Talk to your local YMCA or daycare.

The possibilities are endless and so are the career paths you can choose from.

So, how to begin?

Think about how you’d like to help

Start by really giving some thought to where you’d like to fit in the community service world. Do you want to lead a group? Organize events? Teach? Work with children? Work with animals? Think, also, about the environment you’d like to be in: Do you want to be indoors? Outdoors? In an office setting? In a hospital? Taking the time to ponder how you want to help (and what you don’t want to do) will make it much

easier for you to not only help others, but also do it with a smile on your face.

Talk to those you know

You would be surprised at who volunteers their time, and where they do it. Talk to your friends and see if they are part of any community group or activity. Talk to your school’s guidance counselor; many schools have volunteer and community service programs already in place that you can become a part of. Talk to your parents and friends of your parents. They may know of or be the leaders at organizations in your city, which can provide you with volunteerism opportunities.

Check out established programs

Organizations such as AmeriCorps, the Peace Corps, Greenpeace, Teach for America, the ASPCA, the Red Cross, Big Brothers Big Sisters of America and the Boy Scouts are all well-known for their philanthropic efforts and their large volunteer workforce. If you want to have access to a large variety of resources and have a volunteer crew of hundreds (or even thousands!), then going to one of the large, national, well-established programs is a must.

Go online

Although the large national organizations are definitely worth

checking out, many smaller organizations may not be quite so readily accessible. That’s where the Internet comes in. Websites like Volunteer Match (volunteermatch.org), Volunteers of America (voa.org), Service Nation (servicenation.org), and DoSomething.org all have huge online databases of local volunteer opportunities with both small and large organizations and can easily match you up with opportunities in your area.

What happens after you’ve chosen an organization or event?

Then get busy helping—and thinking about what you’re doing! Ask yourself:

- Do I enjoy what I do with this organization?
- What would I change about my duties?
- Could I do this for more than just a weekend every week? Could I do it full time during the week?
- What about this position fulfills me?
- Am I excited to work for this organization?

If you find yourself saying, “I wouldn’t do this if they paid me!” (and they’re not paying you), then you know it’s not for you. Don’t be afraid

to try out new organizations that you might otherwise never consider. Now's the time to try on as many possible careers! Many students would never have considered a medical path if they hadn't volunteered with the Red Cross or their local hospital, and others might not have thought about a career in teaching or mentoring if they hadn't checked out AmeriCorps, Teach for America or Big Brothers Big Sisters.

What should you do to get the most out of volunteering?

Remember, it's not enough to just lend a helping hand. Be proactive about your volunteering, and it will not only help others, it will help you, too!

Think about why you're doing it

If you have a purpose behind why you help others, you will not only volunteer with gusto, you'll inspire

others to do the same. You'll also enjoy yourself more and bring more joy to others.

Realize it is a long-term commitment

Once you find that perfect volunteer opportunity, don't be sporadic in your commitment. If you really want to make an impact—and if you really want your volunteering to make an impact on your résumé and career opportunities—then stay with it for the long haul. Be constant, consistent and committed. But understand it may involve sacrifices. You may have to give up some weekend outings or spend a few Friday nights working instead of partying.

Don't forget to toot your own horn

If you're doing something you love, helping others, making a difference and learning about what you'd like to do when you grow up, don't forget to

tell people! Put it on your résumé, talk about it in your application essays and share your experiences with others.

Volunteering can be a fulfilling, exciting experience. Approach it in a methodical way, and it can be incredibly beneficial—both to those you help and to your future! 🙌

Anne Chaconas is the director of admissions counseling for PowerScore Test Preparation (www.powerscore.com). Every year, she answers countless questions about college admissions and helps many students get into their top choice schools.



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