

# Introduction

I have been volunteering since I was seven-years-old and am still at it some 70 years later. In fact, it takes up a very large part of my day almost every day. Along the way, I have done many different things: painting walls, selling tickets, organizing skating shows as well as doing hands-on building of schools in the developing world. I've also participated in the running of various not-for-profit organizations, including raising money and chairing countless committees and boards.

Volunteering has taken me all over the world and I have met and worked with many fascinating people from kids on the street in India to former prime ministers in several countries, to young students in Cambodia and even meeting the Dalai Lama. It has also taken me into Canada's north, working with Indigenous peoples through the creation of a Rotary initiative furthering Indigenous education and public awareness of Indigenous issues. For years, many people have suggested I write a book about my experiences. I resisted partly because I was too busy in a myriad of ways and partly because I did not think I had much to say that would be of interest and help to others.

Eventually, I began to realize that while most people in Canada have volunteered, (perhaps because of the scope and duration of my volunteering) I was an aberration when it comes to volunteering and there were stories and lessons learned in this mix of experiences that might be of interest to others. While pulling this book together, I realized how important volunteering was to me and what a difference it has made to my life; enabling me to meet my wife, Pat, and leading me to

my financial services career. My career, in turn, was also greatly helped by skills I learned from my volunteering.

I have come to understand how important volunteering is to our country and the world in general. In fact, I have concluded that volunteering is one of the things that bonds and keeps humankind together. I have also found that often it is helping with the small day-to-day things in a person's life that can make the biggest impact.

Everyone in our society has benefitted from other people volunteering on our behalf. Often, however, you do not know who helped you along the way and many volunteers do not realize the benefits of their work.

Think for a moment of the parents who help in a school or coach a sports team. Think also of the people who assist in a hospital or serve on a charitable board that directly benefits you. Consider, for example the work MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Drivers) has done to make our roads safe from drunk drivers. How many other similar organizations can you name?

There are also people who volunteer to help with such things as education in the developing world; creating opportunities for people who did not have the good fortune to be born in Canada. We all benefit from these acts because it makes the world a better place, and allows us to learn and show compassion towards others.

We have over seven billion people living on this planet and creating an environment that allows us all to get along and live in relative peace is no easy task. Working together and helping each other goes a long way to making our world work.

The media is full of "bad news" stories. Some people ask "why don't they give us good news?" An answer I heard that made sense to me, was this: By definition news is about the "unusual" and "out-of-the-ordinary" happenings. This means that all of the *good things* that go on are not news. I believe this to be true. I also believe that there is much more good in this

world than bad and that out of the bad news and suffering comes action in the form of people volunteering and other wonderful acts of kindness. Any earthquake is a good example of this.

Chapter 1 discusses, in detail, *why we volunteer and the benefits that it brings*, however, one key benefit is that it keeps us in personal touch with others. We all need personal contact with other people. This is becoming increasingly important as modern technology leaves us consumed by our smart phones and other devices. We can sit in our homes, earn an income, order our groceries, do our exercises, watch movies, buy our goods, text our friends and never go out. What sort of life is that? And what type of society will this create? Volunteering can help all of us to keep in touch. Volunteers are not paid money but compensation comes in many other forms .

One of the great things about volunteering is that it can accommodate people of all ages with many different skills and interests; from cooking for the homeless or reading to elderly people, to washing cars to raise money or to using your business skills on a board. We all search for meaning in life and helping humanity has been for me (and I know for others as well) one constant way to inject meaning into our day-to-day existence.

Not only is volunteering for every age, but it is also for every *stage* of life. In this book I outline various volunteer activities as they coincide with other milestones that occur in our lives—be it as a young person just starting out, expanding one's experience from a boring job or keeping active, young and useful in retirement.

Writing this book has been a wonderful journey for me. It has reminded me of past activities, helped me reflect on why I did things and who helped me along the way. The major influences were my family, my educational experiences and the organizations with whom I have been associated—particularly

Rotary. These experiences all have changed my views and influenced how I have lived my life. So too have my volunteering activities.

While I've included several "how-to" chapters based on what I've learned, *Creating Opportunities* is truly a memoir of my volunteer life. It recounts various personal experiences that resulted from major world events. I share failures and successes and I introduce people that I met along the way. There is a good argument to be made that volunteering benefits the giver *more* than the receiver. You can be the judge of that.

It is my hope that regardless of your age and stage, you will find these experiences and stories to be, not only engaging, but a motivation to either start volunteering or keep at it, if you are finding yourself tired and lacking in inspiration. You will also find some ideas that will help you to become a more effective volunteer.

Don't feel that you need to consume this book from front to back, all at once. The chapters are stories in themselves and can be enjoyed as such. The soundtrack to a movie can really enhance the whole viewing experience. I believe that the same can be true for reading. Try listening to some inspiring music while you read this book—be it classical, the Tragically Hip or any other type that might move you. You may be surprised how your imagination ignites and how inspiration strikes.

Happy reading and good volunteering. May your experiences be half as rewarding as mine, while you help to create opportunities for others.

Chris Snyder  
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