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GIVING YOURSELF

A Donation More Valuable Than Money

Jump in and engage—add value by giving your time, experience, skills, and networks.

Giving is a universal opportunity. Regardless of your age, profession, religion, income bracket, and background, you have the capacity to create change. Everything you do, from spontaneous acts of kindness to an hour of your time, constitutes how you give. Indeed, making a gift of time, coupled with expertise and compassion, is a powerful way to make a positive impact on our world.

Hector Chau is one of millions transitioning out of the workforce and, as such, redefining his professional and personal relationships to his community. Now retired and living in Westchester, a neighborhood of western Los Angeles, Hector lives on a pension that doesn't leave him a large amount of money to give to charity. Hector is an active philanthropist, however, as he gives away something even more valuable—his time. Hector volunteers with a program called Tax-Aide, an initiative launched in 1968 by AARP, an organization that provides services to people over the age of fifty. Tax-Aide helps low- to middle-income taxpayers—many over the age of sixty—complete their yearly filings, with volunteers like Hector leading them through the process.

GIVING 2.0

Born in Mexico, Hector has been living in the United States since 1977, when he moved from Mexico City to Santa Monica with his family. Hector, his wife Olga, and their three children (aged nine, eleven, and thirteen)—were all on holiday in California. Olga and the children were enjoying themselves so much that they told Hector they wanted to

move to America. "We decided that since we were in a democracy, we should take a vote on it," says Hector. "And I lost, four to one."

Hector had left his home town of Tuxpan on the Mexican Gulf Coast once before to live in the United States. He attended a Texas high school funded by the Presbyterian Church, and later graduated from the University of Texas at Austin. After leaving college, Hector moved back to Mexico City, where he married his Texas-born university sweetheart and got a job with an accounting firm where he remained for the next sixteen years. He later worked as a salesman for an equipment manufacturer, a job he loved, as he enjoys meeting people and hearing about their lives.

In his new role as a volunteer, Hector is able to enjoy so much of what he loved in his profession. The Tax-Aide program has not only drawn Hector back to the accounting world; it has also given him a chance to make new friends. In between tax seasons, he exchanges jokes and letters, keeping in touch with his fellow volunteers via email. He also meets a wide range of people among the clients who use the Tax-Aide service. There was the hundred-and-two year-old man who still managed to drive his car to the center, with his girlfriend (in her nineties) beside him. And the young aspiring actress who claimed her breast implants as tax-deductible items since she'd had them done to improve her chances of getting work.

"Sometimes we get our heartstrings pulled, and sometimes it's simply fun," says Hector. Cheerful and outgoing, Hector still loves meeting different people and finding out about their lives. Working in sales afforded him this opportunity during his career; volunteering has restored it in retirement. "It's very satisfying when you're helping someone and then, when you see them next time, they're doing well," he says.

Hector is one of millions of Baby Boomers who've decided to take up volunteering or increase it in retirement. For some, it's a chance to give back to society. For others, it means they can continue to learn and develop while meeting new people and expanding their horizons. These opportunities help countless high-energy retirees enhance their self-esteem and fill the void that can open when people give up paid work.

Thousands of new opportunities to do volunteer work emerge all the time, and not just for retirees, whether it's making the occasional call for a nonprofit or helping construct libraries in a developing country. And these opportunities are mushrooming thanks to the power of the Internet. With the connectivity of the Web and online search tools, you can tap into a new world of community service, finding activities that match your skills and organizations that meet your goals.

Volunteering does not have to be a lifelong commitment (although it can be). You might start by doing a couple of hours a week playing dominos with a senior citizen and end up on an intensive six-month school-building project in an impoverished African village. You can work directly with people, giving your compassion and care, or help a nonprofit by giving your legal, financial, or marketing expertise. But you'll make a bigger impact and get more out of it if you think carefully about the kind of work you want to do, how much time you have to devote, and how your skills and experience can best be used. As with any form of philanthropy, planning, tracking, and taking stock are critical first steps (find out how to do this in Appendix I, Creating Your Giving Journal), because if you establish the right volunteer relationships, your involvement will provide your greatest personal connection with giving.

A GIFT TO YOURSELF

In search of happiness, we read about everything from how we need to simplify our lives to avoid stress to how we should eat well, exercise, and surround ourselves with positive people. We are all obsessed with being happy, it seems. And after all, who doesn't want to be happy? Well, it turns out that one of the things that make us happy is giving. And volunteering is no exception. What's more, volunteering even appears to be good for human health.

That's right—volunteering could lead to fewer pills and fewer trips to the doctor. The 2010 "Do Good Live Well Study" found that people who volunteered through their job rated their physical and emotional health more positively than nonvolunteers.[1] Some 92 percent of

the respondents said they were satisfied with their current physical health, compared to 76 percent among nonvolunteers. And 72 percent of volunteers claimed to have an optimistic outlook on life—tellingly this was true for only 60 percent of nonvolunteers. Moreover, 68 percent of volunteers reported that volunteering made them feel physically healthier.

Other evidence supports the observation that helping others brings benefits to those doing the helping. In a paper on the subject, Stephen Post, a renowned bioethicist, cites work conducted by researchers at Brown University Medical School.[2] The researchers studied members of Alcoholics Anonymous, the largest self-help group in the United States, to assess the difference between individuals who helped other alcoholics recover and those who didn't. The study found that those who were helping others were far less likely to relapse in the year following treatment. Post also points to studies that show teenage girls who volunteer are less likely to become pregnant or take drugs, and these young women are more likely to do better at school and to graduate. A similar review conducted by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) found that states with higher rates of volunteerism also had lower rates of heart disease.[3]

What's more, among the many studies that Post cites in his paper, research shows how people who volunteer tend to have fewer of the symptoms of depression. "We are perhaps substituting happiness pills for the happiness that flows from pro-social opportunities and more authentic community," he writes.

Even if you're already healthy of mind, body, and heart, the volunteer spirit brings with it countless rewards. For a start, the more you take on, the more you'll find you have time to do. Being happier as a result of giving will increase your productivity at work, enrich your relationships at home, and put your own problems into perspective by focusing on the greater problems of others.

And volunteering can bring thrills rarely found elsewhere—particularly when volunteers get to see the difference they are making. "Some people say there's a pop or a spark," says Michael Lombardo, describing the moment when his volunteers see the turning point in a

student's progress. "They often talk about seeing a new light in the child's eyes."

Michael is CEO of Reading Partners, a nonprofit providing one-on-one tutoring for K–6 students from low-income communities (it was one of SV2's early grantees and a recipient of a Social Innovation Fund, or SIF, investment). Reading Partners volunteer tutors (retirees, full-time parents, high school students, and working professionals) spend twice-weekly sessions with individual children, forming a close bond with them, watching their journey through frustration and disengagement toward understanding, excitement, and pride.

"We can all remember times as children and adults when we finally *got* something we were trying to understand," says Michael. "And the real emotional nourishment for our volunteers is seeing the kids have that happen on a weekly basis—not only make a huge stride in their learning but also receive a huge boost to their confidence."

As well as giving you emotional nourishment, community service also helps you maintain your skills during a period of unemployment, while demonstrating your energy and initiative to potential employers. When you're looking for work, volunteering can expand your network of contacts. On an event committee for your city's art museum, for instance, you might meet another volunteer whose company has job openings. Meanwhile, feeling productive can help keep your spirits up at a time when it's easy to become discouraged.

It's worth noting some of these benefits. Has volunteering helped you make new friends or find a community of like-minded people, for instance? Have you been able to attend lectures or events that you might not otherwise have known about? Has volunteering helped you get a new job or led to other service work? It's this personal contact that makes volunteering so rewarding—in helping others, you help yourself.

For Hector, the Tax-Aide program has given him more than a chance to brush up his accounting skills. "I like meeting different people," he says. "And part of the procedure is that, once you've finished a return, someone has to audit it to make sure it's all correct and that you haven't missed anything important. While you're waiting for someone to do this,

you have four or five minutes to chat with people—and those moments are fun."

Community service as a family is also a way of introducing your children to giving and the idea of caring for others, while also showing them how they can contribute to solving some of your community's problems. For your children, taking on new challenges—whether that's helping plant trees on a neglected street or going on a fifty-mile bike ride to raise money—helps them learn new skills, gain greater self-confidence, and become more responsible. However, before embarking on any social adventure with your child, it's a good idea to sit down together and decide as a family what projects or causes you want to spend time on. You could even select four or five possibilities and vote on it—thus, as Hector Chau did, giving your kids a lesson in democracy in the process.

Volunteering as a family takes many forms. You could involve the whole family or just a few members. You could take on a challenge for a day—or embark on something longer term. You could participate in an adoption-type program, through which your family might take on responsibility for helping an individual in the community on an ongoing basis—a recent immigrant, perhaps, or an elderly person without relatives (community organizations and churches can help facilitate these relationships).

Volunteering as a family is a great way to spend time together. Equally important, however, is the fact that when families work on community service projects, it provides a real opportunity for you to teach and transmit values to your children. This exposure has a more powerful and enduring impact on them than simply talking about the importance of giving. This was confirmed by a 2011 study called "Heart of the Donor."[4] It found that of people who grew up with parents who were frequent volunteers with nonprofits, almost half (49 percent) had volunteered with a nonprofit in the past year, and of those with parents who occasionally volunteered, 31 percent are volunteers. Among those who never saw their parents volunteer, only 20 percent do so now.

Whether you're going to volunteer alone or with your family, you should think about what you're embarking on as a true commitment—not being paid for your work makes it no less an obligation. So be realistic

about what you promise to do. At too many nonprofits, volunteers come and go, many of them losing interest or leaving when another more exciting activity presents itself. Volunteering is a serious business—the business of transforming and saving lives. I've never been paid for my work at SV2 or Stanford PACS (Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society), for example, but because of the impact of what we do, I work just as hard as I did when I worked in the for-profit sector, if not harder. You may experience the same thing—how passion can amplify your commitment. But practically speaking, if you'd never walk out on a paid job, you should treat your gifts of time and expertise, regardless of their scope, with the same level of seriousness.

THE VALUE OF COLLECTIVE PASSION

When Alexis de Tocqueville, a French philosopher and political scientist, traveled across the United States in 1831, he was deeply impressed by American volunteerism. He witnessed Americans' ethic of coming together to solve problems collectively, working in unison to improve life for those in their communities. Nearly two hundred years later, ever-growing numbers of Americans give their time, energies, knowledge, and experience to organizations and causes that they believe can improve life for their fellow citizens, tackle injustices, and help protect the natural environment. More than 63 million Americans, or almost 21 percent of the population, volunteered in 2009, according to the CNCS—that's 1.6 million more people than volunteered in 2008. And the numbers are growing particularly fast among certain sections of the population. Since 1989, for example, the volunteer rate among sixteen- to nineteen-year-olds, in terms of hours given, has almost doubled, according to the CNCS.

If you're among the many millions who volunteer, you may not think of what you're doing as making a financial donation. But in a sense you are. For collectively, the value of those millions of hours given runs into the billions of dollars. According to the CNCS, the monetary value of

volunteering services in 2009—which totaled more than 8.1 billion hours—was almost $169 billion. And, that assumes an hourly wage value of roughly $20—probably a huge underestimation of the actual value of volunteer time and expertise.

Behind every single one of these dollars is an individual such as Hector Chau, bringing individual gifts of time and talent. According to a survey conducted by the National Society of Accountants in 2009, the average fee for tax preparation is $229. During the tax season, Hector completes about seven to ten returns a day. This adds up. The AARP says that, every year, Tax-Aide volunteers such as Hector are able to help more than 2.6 million taxpayers to file their federal, state, and local tax returns. At an average of $229 per return, that's almost $600 million—an astonishing amount of money, and all given free of charge by AARP's army of more than 34,600 volunteers.

Volunteers are also essential in times of trouble. In the wake of the devastation of Gulf Coast hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma, for example, more than 110,000 national service volunteers, along with 648,000 community volunteers, contributed more than 9.6 million hours. These volunteers helped transform the relief, recovery, and rebuilding efforts—removing debris, creating shelters for the homeless, running call centers for those in need, coordinating benefits, and establishing schools and youth programs. The CNCS values these efforts at more than $200 million to the Gulf Coast states. We've also seen a rise in the number of volunteer efforts that support our troops overseas and veterans as they return home.

As these statistics and examples demonstrate, by giving your time, knowledge, and experience—whether your skills are as a lawyer, a construction worker, or a parent—you're providing an essential service that would otherwise not be delivered or would have to be purchased.

Of course, sometimes it's hard to calculate the value of service in monetary terms. Some even say it's wrong to do so, arguing that putting a cash price on volunteering cheapens its worth. Others suggest that to measure volunteering in this way implies that volunteers simply replace paid workers—when in fact their gifts can be far more valuable in human terms.

This can be true, too—for sometimes a service is simply too precious to measure. Take volunteer initiatives such as the No One Dies Alone program, through which volunteers provide a companion service in hospitals and hospices to terminally ill people who have no friends or family and face the prospect of death on their own. The volunteers provide a comforting presence, talking to the dying individuals, reading poems, singing quietly, or simply sitting in silence while warmly holding their hands. How can you put a monetary value on such a gift—a gift that embodies the very essence of human kindness?

A BEAUTIFUL LIFE

When I think of volunteering and community service, I remember my own first experience as a rather awkward thirteen-year-old girl in knee socks, a white middy blouse, and pale blue skirt, holding the hand of a silver-haired woman—my mother. "But Mom," I whispered to her as we waited in the lobby of Family & Children Services, a nonprofit organization located just off California Avenue in Palo Alto. "Why do we have to be here now? I need to go home and do my homework."

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I was in the seventh grade. It was my first week of school, and I had at least four hours of math, English, and history studies ahead of me. My mother smiled with the patience only a parent can give to their child. "One day you'll understand why I brought you here," she said. I stayed by her side, and we remained at the center for a couple of hours. I learned about young people facing the trauma of leaving foster care, about children who'd been physically or mentally abused, and of teens who'd been separated from their drug-abusing parents. It was my first realization that not everyone grew up in families as happy and loving as my own. I saw for the first time the difficulties so many people face in society.

As an adult, I do understand the importance of giving time to your community and to broader society. But it was my mother who first showed me the way. My mom, a sixth-grade teacher when she met my father, continued to teach at a local public school until my older brother

was born. When we were little, she stayed at home to look after us, but from the moment she stopped working she started volunteering. Blessed with the good fortune of not having to bring in a second paycheck for our family, she started to use her time to help others.

That journey started in a very hands-on way, as nursery and grammar school volunteer. Then, when I was in middle school, she worked with the school's parents association, and helped organize, and even chair, some of the school's fundraising events. By the time I reached seventh grade, she'd started serving on school boards and nonprofit boards, including that of Family & Children Services. Eventually, she developed her own expertise, and she went on to co-found two nonprofits.

With two master's degrees from Stanford, she also gave a gift of intellect along with her time. And she was dedicated, starting at 7 a.m. and often working until 11 p.m., spending more than eighty hours a week on her unpaid service work—while also caring for two children and my father. Few of the organizations she worked with were high-profile. She believed in the importance of providing basic services to help disadvantaged people succeed in society.

She gave her time in a very targeted way, concentrating on education—whether by serving in educational institutions (some of which my brother and I attended) or working with community institutions such as Vista Center (then the Peninsula Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired), which helps people living without full sight to enjoy rich and rewarding lives.

What was so impressive about my mom's volunteering was the way she developed her service work. She started out by simply giving her time in a very emotionally driven way and grew into a passionate nonprofit entrepreneur, an institution builder, and a community leader (while also running our unstaffed family foundation with my father). Everything she did was related; everything she did gave her experiences she could use when tackling the next nonprofit challenge.

She certainly inspired me to do the same. At school, I was always deeply proud when she was giving a speech. I wanted to be just like her. I used to say to myself, "One day, I will serve on a board," even though at the time I knew little about what that really entailed. Because of her,

and the philanthropic leadership of my father, my notion of normalcy when I was growing up was grounded in the idea that everyone should live a life of service. Like all things—from exercise and reading to respect and generosity—what you learn when you're young stays with you throughout your life.

GETTING OUT THERE

So should you clean up trash in a park or prepare food in a soup kitchen, or should you offer legal or accounting services to the nonprofit that organizes environmental cleanups and manages hunger relief programs? Should you edit the text for a nonprofit community news website, help that same organization to procure free advertising, or raise money for it in a telethon? If you have certain skills, it might make sense to work on the administrative or production side of things. On the other hand, working in a housing shelter for a couple of days might give you a better understanding of the realities of poverty, informing your other giving activities.

None of these are easy questions to answer—and today's vast volunteering options can seem overwhelming. You could distribute fliers to promote a social justice campaign or check in patients at a free health clinic. You could help build a database or hand out water and supplies at an emergency aid station. But given the multitude of possibilities, before embarking on volunteering it's important to spend some time taking stock and assessing how to balance your personal passions with public needs. This could help you make a bigger impact and get more enjoyment from volunteering—which will encourage you to do more of it.

First, assess what you have to give—and do so broadly. Remember, everyone has *something* to give. And your ability to share your expertise is not limited by the discipline of your professional life. You might be a lawyer, but if you also love reading and writing poetry, you could volunteer in a classroom, introducing children to poetry. You might be a political consultant, but you love the outdoors, so could lead a summer

wilderness trip for impoverished urban kids. It's about being in touch with your natural talents, hobbies, and interests—and finding a way to put them to use for good. Even if you feel you don't have many skills to offer, you can use your networks, bringing others together for an event or rallying friends, family, or colleagues to volunteer with you.

Next, think about the level of commitment you'll be comfortable with—how often you'll be able and willing to volunteer, as well as the length of your commitment, whether a month, or a year, or on an ongoing basis. Clearly these decisions depend on whether you're working or not, whether you're single or caring for a spouse and children, whether you're a student or you've just retired.

One way to get an idea of how much time you could devote to volunteering is to write out a list of all the activities that take place during your average week. Mark down the times when they have to be done and look for gaps that could be filled by volunteering. Do you have an afternoon on weekends when, instead of window-shopping or watching TV, you could visit a senior center or help renovate a school? If you're a student, are there times when, instead of hanging out at the campus café, you could spend a morning teaching children to read or helping clean up a local river? If you're an unemployed professional, could you set aside time from job hunting to help a nonprofit manage its budget or launch a marketing campaign?

Sometimes you might wonder how you can possibly fit volunteering into your schedule. Well, you might be surprised to find that it's perhaps at times when you're under greatest pressure at work or stress at home that doing something for others does most to relieve your stress. Even if it's hard to leave the house because you're caring for young children, or your health limits your physical abilities, stepping out of your own world and into the wider world—even if it's only for a few hours—will help put your own challenges into perspective.

You can also volunteer from home. Just as the Internet is transforming the working world, it is providing new "virtual volunteering" opportunities—from remote tutoring to producing material for marketing campaigns or helping a nonprofit write thank-you letters to donors.

If you're a professional journalist, for example, you could become a "mentor editor" at the Op-Ed Project, sharing your writing acumen with female and minority academics hoping to publish their first op-eds. These volunteers help increase the number of new voices in public discourse (more than 80 percent of opinion pieces published in major newspapers are by men—something the Op-Ed Project wants to change). Even without technology or professional skills, there are things you can do from home, such as joining the global movement to knit toy bears for orphans around the world.

Knowing exactly how much time you have to give and where you can give it will help you find opportunities that will fit in with your personal and professional schedule. After all, the last thing you want to do is make a commitment you're unable to meet, or to overstretch yourself so that other parts of your life start to suffer. As with anything, striking the right balance between your volunteering time and your other commitments is essential. However, it's always possible to make time for volunteer work—regardless of how busy you are or think you are. As any volunteer already knows, the more you do, the more you can do.

HANDS IN GLOVES

When it comes to volunteering, recognizing what you have to give is only part of the equation. The other part is finding out what's needed and how your particular skills, knowledge, and experience can help fill the gaps. So do some research to find out whether what you have to offer is something the nonprofits you'd like to work with actually need—you may have plenty of experience and skills, but they may not necessarily be useful to every organization you approach.

If you come from the business world, you may have expertise and knowledge in areas such as the law, finance, accounting, marketing, or strategic planning. But remember that you may also have an awful lot to learn.

For a start, nonprofit organizations have to operate in a resource-constrained environment where the kinds of support systems the business

sector relies on, such as IT help desks and videoconferencing facilities, are often absent. They must also interact with a far broader range of stakeholders than businesses (including local governments, other nonprofits, foundations, universities, community groups, and clients) when trying to get things done. Working within a consensus-building or collaborative culture can be challenging in this environment, as can motivating people who are driven not by money but by purpose.

And compared to the for-profit sector, decisions regarding the allocation of a nonprofit's funds are far more emotional, depending on a complex range of social and cultural factors rather than purely financial or economic considerations.

So if you come from the business world, it's important not to assume you know more than your nonprofit colleagues. But if you can tackle these issues successfully in a nonprofit environment, you can make an important contribution while also improving your management skills—something you can take back with you to your workplace. If you do, you're joining a powerful force. VolunteerMatch alone has 2.5 million registered members and has made 4.5 million volunteer referrals since 1998.

Then think about what you want to get out of volunteering. You may want to meet people or even a potential life partner, in which case joining a team working on the construction of a new youth center or getting involved in volunteering at your place of worship might be right for you. Or perhaps you prefer working alone, in which case you might want to work on building a Facebook presence for a nonprofit or providing an organization with IT support.

Volunteering is also one of the best ways to add to your knowledge and experience. You might be looking to build up your résumé so you can make a career transition, in which case you should consider opportunities that give you the chance to polish specific skills or gain exposure to a certain industry, such as health care or education. Or perhaps you want to combine volunteering with the chance to travel.

Finally, think about what form you want your volunteering to take. Do you want to work directly with the people being helped by nonprofits

or who work at nonprofits? Do you want to give your compassion in the form of caring for others (for example, teaching people with Down's syndrome to swim)? Do you want to take on physical work (repainting a community playground or cleaning oil from birds after an oil spill)? Or do you want to put your mind to work (for example, by giving legal training to those working on immigrant assimilation)?

Be prepared for rejection, too. Many nonprofits—especially if they are well-known institutions—already have sufficient numbers of volunteers. And you may not have the specific expertise that a nonprofit needs. It's great to approach volunteering as a way of building your own skills—but to be useful, you must be able to fill an organization's requirements. Good intentions don't necessarily make for good results.

These days, nonprofits are becoming much more professional in how they take on volunteers. Some may even screen you, as a company might when assessing a job applicant, particularly when they're looking for help in areas such as technology or legal matters. Even if you're applying for a position that doesn't require specific skills, remember that managing new volunteers takes a nonprofit's time and energy. It may simply not have the capacity to handle your presence.

However, don't let this deter you. You may just need to spend a little more time finding the right place for your skills and energies. Or you might have to do a bit of advance preparation to show you understand a nonprofit's objectives and the needs of the people it serves. There will always be plenty of organizations out there that can benefit from your time. And working for a nonprofit that really needs your help and to which you can make a real contribution will be far more satisfying for you and everyone involved.

SEEK AND YOU WILL FIND

The good news: it's easier than ever to find the right volunteering opportunity. For a start, you can look around in your local community. Find out whether the nonprofits operating near you match the issues you're

concerned about, and whether or not they need extra help. Your local community foundation, Junior League, or Rotary Club may be able to suggest organizations to approach and even make an introduction.

If you're nearing retirement and want to start or increase your volunteering, your company may be able to help. Many larger companies have programs that help employees move from the for-profit world into the nonprofit sector. Senior Corps (part of the Corporation for National and Community Service) matches people over the age of fifty-five with organizations in need of help and trains new volunteers so that they can be more effective.

The foundation world has also stepped in to encourage postcareer volunteering. Created by Civic Ventures and funded by the John Templeton Foundation and the Atlantic Philanthropies, the Purpose Prize awards $100,000 each to ten individuals over the age of sixty who are finding innovative ways of addressing difficult social problems. A program called Encore Careers helps people in the second half of life find new work with a sense of purpose—paid positions that combine job satisfaction with a chance to help others. For younger people, Global Citizen Year provides a formalized program that helps high school graduates spend a "bridge year" living in developing nations working on social problems before they attend college.

Of course, sometimes it's a conversation that gets the ball rolling. "The moment I retired, I went and told my neighbors," says Hector Chau. "One of them was already active in the [Tax-Aide] program, so he immediately suggested that I join." The neighbor told him about training sessions that took place every year; on retiring that September, Hector took the test for prospective volunteers and passed with flying colors.

Meanwhile, the Web has provided a new and efficient way of connecting volunteers of all ages with community opportunities. Just as Web-based job boards have revolutionized employment searches, online tools now bring together volunteers and organizations that are looking for help. Take Catchafire, a New York City–based for-profit social mission business and a certified B-corporation (a new type of organization that uses for-profit models to generate social benefit). On Catchafire's

website, you can browse organizations and match your skills with their needs. The website even tells you how much money a certain number of pro bono hours will save the organization.

The CNCS also has a tool on its website that allows you to enter your charitable interests and zip codes and search for volunteer opportunities. VolunteerMatch has a similar search engine (in fact it's the number one search result for the word *volunteer* on Google and Yahoo, with more than 100 million pages served in 2008) while UniversalGiving has hundreds of screened and validated international volunteer opportunities available on its website. For young people, DoSomething.org presents all kinds of options and matches people with grants and the chance to volunteer.

GIVING 2.0

But the Internet does more than matchmaking. Social networking allows volunteers to use their activities to raise money, too. One organization pioneering this approach is Crowdrise, launched in 2010 by actor and philanthropist Edward Norton, producer Shauna Robertson, and Robert and Jeffrey Wolfe, who founded the offbeat online retailer Moosejaw (Crowdrise's cheeky slogan is "If you don't give back, no one will like you"). As well as empowering fundraisers, Crowdrise boosts volunteers' fundraising potential. Inspired by the charity walkathon or marathon concept—in which participants raise money through networks of friends—Crowdrise's founders believe individuals or teams of volunteers should be able to attract funds in the same way, whether they're working in an American homeless shelter or helping build a school in rural Africa. Crowdrise calls it "Sponsored Volunteerism."

On the site, you create a project page for yourself or your team through which to showcase your volunteer activities by uploading text, photos, and videos. Using your email accounts, Facebook friends, or Twitter accounts, you let friends and family know what you're doing and ask them to sponsor your activities, with amounts as small as $25. You can also search for projects and join existing teams, either by volunteering or donating. Once your page is up, anyone can join your team or donate to your cause. So while you're giving your time, you're also using your volunteering to raise financial resources from others. It's a turbocharged form of volunteering, powered by online social networking.

Alicia Chastain, a San Francisco–based designer and one of the individuals with a Crowdrise page, is on the board of BayKids, where she began as a volunteer editing videos for the nonprofit. BayKids works with local hospitals to teach digital filmmaking skills to hospitalized children, helping them find new ways of expressing themselves. "More than once I went home in tears," Alicia writes on her page. "Not because it was sad, but because of the sheer will and courage these kids have. It is humbling." Alicia uses her Crowdrise page—which includes a video—to encourage people to give to BayKids.

The sponsored volunteering concept is catching on fast. But whether you're using the Web to find volunteer opportunities or to combine your volunteer activities with fundraising, the Internet has made it easier than ever to give your time. A whole world of community service exists—and, with a click of your mouse, you can now become part of it.

GETTING ON BOARD

Another important form of volunteering is serving on nonprofit or foundation boards. However, as with any form of philanthropy, giving some thought to your decisions matters. Your choice of nonprofit board, as well as how you engage with it, can make your presence more or less effective for both you and the organization.

If you approach it thoughtfully, you can absorb the best practices of one board and take that experience to another board. What I learned while on the board of Menlo School and Castilleja School (the high schools my brother and I respectively attended), I was able to bring to another local private school, Eastside College Preparatory School. I first encountered Eastside on an SV2 site visit, after which the school became one of our first SV2 grantees. Unlike Castilleja and Menlo, at Eastside every student was on full scholarship and the first in their family to be headed for college. My experience with Eastside, other educational institutions, and the other nonprofit boards on which I sat informed the way I led the boards of SV2 and the Stanford PACS (Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society).

Serving on a nonprofit board is a tremendous responsibility, and attending meetings and going to events is just the beginning of your stewardship. As a board member, you need to become fully engaged with an organization and contribute to its evolution directly with your time and expertise. You need to work closely with the nonprofit's executive team to help it achieve its goals and tackle its challenges. Then, as well as making a contribution, your service can become a critical part of your philanthropic journey, helping you acquire knowledge and skills you can use not only in your giving but also in your working life.

If you're an active philanthropist or community participant, chances are that at some point you'll be asked to join the board of a nonprofit or foundation, and an invitation to serve should be considered an honor. However, before accepting, ask yourself some questions. Is the organization one whose values you share? Are you passionate about its mission? Are the individuals on the board people with whom you'd like to collaborate? Does it have a strong leader at the helm, and what are its plans for the future? Is it in need of special skills and expertise that you can provide? As with volunteering, think about what you can bring to the table in terms of skills, experience, knowledge, and networks—are those a good fit with the organization's needs?

In addition, find out what kind of board it is, what commitment is expected of you, and what the board's activities involve. Does it exist purely for fundraising? Is it simply bringing together high-profile individuals to give the organization public credibility? Or is it a working board, with members who participate in the organization's evolution?

Another important consideration is how you'll support the organization financially. If you serve on a nonprofit board, you should be prepared to make a stretch gift to support its work (whatever *stretch* means to your personal finances), as board leadership in fundraising is important in setting an example for other donors. Often a measure of success for a nonprofit is what percentage of its board members are annual donors, as well as giving to its events, capital campaigns, or endowments—the sector "gold standard" being 100 percent. Many nonprofits raise a large portion of their annual operating funds from board members, and while they may not state this, the expectation may be implicit. So when

joining a board, expect to be asked to support all of the above. You should also be willing to ask others in your networks to do the same.

Many boards do, however, have representatives either from among the people they serve or the broader community, as well as philanthropists and field experts. If your service falls into this category, you may not be required to give the same amount financially as other board members, but you may be required to raise the same amount. So it's a good idea to join a board only if you feel sufficiently committed to the organization's mission to do this.

Regardless of your role on any nonprofit board, pay attention so you recognize when your interest shifts, your ability to give time diminishes, or you are simply burnt out. Others can always bring fresh energy, resources, and expertise to an organization. Instead of drawing out your service because you feel obligated to fulfill a specific term, treat this as an opportunity for the nonprofit to acquire a new board member who may be able to bring different skills and connections to the table. Boards need regular renewal, as well.

Some boards are what I call "reporting boards," and their meetings can be unrewarding events. To me, it seems a waste of time, talent, and philanthropic capital to call together meetings of an extraordinary group of people (often key leaders in the community and industry) and proceed to talk at them (rather than with them) for several hours, with staff members reporting on items that could easily be distributed as preparatory materials. So find out how the organization structures its meetings and whether it gives members concise, informative reports in advance as background for the key issues to be discussed. Investigate what role the board plays in strategic planning and core decision making, as well as in coming up with new ideas and different ways of thinking about an issue.

When I chair a board, I structure meetings so as to make the most of the intellectual capital of those in the room, keeping introductory remarks and presentations to a minimum and maximizing time for group discussions and brainstorming. Leaders who fail to do this are missing a huge opportunity to tap into the expertise of board members and to engage them fully in the organization's mission and goals. So make sure

that the chair of any board you sit on uses the time and talent of board members productively. This will make the experience far more valuable to both you *and* the organization.

WORKING FOR GOOD

Ben Amaba, a senior sales executive at IBM, is a particularly active volunteer. He not only serves on boards at universities and research organizations, but also speaks at Engineers Week and at career days for many Florida schools. Among the activities he loves most is getting schoolchildren and students fired up about studying math, science, and engineering. Among the many letters of thanks Ben has received from the young students he speaks to is one from an eight-year-old boy named Bryan. In his handwritten note, Bryan told Ben: "Just like an earthquake you rocked the classroom." These words are music to Ben's ears. "That's when you know you made a difference to somebody's life," he says. "I can't even put into words how I feel when I get those kinds of letters."

Ben is the son of a Filipino immigrant who joined the U.S. military early in his career and later worked in logistics and finance for the U.S. Navy. His father's story, says Ben, is one of the reasons he feels passionate about volunteering. "The U.S. had a program where they would let Filipino citizens join the navy to help them improve their quality of life," he explains. "And what motivates me is to bring the same opportunities to others that the U.S. presented to my father and to the world."

For Ben's family, many of those opportunities came in the form of the education and training provided by military officers (themselves volunteers) to minority families. "My dad couldn't speak English," says Ben. "He didn't even know what a checking account was. But senior officers came to the house to provide special programs to minorities in the navy. They were helping the ones coming in and, growing up, we saw that this was just normal behavior. That's why I'm drawn towards service rather than just writing a check."

Ben uses the knowledge and experience he's gained from his professional career to encourage students—from kindergarten through to

postgraduate level—to consider careers in scientific and technical fields. Working through the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Education Coalition, Ben regularly finds himself in classrooms using his enthusiasm to inspire the students sitting in front of him. Sometimes this involves taking children from kindergarten to meet postdoctoral students. "I have five-year-olds that go to universities and build things and see prosthetics and ergonomics," says Ben. "And these kids are amazing—they're listening and understanding more than we think they are."

But while Ben has been giving his knowledge and experience to others, he's also been acquiring it. When he first started going into classrooms, he had to spend many hours preparing for the sessions, but he is now a skilled presenter. For Ben, his ability to help change young people's future never ceases to amaze him. Six months after he received the letter of thanks from Bryan, Ben saw him in the street and stopped to say hello. The eight-year-old explained again how much he'd enjoyed Ben's talk, but confessed that he didn't want to go into technology, math, or science. He wanted to be an attorney. However, after Ben's talk, he said, he'd got a new idea. "He told me he'd worked out how to make himself happy while also making me happy," explains Ben. "He said: 'I'm going to be a patent attorney.'" Ben was astonished—not only that, as a result of his class session, Bryan had spent several months thinking seriously about his career, but also that an eight-year-old had learned what a patent attorney was. "It's phenomenal," he says. "I think I dropped my groceries."

Becoming adept at teaching and presenting is just one of the skills you can acquire by volunteering in a field related to your work. You can also gain professional experience that might otherwise not be open to you. If you work in a law firm at a junior level, for example, it's unlikely that you'll work directly with clients until you have advanced within the firm. Doing pro bono work for a nonprofit could be a way of getting direct client experience, giving you the kind of interpersonal, leadership, and project management skills that would be difficult to acquire on the job at an early stage in your career.

What's more, volunteering can help you advance in your career, demonstrating your abilities to the people you report to and proving

you're ready to take on greater responsibility. Corporate community projects—whether rebuilding homes for flood victims or teaching underprivileged children to read—bring people from various parts of the business together to work on charitable projects and thus are great ways to build your teamwork skills. These activities also provide networking opportunities. Who knows, as a second-year analyst in a bank, you could find yourself hammering nails into a wall with your chief strategy officer.

The corporate sector certainly has more to contribute than money. This was reflected in the Palindrome Pledge—an initiative of Palindrome Advisors—in which, in March 2011, one hundred global corporate leaders committed to change the way they give to the nonprofit sector by taking more prominent roles in the board management or operations of nonprofit organizations and by helping them with their business and management needs.

Large companies—who often see volunteering programs not only as part of corporate philanthropy but also as a way of building workforce skills—have developed sophisticated mechanisms to make it easier to organize their employee volunteer resources. IBM, whose employees worldwide have donated more than 11 million hours since 2003, harnesses the power of the Web to maximize these efforts. Ben Amaba and his coworkers can tap into IBM's On Demand Community, an online hub that helps employees and retirees assess their skills and then decide what kind of volunteer work they'd be best suited to do. Once they've figured this out, they can search the site for opportunities based on their interests and the amount of time they have to give. They can take online training courses to prepare themselves and track their volunteer work on the site by logging their hours.

Through links to documents, videos, and online presentations, employees learn new skills, make the most of their volunteer time, and share knowledge between volunteers, helping spread the experience of those who've gone before. "We use it to store our presentations," says Ben. "And not only is it information that is reusable by other people across the world, but I'm able to contribute to it as well."

Of course, not all companies have the resources to develop a system such as IBM's. But even if you work at a small company, you may be

able to encourage your IT department to set up an intranet—an internal website—where volunteers in the company can share information. If there's an existing corporate intranet, you might persuade IT to add a volunteering micro-site to it. And if neither is possible, you could set up a volunteering page for your company on a social networking site such as Ning or Facebook and encourage colleagues to add their stories and experiences, as well as links to useful information.

Make sure you know what your employer is offering, too. Many companies will help connect employees to volunteer opportunities and give them a certain number of paid working hours a year to devote to this. Some even match your volunteer hours with dollars in the form of a donation to the nonprofit you've been assisting. Others offer more extensive volunteer opportunities. Some consulting firms send executives on overseas volunteer missions, for example, to work in developing countries on projects with nongovernmental organizations or nonprofits.

And if you cannot find a program in your own workplace, look into other ways of discovering how to put your professional skills to work for good. The Taproot Foundation, for example, helps business professionals donate skills in areas such as strategic planning, management, human resources, marketing, design, or IT to nonprofits in need of those skills.

If you own a business, remember that offering volunteer work to your staff brings many benefits. In addition to developing their skills and teamwork, it can help you recruit and retain the best employees at a time when—particularly for younger people—there's an increasing desire to work for companies who invest in their communities as well as in their economic success. A volunteering program can also help you establish your brand in the local, or even global, community. And all corporate volunteer programs help make the company a larger part of its employees' lives, which fosters loyalty.

To maximize your impact—particularly on the communities you're trying to help—you need to manage such a program carefully. A study by Deloitte, a consulting firm, found that only 38 percent of companies work with nonprofits to measure the impact that their employees' time is having.[5] Yet such measurement is critical, as it quantifies the benefits

of community service to your employees and ensures that their individual skills are being used in the most appropriate way.

Organizations such as the Taproot Foundation and Senior Corps can help. They work with companies to design volunteer programs for employees and retirees. Organizations such as United Way can provide your company with information on local volunteering opportunities and will match your company with appropriate nonprofits in your area. They facilitate these connections by building a volunteer opportunity search box on your intranet, and providing toolkits to help educate managers and employees. Using existing resources, you can create new ways of giving in your company.

VolunteerMatch offers Web-based tools that can be used by an organization of any size to help manage, track, measure, and increase the impact of corporate volunteering programs. The American Red Cross's "Ready When the Time Comes" program helps partner companies train and prepare their employees for large-scale disasters, so they can act as reserves that can be called on to help when necessary. The Entrepreneurs Foundation works with companies nationally to set up both volunteering and giving programs, as well.

These programs and others help companies and employees not only increase the impact they can have on the communities in which they operate but also develop a stronger, more motivated workforce with better skills, improved teamwork, and leadership abilities. Through volunteering, companies can build their relationship with the local community while also enhancing their own human resources. It's what the business world would call a win-win.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

What to Ask Yourself When Considering Volunteering:

- How much time do you want to give?
- How often do you want to volunteer—for example, a month every year, an evening a week, or a couple of hours every weekend?

- Do you want to volunteer with someone as a bonding experience—perhaps your spouse, your children, or a friend?
- Are you looking to use volunteering as a means by which to meet new people for social or professional reasons?
- Do you want to give kindness and care—such as by reading stories to kids suffering from terminal illnesses—or do you want to put your mind to work—for example, by helping a nonprofit develop a marketing plan?
- Do you want to work directly with the people being helped by nonprofits or do you want to work with staff members at nonprofits?
- If you want to work with nonprofit staff, what are the most appropriate skills and knowledge you can offer them that they currently lack?
- What does the nonprofit you'd like to volunteer with need, and is this need something you can offer and something you want to do?
- Will your volunteering create value for both you and the nonprofit?
- How will you measure the success of your volunteering—these measures may include a certain amount of money raised at an event, a child's test scores improving over a semester, or a more beautiful community space?

What to Ask Organizations You'd Like to Volunteer For:

- What does the organization need in the way of skills?
- How does the organization manage its volunteers?
- Could you talk to one or a few other volunteers to learn about their experience of working with the organization?
- What are examples of volunteering they can give you?
- Does the organization do any training or introductory programs for volunteers?
- What learning opportunities are there at the organization?
- Does the organization need volunteers to work in the field helping to deliver its services, or does it need writers, publicists, IT specialists, or other types of volunteers to help run the organization itself?
- Who will supervise your work or be your point of contact?
- Does the nonprofit have the capacity to manage your presence as a volunteer?

What to Ask When Considering Board Membership:

- What type of board is this—a fundraising board, a titular board (a group of high-profile individuals who give the organization credibility but are not

necessarily active participants), a working board (high-engagement individuals who participate in building the organization), or a strategy board (with members involved in strategic decisions but rarely in implementing the strategy)?

- Who makes decisions—the executive committee, the board chair, the chief executive, and/or the nonprofit executives? Does the entire board have a say?
- How many meetings take place each year?
- Can you see past agendas to assess how much of the board's time is spent participating in strategic decision making rather than listening to staff presentations?
- Can you talk to a few current board members or attend a meeting, or both?
- Is the board created primarily for fundraising? If so, meetings may entail mainly listening to reports, with decisions driven solely by staff (if you're passionate about the mission and committed to your fundraising responsibilities, this should not discourage you from becoming involved).
- Does the board have a "give or get" policy, requiring board members to either give a minimum amount of money themselves or to raise an equivalent sum from others? (Don't let such a policy put you off, but make sure you can meet fundraising levels expected of board members.)
- What are the fiduciary responsibilities of the board, and what is the oversight process for managing and allocating organizational resources transparently and effectively?
- What is the board's annual process for assessing the performance of the CEO or executive director?
- What is the board's annual self-assessment process?
- How often does the organization create a strategic plan, and what is the board's role in creating the plan?
- Does the organization have directors and officers (D&O) insurance to protect board members in the event of a legal dispute?
- Will you have time outside of the board meeting schedule to support, advise, and work with the organization's staff?
- Are board members expected to give names and addresses of friends to the organization? (This is often a requirement of serving on an event committee or chairing an event.)
- Are you willing to introduce ten of your friends to the organization? (It's a good idea to join boards only if you feel comfortable doing this.)

- How does the community view this board and its organization (this can influence your effectiveness in supporting it)? Ask five to ten people from different parts of the community before agreeing to join.
- Are board members expected to serve on one or more board committees as well? If so, how often do board committees meet and what are committee members' responsibilities?
- Are board members expected to do work outside the board committee meetings?

Innovation Lab—Ideas to Test:

- Talk to local nonprofit leaders about which volunteers at their organizations have been most effective and why.
- Ask friends or colleagues what their most rewarding volunteer experiences have been and why.
- Go online and choose one volunteer opportunity through a matching service.
- Take stock of your skills (whether business, creative, technical, or in communications) and offer them to one of the nonprofits you are already funding.
- Attend a meeting of your local Rotary Club, Junior League, Elk's Lodge, Lions Club, AARP chapter, or any other volunteer or religious organization and see if a giving community can enhance your own gifts of time.
- Select one of your most rewarding volunteering experiences and talk about it with people you know through a social network such as Facebook or Twitter. Ask people to comment on your story, and you may receive valuable insights into the volunteering experiences of others.
- Help a nonprofit expand its existing volunteer program, or help a nonprofit create one.
- If your company has no volunteering program, find out how you could start one.

For the Family:

- Take your children on a site visit to one of the nonprofits with which you are currently or considering getting involved.
- Consider taking a "volunteer vacation" with the family to a location that is interesting to you all.
- Take your family to a beach or public park cleanup. Then take them all out for a pizza as a reward for hard work.

- With your children, make a list of things each of them is good at and likes to do. Then think of ways that your children can put their own talents to work to help others.
- Find out if there are any nonprofits in your area that allow teens or college students to sit on the board, as board fellows or volunteer members, or are willing to pilot such an opportunity. Nonprofits who serve youth may be especially interested.
- Spend a weekend afternoon with your children helping a local food bank with a physical capacity issue—such as crating a ton of oranges or packing a hundred food packages for families in need. You can easily do this activity with one or two other families, which will increase both the impact and fun.
- Create a "volunteering circle"—like a giving circle for time instead of money. Partner with two or three other families who have children of similar ages and with whom you already enjoy spending time. Choose an issue area that's important to all of you, and plan monthly volunteer projects focused on that issue area. End each volunteering session with a potluck dinner at a circle member's home.
- Make volunteering around an important family event or holiday a tradition.
- Ask the religious institution you attend if it has any community activities that you and your kids can become involved with.

And Remember:

- Your offer of time and skills may not necessarily be accepted by a nonprofit—the organization may already have enough volunteers or may not have the capacity to manage your presence (free help—including student interns—can be costly to nonprofits in terms of staff time and energy).
- Not all organizations can legally allow people under the age of eighteen to volunteer (this is not true for every organization, and some nonprofits do accept younger volunteers).
- There's no shortage of nonprofits to volunteer at, so if your talents don't fit the first place you offer them, don't stop looking.
- For a nonprofit, volunteers can present a significant management burden, so if you're considering volunteering, make sure the organization is able to accommodate your presence and that you have something of value to offer (this is true to an even greater extent for teenage volunteers and college student interns).

- An organization to which you're also donating money may feel obligated to accept your offer of voluntary help, whether from you or from a family member. It's your responsibility to make sure you're meeting an unmet need and that you'll be helping rather than hindering its work.
- Often nonprofits turn first to board members for professional expertise, but some have board committees with nonboard volunteers (particularly in areas such as investment, audit, marketing, social media, and fundraising).
- Serving on a board is just one of countless ways you can serve an organization—fundraising requirements need not be a limiting factor in your engagement.
- If you're leaving a board, be honest about why (critical feedback can be among the most valuable gifts you can give an organization).
- Activities in which your children participate can provide excellent opportunities for volunteering, such as coaching Little League or other sports teams, helping create costumes for a dance recital, or being a troop leader for Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts.
- For many nonprofits, offers of time, skills, and talent are even more valuable than offers of money.
- Volunteer work can include the most unglamorous tasks. You may find yourself cleaning out a storage room, addressing envelopes, or making photocopies. No matter how inspiring the cause, the work can be emotionally challenging, physically challenging, or unstimulating—but changing people's lives for the better makes it more than worthwhile—it's exhilarating.