



VOLUNTEERISM – SOWING SEEDS EARLY

VOLUNTEERISM IS A CONCEPT OF SOCIAL ACTIVITY THAT IS BASED ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF FREE WILL. THE SEEDS OF VOLUNTEERISM NEED TO BE SOWN EARLY IN LIFE TO ENSURE THAT THE FUTURE GENERATIONS ARE EMPOWERED FOR SOCIAL ADVOCACY. **GEETA SHETTY** THROWS LIGHT ON THE CONCEPT OF VOLUNTEERISM AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY OF LEARNERS.

What is Volunteerism?

Volunteerism is an act of rendering public services or an act which is geared towards serving the larger good of the society. It is an act that is governed by an individual's free will rather than compulsion. It is a manifestation of an intrinsic desire to actively serve humanity rather than an extrinsic requirement. Social psychologists I.N. Aynutdinova, O.V. Reshetnikov, E.V. Subbotinsky, and A.I. Holostova define volunteering as – '...a selfless assistance to people in need, a special form of human activity, based on altruistic motives'.

According to Shagurova et al's study in 2016, the main features of volunteering are:

- Lack of any financial gain or even a partial financial reward.
- Voluntary character of the activities.
- No individual benefit to the volunteer and his or her inner circle.
- Based on the principles of altruism, selflessness, generosity, openness, humanism, free will, legitimacy, compassion, sensitivity, dedication, and humaneness.

India is a country that faces several socio-cultural, economic, educational, and environmental challenges. In fact, it needs 'help' in various sectors. Many willing hearts and benevolent hands are required to allay these problems. Such hearts and minds that recognise the needs of the country have to be nurtured and cultivated at school. If the fire of service is kindled in every child, we can create a nation with socially responsible and proactive citizens.

Benefits of volunteering

While participating in volunteering activities, an individual realises how certain populations and groups have been disempowered, disadvantaged, and discriminated against. Volunteering inspires and motivates individuals to join hands to proactively contribute to social change.

Volunteering demands reasoning abilities,

critical thinking skills, and analytical skills. Any volunteering activity should be beneficial to the target group, therefore, it requires a need analysis followed by proper planning, procurement, application of resources (human and material), monitoring, and follow-up. Hence, volunteerism has cognitive benefits to an individual and develops higher-order thinking skills.

Another benefit of volunteerism which is also its pre-requisite is social competence. As individuals work in groups during a volunteering activity, it helps to develop interpersonal skills and a collaborative mindset. Cooperation and healthy interactions are the hallmarks of volunteerism.

Why start young?

Campanini and Facchini in their 2013 study have shown that for students to participate in social work, altruistic value is the most important motivating factor followed by a career in social work. What is noteworthy is that the motivation of 'others' or extrinsic factors are the least considered influences motivating students to be socially productive. In addition, Clary et al. in 1998 found that while some volunteers would do it for self-fulfilment and self-realisation, others would want to do it for an external reward or motivation. Thus, in most situations, volunteering demands intrinsic motivation. The intrinsic factors work 'inside-out', that is, they drive the person towards volunteering activities. However, in order to enable this, the approach would sometimes need to be 'outside-in'. This means that external stimuli are essential in developing the lifelong intrinsic factors in learners.

Still, there are various reasons why our youth shy away from social responsibilities, some of them being:

- There is little awareness among young learners of the problems existing in the country. School syllabi do not provide deep and complete insights to the problems in society leading to superficial understanding about issues. Students do not often

know ground reality and hence fail to understand the issues with empathy.

- Students do not know who needs help, where to help, how to begin etc.
- Most youth have inhibitions towards social activities due to socio-cultural reasons or family restrictions.
- Sometimes the desire to serve is dampened by a lack of skills needed.
- Above all, the most crippling factor is fear. Individuals have a fear of the unknown that acts as a formidable barrier for involvement in volunteering activities.

Thus, school education should consciously work towards the development of the right attitude and requisite skills to encourage the young to take up volunteering activities.

How to start early?

Helping, caring, and sharing are virtues that need to be inculcated from an early age. These virtues are 'caught' rather than 'taught'. These attributes are absorbed from the environment through observation, imitation, and practice. Volunteering is one of the ways of developing these desirable virtues in young learners. Going by Bloom's taxonomy of affective domain, development of values follows a pattern namely:

- Receiving: Young learners receive information about issues through direct inputs, media, and observation. The stage is about awareness, willingness to hear, and selective attention.
- Responding: This involves following instructions or advice and showing affirmation or negation towards it.
- Valuing: It represents the worth or value a person attaches to a particular object, phenomenon, or behaviour ranging from simple acceptance to the more complex state of commitment.
- Organisation: It involves organising values into priorities meaning contrasting different values, resolving conflicts between them, and creating a unique value system.
- Characterisation: This involves

internalising or making an action a part of a learner's value system – volitional behaviour and possession of a value system that controls behaviour.

Thus, education in volunteering should be concerned with the students' general patterns of adjustment (personal, social, and emotional). It should begin with sensitisation of learners to issues, such that they feel driven to social action. The steps to be taken are as follows:

Sensitisation

This is a critical step as without awareness students won't understand how volunteerism contributes to a society. At the primary stage, teachers should plan volunteering activities within the school premises and in-house. These activities could include cleanliness drives, personal hygiene drives, buddy learning, etc. On selected Parent Teacher Meeting (PTM) days, parents could be included in volunteering activities organised by the school, to set examples for their wards about the joy of service. As the grades progress, sensitisation can be ensured through films, videos, newspaper analysis, critical study of current affairs and local and issues etc.

Training

Go beyond an orientation and demonstrate how volunteer efforts will make a difference. Orient the learners about the complexities and responsibilities of volunteerism through direct instruction or through talks and insights shared by experts. The training provided ought to be at the attitudinal level and aimed at developing organisational skills, interpersonal acumen, and decision making prowess. The training should be highly motivating and encouraging.

Targeted activities

The students should be involved in organised volunteering at all levels of planning; the scale can change with progress and over time. Activities should be carefully planned according to the site and target group of

beneficiaries.

Debriefing and feedback

A teacher analyses and takes stock of the volunteering activities – the failures and successes – and discusses it with her students. After the activities, feedback should also be taken from students regarding their personal feelings and their own strengths as well as shortcomings. The students have to be stimulated to think reflectively on their actions and analyse their learning. The benefits of the activities on the self and the target group need to be reflected upon during the debriefing.

A model for volunteering

Below are Kouzes and Posner's five leadership practices and ten commitments can be adapted to volunteering training.

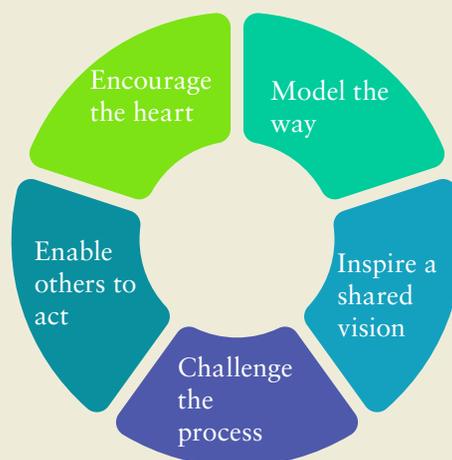


Fig. 1 Kouzes and Posner's five practices

Model the way

1. Describe how and why volunteers are involved and share it with the school management.
2. Walk the talk by working alongside students from time to time.

Inspire a shared vision

3. Envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities.

4. Brainstorm with students regarding new and exciting ways of contributing to the institution's mission.

Challenge the process

5. Search for opportunities and seek out cross-disciplinary and cross-sector collaborations.
6. Experiment and take risks but learn from experience.

Enable others to act

7. Foster collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships through team-building activities.
8. Strengthen others by increasing their self-determination and developing leadership competence.

Encourage the Heart

9. Recognise contributions by showing appreciation for individual improvements and successes.
10. Celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community – document through photographs and stories that are shared and archived.

Conclusion

Schools should focus on developing enthusiasm, inspiration, empowerment, and confidence and fervour for social engagement in their students. The collaborative and cooperative nature of volunteering activities can make learners instruments of social change through community engagement. As Taylor in his 2000 study rightly points out – 'It is the transformation within a group context that gives individuals more courage to initiate social change within new communities.' Educational institutions should aim at the institutionalisation of volunteerism through conscious efforts. This will ensure that they build socially committed and dedicated citizens with abilities for contributing to social change. **T**



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