

THINKING OUTSIDE OF MY BOX

Volunteering and Leadership



SECTION I: LEADERSHIP: "EVERYONE IS A LEADER"

*"If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more,
do more and become more, you are a leader."*

John Quincy Adams

When you hear the names: Ghandi, Eleanor Roosevelt, Martin Luther King, Jr., Mother Teresa, and John F. Kennedy – what is the common thread that unites them? They were all great leaders. There are hundreds of definitions of leadership and thousands of books written on the subject. There are many theories and debates about whether leaders are born or made. Everyone seems to have their own personal philosophy on leadership.

Most agree that leadership is a skill that can be developed through education, training, and experience. You may have gotten some leadership experience through clubs/organizations, playing on a sports team, working as a supervisor, volunteering, tutoring, or completing a group project. College is a great time to try out your leadership skills. You don't have to hold a leadership position in order to be a leader; anyone can step up and take the lead.

Some skill sets that effective leaders use include:

- Communication – written and verbal
- Ethical decision making/leading with integrity
- Time management



- Stress management
- Goal setting/creating a vision
- Self-awareness
- Motivating others
- Managing conflict
- Understanding differences
- Working as part of a team

Look for ways to get involved co-curricularly through the Student Activities or Involvement office on campus. There are opportunities through clubs/organizations, intramurals, peer counseling/advising, tutoring, service projects, programming, and residence life. Numerous workshops, conferences, institutes, speakers, and dialogues help students learn new leadership skills, or enhance existing skills.

On the curricular side, leadership opportunities may be found directly or indirectly in various courses; you may discover a leadership certificate or even a major or minor. You may take courses on the theoretical foundations of leadership as well as the effective practice.

Most student leaders agree that the skills they have learned will last a lifetime:

“Leadership is not only knowing the difference between right and wrong, but having the courage to stand up for what is right and for those who have been wronged.”

Patrick C. (student)

“My role in the classroom and in my organizations is a powerful one and it’s because of that that I have been able to mature by becoming more accountable, more compatible and more goal-oriented. I am not only a leader because I believe myself to be, but because others around me believe in me, as well. My task as a leader is to help my team believe in our ability to succeed, and believe in our common goals. I am able to do that because of the positive reinforcement I continue to receive during my time at Mason from students and faculty but also very much from staff members. I lead because I want to help as best I am able. It’s my role. I embrace it.”

Jeff B. (student)



SECTION II: HELP ME HELP YOU

Volunteering In Your Community

"Life's most persistent and urgent question is: What are you doing for others?"

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Almost 83% of incoming freshman report engaging in frequent or occasional volunteer work (UCLA/Higher Education Research Institute Annual Freshmen Survey, 2001); in fact, more teenagers than adults volunteer. The overall volunteer workforce represents the equivalent of over 9 million full-time employees at a value of \$255 billion (Independent Sector, 1999).

Whether it is a child who needs tutoring, an elderly man who could use assistance within his home, an AIDS patient who needs meals delivered, or a woman seeking shelter from an abusive relationship, there are many people in your local community who could use a helping hand. National and international agencies like the Red Cross and Peace Corps provide assistance to developing countries and relief efforts for disasters such as the catastrophic earthquake and tsunami that struck southern Asia and eastern Africa in 2004.

Volunteering is the act of providing a service to help others without the expectation of monetary compensation or personal recognition. It can be direct service to others, advocacy, or indirect service (fundraising).

It's a great way for you to connect to the broader community while gaining valuable experience in a wide variety of settings. On a societal level you can help those in need and create a more cohesive community. On an individual level you gain personal satisfaction, the chance to develop personal and professional skills, and a sense of belonging to the greater community.

There are a number of ways for you to volunteer through established programs such as the university like a Service Learning Office, an Alternative Spring Break program, or clubs and organizations such as Alpha Phi Omega or Best Buddies. You can also find opportunities in the local community through religious, health, educational, environmental, cultural, or recreational agencies. Many college students are involved in tutoring/mentoring children and adolescents, saving the environment, building houses, working with the elderly, or raising awareness/funds for health issues such as HIV/AIDS. The list is endless; for you, it's important to choose something that you'll enjoy.



Keep these tips in mind when you're volunteering:

- ***Be aware of your environment.*** Remember you are a visitor and are there to help. The agency may have specific ways of interacting and getting things done.
- ***Find out about an agency's history.*** The more you know about an organization and the clientele it serves, the more effective you will be.
- ***Establish a contact person.*** Know who will be working on a project with you and have a phone number in case you need to reach them.
- ***Follow a work ethic.*** Remember your commitment to the agency.
- ***Follow the organization's policies and procedures.*** Familiarize yourself with the specifics of your job and understand the rules.
- ***Understand the need for confidentiality.*** You may be dealing with sensitive information that is not to leave the agency.
- ***Dress appropriately and sensibly.*** Wear clothing that is neat, clean, and safe, taking into account the customs of the area in which you work.
- ***Avoid carrying personal items that may identify you as an outsider.*** Develop a community safety net of resources in the region, so you'll know where to go if you are faced with a problem.
- ***Above all, use common sense!***

Here's what some students had to say about their experience in doing volunteer or service work:

"It really keeps me grounded. I live a blessed life, one where I have never had to go hungry, always had a roof over my head, and even get to attend a University. Often times volunteering puts me in situations with people who have not had many of these benefits. Sometimes these people are just living day to day, not sure what the morning will bring when they go to sleep at night. When I am interacting with these people, it reminds me just how fortunate I have been, how small many of my problems really are in the grand scheme of things."

Dale W. (student)



"For me, volunteering has been the fuel to my education. For as many books as I have read or classrooms I attend, nothing has given me more guidance and motivation as an individual. I believe that there is a process to becoming an active citizen, and volunteering is the number one way to converse and shake hands with people from all backgrounds. It is an indescribable feeling when something has been accomplished by the hands of volunteers."

Erica B. (student)

"I enjoy doing things for other people (regardless of recognition or appreciation). It gives me something to do and I don't feel like I've wasted my time. It also allows me to meet interesting people that I might not have met otherwise. There's some personal benefit to some of the things I do such as projects to help the environment or helping to raise money for a medical cause (a family member might have been afflicted with that particular disease), but that's more of an afterthought than the reason."

Elizabeth T. (student)

"Making myself available to others has given me a sense of satisfaction in that it allows me to feel as if I am repaying all those that have helped me throughout the course of my life by offering the same wisdom, guidance, and all around general concern for the welfare of others."

Million F. (student)

As you can see, each of these students feels strongly and has a unique perspective on the benefits of volunteering. Take the first step to explore opportunities on your campus and in the community that you find interesting. Whether you commit a sizeable amount of time or just a few hours per month, you'll be amazed at the difference you can make in both your life and the life of someone else!

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