Early Career Members

Paying Back or Paying Forward—Service is Good for You!

by Garrett Liles

Many of us serve society by volunteering for a variety of causes. If you take the time to serve others, do you ever reflect on why? Is it simply to support the process of gathering “trophies” for your CV mantle, a tangible component of professional advancement? Or are you driven by a service philosophy, where leadership, mentoring, and helping others are core values? It’s likely you fall somewhere in between where a combination of personal goals, motives, and available resources regulate why you help others and how much time you devote to it. I pose this question since hard work and dedication have allowed us all to collectively “arrive” as intellectuals, residents of various towers—ivory and otherwise—and informed citizens. This status, like it or not, comes with responsibility to give back by sharing knowledge, skills, and time (the most precious commodity).

Service is good for you, and the following quotes provide the perspective of a few individuals who changed the world through serving others:

• “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.” — Mahatma Gandhi

• “Life is for service.” — Fred Rogers

• “Those who are happiest are those who do the most for others.” — Booker T. Washington

Indeed, volunteer service is actually a two-way street where giving benefits all parties in direct and diffuse ways. Approach volunteer service not as something you do for those less fortunate but as an exchange where you too receive benefit. These benefits include:

• Exploring new interests and hobbies while identifying and developing undiscovered skills

• Meeting new and diverse people and experience personal growth

• Becoming an integral part of a community—academic, social, or local

• Leading by example and producing lasting impacts — others will notice!

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The ‘Value’ of Volunteerism in Agriculture and Soil Science

Over the last decade, about 1 in 4 Americans volunteered, and in 2012 alone, approximately 64.5 million Americans served others in one form or another. This equates to about 7.9 billion hours of service, which generate more than altruism and the benefits outlined above; it’s estimated that an hour of service is equal to approximately $22 of economic benefit.

1 See www.volunteeringinamerica.gov.

2 See www.independentsector.org/volunteer_time#sthash.dpojNIZA.dpbs