

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A VOLUNTEER?

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What does it mean to be a volunteer? The answer to this question can be offered by millions of people around the entire world, people who have chosen to be volunteers that work in different associations, foundations and organizations.

As it is mentioned in the Explicative Dictionary of the Romanian Language, to be a volunteer means to willingly, consciously act by one's own initiative, unforced by anyone. If we were to guide after this definition, people choose to be volunteers because they wish for it, because they want and not because they have to; they are not forced by anyone or anything to be volunteers.

That „something” that urges them to action, to involve, to dedicate, comes from inside, from the desire to be close to people, to help, to learn, to experiment, to enrich themselves as people...and for people. Because this is what it means to be a volunteer. First of all there has to exist the desire to be beside the others when they need it. It is important to be *there* in the moments that require your presence, your unique qualities and all that you can be for them, for those who might need you.

Not less important is the way you perceive people...all people. If you can go beyond the masks, if you can really see what you are looking at, you will find that all people are the same, they all have the same needs, desires and, almost the same aims. Everyone needs affection, respect and friends. A good volunteer can offer more or less of each, when the situation requires. He/she can offer affection and can show respect by what he/she is doing, by the way he/she acts and by the way he/he chooses to involve.

What does it mean to be a volunteer? It means to make time for the others; to wake up at seven a.m. and your first thought should be a happy one, exactly because in that certain day you are going to the foundation where you activate as a volunteer and where you are expected by those from that foundation to come...exactly when you said you will. And this is an important aspect of what it means to be a volunteer: to keep your word, because a person who keeps his/her word is a person who respects people he/she is working with, respects what he/ she does and respects himself.

To be a volunteer also means to accept the others the way they are, with their entire colouring of qualities and defects. Because people are not perfect, as much as they would like to believe so. Any volunteer that comes into contact with different categories of people should know the fact that, behind any behavior that

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he/she might have the tendency to label it as being at least unpleasant, there is a need, a desire, a suffering of that person that is manifesting it. And it is not easy to control your first impulse and to pause in order to look behind the mask, to analyze, to filter and to want to understand the person that is in front of you.

To be a volunteer involves a lot of patience, especially regarding the activities you are developing with those who benefit from it. There is this possibility that sometimes not very much people would understand *why*. For example, why some people make the decisions they make, bad choices, in someone's opinion; why some children suffer with autism and why can't they rejoice their childhood such as „normal” children do?; why some elder people choose not to communicate and leave the impression that everything that is done for them is worthless, even though there are made big efforts to pull them out of the spiritual mesmerism in which they tend to fall. There are a lot of „*why's*” and maybe that, in time, answers are coming too, but the role of a volunteer is that to offer himself, to offer his/her unconditional help, to amplify his/her efforts in order to understand the person in front of him/her, and, more important, to accept that person the way he/she is.

Being a volunteer means to understand the suffering of other people, to be prepared that these will be a part of your life as well. It means to accept other's life stories, with all the good and less good moments of it and to know that, by listening and finding out, you have the occasion to enrich yourself and to learn. And, more important, that this suffering, once shared, becomes a little lighter.

What does it mean to be a volunteer? To always want to learn something new, to not be ashamed to say: *I don't know...but I wish I knew.*

It means to be there where you are needed, no matter if you are required to hold a conference on a theme that you are very fond of or if there is the need to help a elder person to eat or to do some household activities which some people might find disgusting. Because what a volunteer does, and especially the way he/she does it, reflects the quality of his/her character, his measure of involvement, his/her wish to help, to enrich by what he/she is doing.

Being a volunteer means to want to be among people, among those *like you*. It means to open up yourself to knowledge, to loving your neighbor, to everything that can help you grow. It means to know when to offer a smile, a comfort or to say a good word.

Being a volunteer involves the capacity of respecting a set of well predefined values that reflect in everything that he/she is thinking, feeling and doing.

Any volunteer, when he/she works with and for people, should always keep in mind those words said, in a certain moment, by the orator and author John Maxwell: “ *the right thought, plus the right people, in the propitious environment, at the key moment, for the adequate reasons, it always produces the best results*”, because, eventually, a man sanctifies a place and *anyone*, regardless the qualities he/she has, can produce at least one change in someone's life.