

Plenary Presentation



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Volunteering and Self Actualization

Good afternoon,

I am glad to have a chance to share with you some of my personal experience and my opinion on volunteering.

Starting from the early seventies of the last century, the Hong Kong Government has been spending more and more money on education, medical service and various other social services. This year, the figure reaches HK\$1,49 billion.

This is good for most of the NGOs and charity bodies as it helps them to solve a lot of their funding problems. However, it may not be that good when most of the NGOs rely too much on Government subventions. They lose their ability to raise fund from the public. They spend less and less effort in maintaining the relations with the donors they used to depend on. With money in hands, they tend to accomplish their jobs through paid staff rather than volunteers. This new environment leads them more remote from the civil society. Some NGOs look much alike a government department and are becoming more and more bureaucratic. It is really not a good sign.

I personally enjoy much more working together with organizations that involve a lot of volunteers. I am a member of Sowers Action, an NGO providing remedies for fundamental education in poor areas in the Mainland China. They have very little paid staff, yet they built

hundreds of schools in China. Most of their projects were accomplished through volunteers. I have been working with them for over twenty years, both in fund raising and project supervising; and I enjoyed it very much.

It seems that people trust volunteers more easily than paid staff because they can be sure that these people are not working for their own interest. They are unselfish; they care more about other people than just themselves. When we went to site inspection, we needed to pay all our own expenses for the trip. No one received any material benefit. However, we all felt such trips gave us very high spiritual return. It is nice to find that human beings can love each other, and the brotherhood of man transcends boundary of races and sovereignties. Our disputes were never difficult to solve, because we knew we were all there for the well-being of the less fortunate people. We needed to work together to improve the quality of their lives. As a result, we could easily forgive each other and quickly come to consensus.

Once I joined a project team that needed to work in a far away village. We had to take a bus that was used to serve only local people. The trip was very bumpy, and I had to sit with an old farmer. He was holding a piglet in his arms. The piglet was very dirty and it shitted all over his trousers. But he just didn't care. It stank so much that I could hardly breathe. But somehow, at that particular moment, I suddenly had a feeling that the smell of the piglet was actually helping me to wash away the sin I gathered in my daily life. I felt my soul was purified. This experience always urges me to advance to the frontline in my philanthropic endeavor.

It is only when you are on the frontline then you can see what people really need. And this is the best way to maintain your enthusiasm. Giving away money is not enough. You need to get your feet wet and your hands dirty then you will know what is needed to be done. It is wonderful to have the feeling of being needed. We need to see with our own eyes the impact of our job. Then we know how to improve ourselves in the future. It is only through direct contact with the people we serve then we understand why it is more of a blessing to give than to receive. Serving other people is the best way of self actualization. Our lives are mortal; therefore seeking self interest is limited. A capable man can earn more than his personal consumption. If a man just looks for self interests, he would soon find no meaning in keep on working. The talent of a man can only be fully actualized when he is determined to serve as many people as possible. It is only through benevolence one can find more worth in his relatively short life span. The greatest treasure on earth lies in human personality. You can easily find it when you are working as volunteers.

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Hong Kong is a relatively prosperous society. It is not so difficult to earn a simple but sufficient living. So instead of working like a maniac just to accumulate wealth more than one really needs, one can always spare some time to serve some other people. I believe a lot of

people in the private sector are willing to work as volunteers when they see all attractions aforesaid. The only hindrance is that they don't know where to find this kind of opportunities.

Organization like AVS should have a big role to play. I understand that you have already built a sound referral system. Through AVS, people in the private sector can easily know what kind of services is now needed, i.e. when, where and to whom the services need to be delivered; and what kind of knowledge and skills the volunteers must acquired in advance. I understand that you are also providing training for volunteers, so that charity organizations will be glad to hire them because they are not only willing to but also able to.

As for NGOs in Hong Kong, I think they need to change their attitude. They should involve more volunteers in their services. Through this, they can let people in the private sector know more about the problems of our society; thus be willing to make their contributions.

Statistics shows that Hong Kong people are one of the most generous people among the big cities in the world. But this statistics counts only the money we donate. I hope in the future, the figures will show that we are also generous in volunteering. Thank you!

