



## The Psychology behind Volunteering

Volunteering: giving your time without being required to by an outside source. Why do something if you do not have to? We often do things that bring us some sort of reciprocity. We work for money, we exercise to stay healthy and we have children to bring us joy (and maybe to take care of us when we are elderly). I am joking about the last one. But, many people often have a specific benefit in mind when engaging in activities. We tend to be strategic in how we spend our time and energy.

If there is no personal advantage, why do something? That is the amazing thing about volunteering. There often is not a specific and concrete advantage for the individual from volunteering. We do not get paid, we may not get public or private recognition and we sometimes do not see the immediate benefit to the recipient(s) that we have volunteered to assist.

So....why do we volunteer? Well, there are some more personal reasons that people volunteer their time and energy.

- **Self-esteem** – Helping others lets us feel useful, especially when we help others who may not be able to help themselves at that moment in time. We feel better about ourselves when we can lend a hand and/or pay-it-forward.
- **Personal connection**- Some individuals have a specific connection to the nonprofit and its cause. For example, if a parent has a child that is killed by a drunk driver, they may join MADD (formerly known as Mothers Against Drunk Driving).
- **Community building** – Many volunteer efforts provide great community building opportunities. They may literally bring neighborhoods together to create an event or may allow people in the same or different neighborhoods to meet.
- **Value driven**- Some people are motivated to volunteer based on their own values and what they believe is the right thing to do. Sometimes, this is based on their religious affiliation.
- **Obligation**- At times, a friend or family member asks someone to volunteer. The volunteer, who might not have signed up otherwise, may participate. We may even feel obligated to ourselves to volunteer. We might see motivating ads and we would feel guilty if we did not do anything.
- **Learning opportunities** – Certain volunteer efforts provide great learning experiences. The volunteer may be a younger individual who is learning how a business or industry works or they may learn about a particular culture through their volunteer experiences. Some individuals choose a specific volunteer role to gain experience in a field (for a future job or to get into school, etc.) or with a particular population (for different career opportunities, etc.).

Do you volunteer for any of the above reasons? If not, why do you volunteer? If you do not volunteer, why not? I'd love to hear your feedback; please reach out!