

Response to New York Times 2007 article "For Love and a Little Money"

Claudia Deutsch's article (For Love and A Little Money) seems to imply that the modern retiree views not-for-profits as a venue for meaningful part-time employment. Let's be honest, with the quid pro quo of a paycheck, this is not volunteer work so let's not confuse the issue by calling it that. It's low wage employment.

As volunteer managers my colleagues and I, we work hard to develop meaningful job descriptions for ALL volunteers and to see that no one's time is ever wasted and everyone's efforts are appreciated. This article seems to suggest a hierarchy where some volunteer jobs are more meaningful and therefore deserving of pay and other jobs are "fluff." Oh great. Who gets to decide that?

It's ironic that on the day Ms. Deutsch's article appeared, her colleague David Brooks was the keynote speaker at a fund raising breakfast for the Citizen's Committee for Children. The volunteers for this organization serve a vital role. They attend a 16- week Community leadership course which prepares them to provide advocacy for New York's neediest children- shaping policy, and lobbying in Albany if necessary, to Secure Every Child's Birthright with adequate housing, education, medical and developmental security. Not a shabby task for a volunteer. My colleagues and I in volunteer management know so many other organizations that require this level of commitment and expertise .

Grant writers in our respective organizations constantly ask us how many volunteers donate their time and expertise to our particular organizations. When members of the community volunteer to support the mission of a particular not-for-profit, it's a fairly pure indication of how important that organization is to the fabric of the community. This is essential information to grantors who are making decisions on how best to "invest" their foundation's money. Under this new trend that Ms. Deutsch suggests is developing, how would we quantify that? By the number of low-wage, part-time jobs we offer? That's hardly a valid indication. Are we becoming a society where a paycheck will trump heart and soul of the volunteer spirit.

And do I even need to mention the \$200,000 or so my employer would have to build into its budget to cover the minimum hourly wages mentioned here? Pressed as we are to use our dollars efficiently, I can't imagine that happening.

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(I am employed as the Director of Volunteer Services at Thirteen/WNET)