



NOVEMBER CHALLENGE: PICK A CAUSE

It can be really overwhelming and non too productive to agonise over all the things that are going wrong in our little world. Sarah Lazarovic has a great newsletter about climate gloom and how we can tackle it over at www.mvp.ist - if you're not already subscribed, go there right now!

Sometimes I find it helps to break down apparently insurmountable problems into more manageable parts. That's what this challenge is about - picking a cause. Spend this month working on a cause that you're interested in. If you don't have one you're interested in, spend some time with a few to see what grabs you.

While helping out with an issue you're passionate about is obviously great for that cause, it's wonderful for you, too.

PART 1: THE BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING

MEET NEW FRIENDS

Volunteering is a great way to meet new friends as well as strengthen existing connections with friends, family, and co-workers that you volunteer with. You will meet new people with a variety of diverse backgrounds. When you choose an organisation or cause in which to volunteer, consider that the people you're working with did, too. Sharing a common interest will help you build closer relationships with those around you.



A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Volunteering can help you feel connected to other volunteers and to those you are helping. This experience may make you want to get involved with other aspects of your community, local politics or to advocate for programs that you believe are important.

ACCOMPLISHMENT

When you do something that you feel is worthwhile and valuable for the community, it gives you a sense of accomplishment. And what's more satisfying than that? Other than a Snickers bar, of course.

CAREER BENEFITS

Volunteering can help your career. You can gain valuable experience and build skills that can be used to obtain paid jobs in a career you are interested in. Here are some ways that you can advance your career through volunteering:

Teaches you valuable skills

The training and hands-on experience you gain while volunteering can help you learn new skills as well as build upon the skills you already have. For example, if you are a volunteer that advocates and raises awareness for a cause that interests you, you will gain communication, public speaking, and marketing skills. You can put these skills on your resume and enhance your skill set.

Provides job prospects

Along with acquiring valuable skills and experience gained through volunteering, you may also meet people in your field of interest who can become your mentors or at least become a part of your network. If you choose to pursue a career in the field you



volunteered in, the connections you make may help you to widen your job prospects. The experience you gain while volunteering may be very attractive to potential employers.

PERSONAL WELL-BEING

After helping others, you might feel excited, happy, helpful or thankful. Volunteering can positively impact your overall well-being. It often feels good to contribute to projects and organizations that mean something to you. This lessens the effects of stress, anger, and anxiety in your life. Building bonds and connections with people you volunteer with counteracts social isolation that often causes stress and anxiety.

FULFILLMENT

Participating in volunteer opportunities can help you achieve a sense of fulfillment. For example, many people use volunteering as a way to make time for their hobbies while making a difference. If you are interested in the outdoors, you may volunteer at your community garden or help out at a children's summer camp. Volunteering for organizations or causes that you are interested in may provide you with a renewed sense of creativity and motivation that carries over into your personal and professional life.

PURPOSE

You can find your purpose through volunteering by becoming part of something greater than yourself. If you're retired or lost a spouse, volunteering and helping others can give your life new meaning and purpose. It can also take your mind off of your own worries and keep you mentally stimulated.



PART 2: TIPS FOR CHOOSING A CAUSE

Here are a few ideas as to how you can evaluate the right cause to support.

LOOK TO YOUR OWN COMMUNITY

These days, you can of course volunteer your time and skills with any organisation based anywhere in the globe. However, one benefit of volunteering with a local cause is that it allows you to impact and connect with your community. Some of the most common volunteer opportunities are helping at an animal shelter, planting flowers, trees or shrubs at your local garden, beach or park clean-ups, and talking or reading to the elderly.

MAKE SURE IT'S LEGITIMATE

If you don't have the time to volunteer but still want to support a cause you care about, donations are a very simple way to do that. However, make sure that the charity you're supporting is legitimate. This is a great source for U.S. based charities: <https://charitycheck101.org> You can also head to CharityNavigator to see how much money each charity uses for its stated cause instead of for marketing, fundraising and overhead.

PERSONAL CONNECTION

Find something that feels personal to you. There are many great organizations out there, but finding something that is a match to your history and values will make you more engaged in the organization and allow you to better contribute.



START SMALL

People are suffering from compassion fatigue. So many causes, so many problems -- it can feel overwhelming. In some cases, the bigger the nonprofit, the less you see your money at work, so consider donating to, or volunteering at, a smaller organization tackling a specific problem.

LOOK AT THE ROI

Look at the impact of each dollar and how to stretch it to maximize your return. For example, microloans are repaid and can be lent out again and again.

PERSONAL MISSION STATEMENT

This one is a bit kooky, but bear with it. Christophor Jurin, of Construct-Ed, Inc, recommends writing your own personal mission statement. Just as a company has a mission statement to guide the activities of the business, a personal mission statement guides the activities of your personal life. He says, "Develop a personal mission statement, and then identify causes that resonate with that mission. Find those causes that ignite your passion and donate and/or participate."

POLL YOUR FRIENDS

Ask people whose opinions you value for recommendations. You already have a lot in common - you may find you care about supporting the same causes as well.

JUST START

Above all else, avoid paralysis by analysis and just get started!