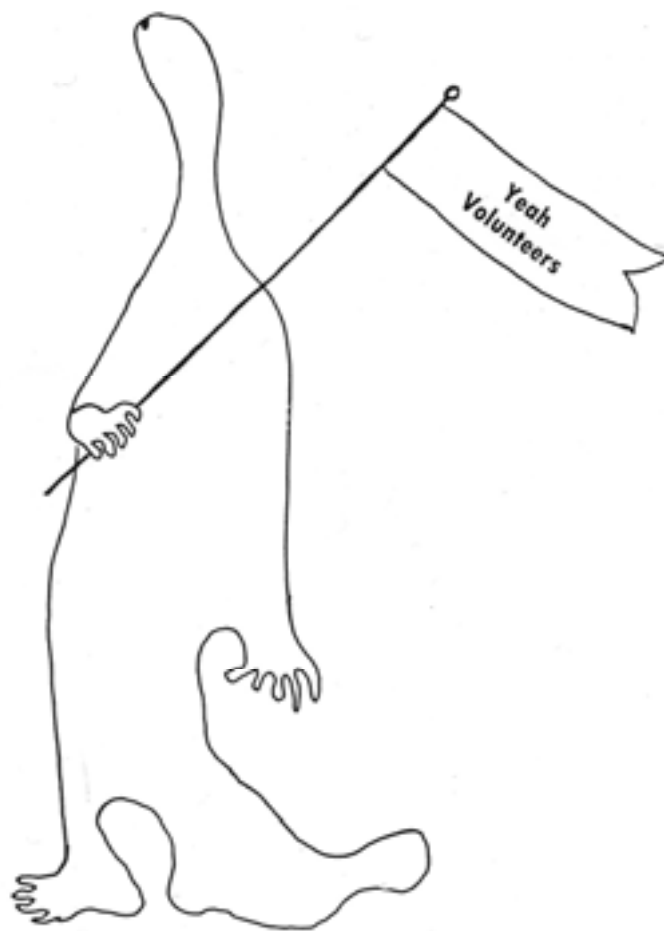


# A Volunteer Handbook "Getting It Right"

By Don Willcox



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**The Politics of Foreign Aid**

**A free publication of:  
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**This publication is for Sunan**

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## Introduction

This publication, in addition to providing hands-on solutions to a host of potential problems, records real-life volunteer experiences. It does this in order to illustrate both the pitfalls (or pratfalls) and success stories experienced by actual volunteers. Many of these stories are punctuated with satirical drawings - the intent being to hopefully add relief to the text as well as to add impact to the stories. Except for changing names and locations, all stories recorded are true and have actually happened.

The goal of this book is to provide constructive information to:

1. Prospective overseas volunteers.
2. Host country NGO's.
3. Employees of government agencies who work with volunteers.

The recommendations offered in this publication have been hard-earned through many years of hands-on experience, as well as by trial and error. Because both public and private funds are often fickle and in short supply, **this book hopes to encourage a more responsible and efficient application of generously donated volunteer services.**

Volunteers come in all sizes, shapes, ages, and colors. For the most part, volunteers pay their own way, receive no salaries, and are often both a positive and essential ingredient in the operation of many private and governmental agencies – including organizations that focus on human needs, environmental protection, species conservation, and both pure and statistical research.

It is important for all potential volunteers to understand that in many countries, the generous donations of volunteer skill, time, and labor are often perceived quite differently than one might expect. Local people in many countries simply do not understand the concept of working for free and may incorrectly assume that visiting volunteers are either independently wealthy, financially supported by wealthy parent organizations, or (in a worst case scenario), that volunteers are simply fabricating the truth of their economic reality. In many countries, the continuing presence of volunteers has contributed to an unhealthy “Santa Claus” mind set – where, instead of encouraging self sufficiency, has resulted in a dependency that suggests: “if we do nothing and wait long enough looking as pitiful as possible, Santa Claus will come along and solve our problems”.



Therefore, as this example points out, misconceptions about the role of volunteers have built up over time – partly due to the actions of volunteers themselves and partly due to the poverty (or lack of public problem- solving) often encountered in host countries. Because of this muddled view, volunteers who hope to contribute a maximum of benefits to their hosts are well advised to live, eat, dress, travel, and entertain conservatively without the risk of noticeable excess. In other words, to be

accepted in the local community, **it is prudent to adopt a life style consistent with local standards.** Excess only adds fuel to a flame already brightly burning on pilot.

For the newly arrived volunteer (often brimming with optimism and energy), it is also prudent to lower one's expectations. Slow down, allow time to adjust to the myriad of new impulses, and above all, learn how to listen and observe rather than pontificate with "rocket propelled" judgments.

### **Face**

In many parts of the world (especially in Asia), "**face**" or how one physically presents oneself to others, remains an integral part of cultural conditioning...an ingredient within human interaction that directly leads to the formation of (or the passing of) **judgment.** It remains locally irrelevant whether or not volunteers from developed countries approve of "**face**" as a value standard. If "**face**" is the name of the game in the country you intend to work in – then it remains counter-productive for volunteers to focus on or invest in rebellion. Your host country, regardless of whether or not you personally approve of "face" as a standard of conduct, has a right to establish its own rules. Hopefully, the duty of a volunteer is to **assist** rather than to complain about or attempt to convert the host country!

-----

Helga walked out of the *International Arrival Terminal* - a freshly graduated 24 year old Occupational Therapist filled with youth, energy, optimism, and a healthy portion of social conscience. She was traveling abroad before, as she put it, "settling down to a real job". Helga grew up and then attended university in a cosmopolitan European city. She was embarking upon a developing country "adventure" which would be in total contrast to her roots. Helga had emailed an NGO ahead of time that she had great hopes of providing volunteer therapy services to home-bound rural and remote area indigenous disabled persons.

When Helga introduced herself to the "in-country" NGO office for the first time, she was wearing blue jeans precariously clinging to her hips, a tee shirt tight enough to fit a 10 year old, and a tee shirt length that bordered on a bra. The several exposed parts of her youthful body which were presented to her host upon their first initial meeting included one pierced navel ring, two jeweled studs on the right side of her nose, one turquoise stud above her eyebrow, and 6 multi-colored pierced studs in each ear.

Somehow, after years of sacrifice and educational investment on the part of Helga's parents (not to mention that Helga had been the recipient of some of the finest professional training Europe had to offer), the subject of "**appropriateness**" or better yet "**cultural appropriateness**" had been totally omitted from Helga's education and apparently her home life.

When her host NGO delicately attempted to broach the subject of her multiple piercings and exposures, Helga returned a shocked look that read: "What planet are you people from?"

Before planning her trip, an investment of thirty minutes on the Internet would have provided Helga with information on the "**cultural appropriateness**" of the people she was hoping to work with. Unfortunately, both for Helga and her potential clients, her unwillingness to understand "**cultural appropriateness**" left the NGO with no choice but to decline her offer to volunteer.

**Volunteers, no matter in what capacity they serve, become ambassadors for the local agencies and foundations they represent.** In Helga’s case, her volunteer duties would have taken her into rural homes where touching and manipulating another person’s body would have been essential. For a rural or remote area home-bound (often bed-ridden) disabled person to suddenly confront the face of a white stranger decorated with multiple face piercings did not, in our opinion, encourage either confidence or trust. Fortunately, Helga went on to locate a volunteer position in an urban clinic much better prepared to accept her multiple piercings.

-----

Torben arrived in Nepal with years of background working as a caregiver for disabled persons in his home country of Denmark. Torben had spent his youth as a sailor and over many years, while visiting ports all around the globe, he had accumulated a myriad of colorful tattoos that decorated his arms, legs, and chest.

Because tattoos, especially when applied to the arms and chests of rural Nepali males, was not at all uncommon, Torben’s tattoos were not given much notice. This however, dramatically changed during his first home visit when he was asked to help turn a bed-ridden disabled patient – a “Gurung” Tibetan minority female who was being attended locally by an ethnic minority shaman.

The disabled female was lying face up on her back and needed to be turned onto her side. As Torben began to gently turn the lady, the shaman aggressively placed himself between Torben and the patient and started to shout and wave his arms. What eventually followed was an explanation that the human skulls (suspended like grapes from vines tattooed on Torben’s forearm) were seen as powerful negative symbols which could transfer “bad luck”. Here again, **“cultural inappropriateness”** provided the obstacle, even though this time, it was the NGO’s oversight rather than Torbens.



The potential problems that were posed by Torben’s tattoos were easily resolved when Torben began wearing long sleeve shirts and long pants while visiting clients. Torben went on to provide many months of valuable volunteer service.

What is considered acceptable will vary from one country to another. In many parts of S.E. Asia for example, beards are discouraged and often associated with the absence of cleanliness. In Buddhist countries, the touching of another person’s head without asking permission (or apologizing) is also considered inappropriate. Likewise wearing shoes indoors or pointing one’s feet at a respected religious icon is equally inappropriate.

Wearing modest and appropriate clothing will often invite respect. It is always prudent to keep clean, change clothing regularly, and bathe. In many countries the body odor reputation of youthful foreign visitors who overload themselves with heavy backpacks has already preceded their arrival. Body odor is not always a matter of cleanliness alone. Tropical humidity and sweltering temperatures tend to incubate offensive odors. The point to remember, however, is that even though local people remain polite and rarely say anything confrontational about body odor, this does not mean that they have lost their sense of smell. Finally, as is hopefully self-evident,

cleavage-teasing and bare-chested machismo are seldom appreciated, regardless of the country.

If volunteers hope to maximize the results of their donated labor and skill, the wisest course of action is to become a careful observer of both the behavior and dress code in the host country. Finally - when in doubt, ask!

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### Success Story #1

Ishmael was on his way from India to Vietnam when he stopped in Thailand to take a course in Thai massage. His home country was Spain and he earned his living as a Pyrenees Mountain Guide.

During the off season as a guide, Ishmael had become a self-taught computer expert. He not only knew how to design and develop computer programs, but also how to build and design websites, as well as to repair both hardware and software.

At the conclusion of his 8 day Thai massage course, Ishmael walked into a locally based Thai NGO and offered his volunteer services. He remained for 6 months, paying his own way for everything. During his stay, he taught the entire NGO staff not only how to program a computer, but he also contributed two NGO websites, and designed two NGO brochures.

Ishmael avoided the tourist crowd and spent almost all of his time with the Thai staff. In very short order, he was genuinely accepted and protected as a much-loved family member. When he finally left for home (due to a family emergency), he left Thailand waving at the tear-drenched faces of everyone he had worked with. Around his neck hung a fragrant necklace of Jasmine flowers, a symbol of love and staff respect.

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### Hidden Religious, Political And Sexual Agendas

If political or evangelical conversion (regardless of the religion or political party) is the primary goal or justification of a volunteer, we strongly recommend a policy of “up-front” volunteer-honesty. In other words, define your goal and inform your host about your political or religious agenda **before** you make your travel plans.

Don't surprise your host! Give your host the opportunity to understand your primary intentions. Why? Because there are countless organizations all around the globe that accept volunteers but **do not accept or welcome political or religious agendas**. For example, in many countries political and religious proselytizing is illegal, and could not only result in a volunteer being expelled from the country, but could result in heavy fines or sanctions levied against the host organization. Self-righteousness, arrogance or a myopic perspective are not the proper tools for a volunteer.

Aside from questions of legality or local taboo, a mature volunteer needs to clearly understand that there are countless aid organizations around the world that perform their services as a gesture of **untainted goodwill**. The majority of people involved in these organizations are simply trying to



“give something back to humanity or the earth” without expectation or the hope of an earthly or heavenly reward.

More often than not, a volunteer position, no matter in what country or job position, entails hard work and often includes challenge and stress. The initial impetus for most service and aid organizations is to identify and solve unattended or unaddressed problems throughout the world – **not to create bureaucracies or permanent institutions**. Most of us who devote the better parts of our lives to provide service or assistance to others would prefer that the particular problems we face on a daily basis will eventually clear up, go away, and render our jobs **redundant**. We work not to perpetuate problems **but to solve them!**

If you’re volunteering in Africa to help prevent HIV Aids; in Cambodia to clear land mines; in the arctic to assist with indigenous alcoholism; in Banda Aceh to assist Tsunami survivors; in China to help flood victims; in Guatemala to build houses; or in Thailand to provide mobility to disabled persons.....**stay out of local politics and religion!**

When free benefits, food, money, jobs, or perks are offered to desperate or suffering humanity, it’s only human (and not at all unusual or sinister) for people in distress to promise whatever it takes to secure the help that’s offered. In other words, immediate survival in situations of urgent need can cause people to often say or do whatever is expected of them in order to guarantee immediate help. A volunteer or aid worker who fails to understand this is like a frog trapped under a coconut shell, believing the world is only as large as its tiny prison. Pointing fingers and making negative assumptions about life situations one has never personally experienced is always unwise.

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Asoke was 22 years old with a young wife, a new baby daughter and a good paying job attaching electric wires onto cross arms of concrete posts along city streets. His employer did not provide a safety harness and Asoke was too inexperienced to understand the risks involved in his work.

At the beginning of only his second week on the job, and while he was more than 5 meters above the street, he came in contact with a live wire. The electric shock was so severe that he released both hands from the ladder he was on and fell to the pavement, severing his spinal cord. Asoke now began a new life as a paraplegic.

Whatever savings he had accumulated were immediately exhausted by medical expenses. Without work, neither Asoke nor his family were able to afford a wheelchair, and in his country the government did not provide wheelchairs.

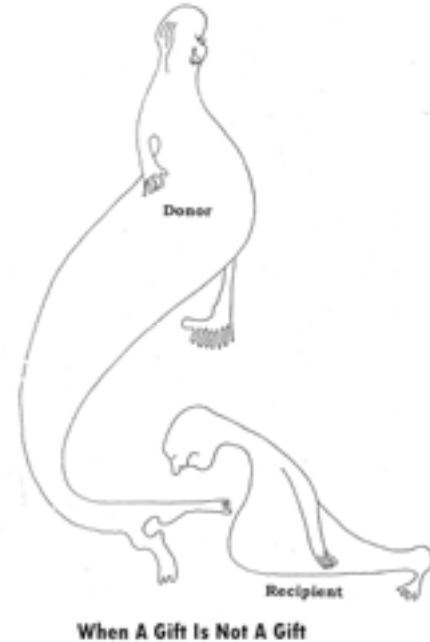
This was precisely the moment when the western “**Volunteer Evangelists**” entered Asoke’s life by offering him a free wheelchair in exchange for religious conversion. Although he had spent all of his life as a Buddhist in a Buddhist culture, Asoke was only too happy to exchange his religion for a wheelchair. As proof of their new “prize conquest”, Asoke agreed to have his photo taken while sitting in his new wheelchair smiling broadly and posing with the “Volunteer Evangelists”. He also placed new religious symbols around his neck and around his room, and even attended initial sessions of “religious training” at the nearby church.

His religious conversion, however, did not last as long as the air in the tires of his wheelchair. Similarly, as soon as he had exposed himself as less than sincere about this new religion, the “Volunteer Evangelists” not only lost interest in Asoke, but also made sweeping generalizations about the lack of honesty of people in Asoke’s

country. Situations similar to those of Asoke are all too common and take place all around the world regardless of whether the prize offered is a free wheelchair, food, medicine, clothing, labor, or even a free education. What remains even more disturbing than questions regarding the sincerity of the suffering recipients, is the fact that strings and expectations are often shackled to free donations.

**If a gift to a needy human being is no more than an extension of donor-control - then, in our opinion, the donation is not a gift.** To be able to provide gifts which are free of donor control – is, we believe, the definition of a successful gift and a constructive volunteer.

Human history is unfortunately ram-packed with tales of well-meaning political and religious evangelists – whether the history has recorded indigenous Inuit children suffering humiliation and mouth-washing for the sin of speaking the Inuit language in Canadian missionary schools; to the histories of entire cultures such as the Inca, the Akha, or the culturally rich indigenous peoples of both north and south America decimated in the name of conversion, or colonization. Will we ever learn?



Every volunteer, aside from technical or professional qualifications, must always choose between the path of arrogance or the path of compromise, adaptation and adjustment. The evolutionary process of life itself, birth to death, youth to age - teaches all of us (if we listen) that what may have been appropriate at one stage of our life can become inappropriate at another. If indeed, our planet needs help in order to survive, help must come in the form of **people with ears who are willing to listen**, compromise, and forsake a pre-conditioned black and white, “right and wrong” singular view of life.

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As a potential volunteer, Mr. Ralph’s resume included 15 year years as a social worker in addition to having received the “Social Worker Of The Year” award in his home country. On paper, Mr. Ralph appeared to be the ideal volunteer candidate to teach English as a foreign language at the overseas orphanage.

The orphanage was located in a former school building facing a busy walking street in the “upscale” section of the city. The orphanage had constructed a visitor information desk immediately adjacent to the walking street. Mr. Ralph, who was a chain smoker, volunteered to help at the information desk because, in his words, “it allowed him to smoke at a safe distance from the children”.

Within only a matter of days, Mr. Ralph began to spend more and more time manning the information booth. Finally, he informed management that he preferred manning the information booth to teaching English. The NGO was unprepared and surprised by this request for change but reluctantly agreed. The real reason for the change soon became apparent. Mr. Ralph had used the information booth as a stage to contact single young women. His efforts on his own behalf proved enormously

successful. Before he resigned his short-lived volunteer position, he introduced everyone at the NGO to his new girl friend.

Stories similar to those of both Asoke and Mr. Ralph are familiar to almost all NGOs. Although such stories may not generate earth tremors – they illustrate what amounts to, in real life, a continual, unproductive, and negative drain on precious NGO resources, finances, energy, and spiritual optimism. In Asoke’s case, he was confronting one of life’s most traumatic challenges – namely adjusting to a completely new life without the use of his legs. His difficult transition could have been made much easier had the new wheelchair been donated without strings attached. In the case of Mr. Ralph, his host NGO had pre-invested both energy and time – not only to secure Mr. Ralph’s visa, but to also arrange the logistics related to his planned English language classes (which had to be cancelled upon his resignation).

Sadly, and because of experiences such as Asoke and Mr. Ralph, many formerly welcoming NGO’s either reverse their volunteer acceptance policy, or become suspicious or cold when receiving volunteer requests. In almost every case (even though many of these organizations depend upon volunteers), they have grown administratively weary of dealing with problems related to volunteers. Being able to record some of these problems in a published form hopefully provides everyone involved in the volunteer experience with fresh insight toward more intelligent preparedness.



### **Expanding Horizons**

The happy postscript to Mr. Ralph’s story is that he later married the young lady he met via the orphanage “information booth”. His marriage opened him to the realities of his wife’s culture, and within less than 6 months after their marriage Mr. Ralph returned to the orphanage, apologized for his former hasty departure, and both husband and new wife went on to donate valuable volunteer service. Mr. Ralph’s experience provides an example of how an increased perspective can also increase maturity.

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### **Persona Reinvention – Volunteers On The Run**

One of the perks of living outside one's home country is the ability to re-invent one's self. In other words, in order to leave life's old baggage behind, a newly arrived foreigner, especially when settling among naive or trusting people, can assume an entirely new persona. It happens often and there is seldom any verification process, particularly in countries where English is not a "first language".

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Mr. David, a citizen of the land "down under" secured a "developing country" volunteer position as a computer teacher and programmer at a severely under budgeted government residential disabled school located some 40 kilometers outside the nearest city. Mr. David presented a comprehensive curriculum vitae. According to his vitae, he was an expert in "computer-speak", and he was compassionately convincing at selling himself. He was a friendly man, tall, and very handsome in the eyes of his potential students. Upon acceptance as a volunteer, Mr. David began to refer to himself as "Teacher David" – a title which was highly respected in his host country.

When he arrived at the school, the existing computer equipment in the less-than-cheerful classroom consisted of several donated, under-powered second-hand computers, one old printer, and a collection of miscellaneous desks. In short order, and with his gift of "gab", Mr. David was able to convince the school Superintendent to launch a government appeal for additional computer funds. The application process, although slow, resulted in enough funds to purchase 6 new computers to be shared among 30 students.

Mr. David selected the computers and arranged the software installation. Unfortunately, the software he selected was in English – a language his students barely understood. His subsequent request for additional funds to update the software into the local language began to raise suspicions in the mind of the Superintendent.

An Interpol police check revealed that there was an outstanding arrest warrant for "Teacher David" in his home country. The Interpol report further revealed that contrary to his curriculum vitae, he had no degrees and no previous experience as a teacher. The Interpol report listed Mr. David's profession as a "wallpaper-hanger".

After "Teacher David" was asked to resign and after he had already departed from the school, the Superintendent received not only a whopping Internet bill from the telephone company (for which "Teacher David" had maintained sole access), but he also discovered that one of their students was missing. A telephone call to the student's home revealed that the student's parents had not heard from their daughter. Several weeks later, police located "Teacher David" happily living together in the nearby city. At last report, the local newspaper published a photograph of "Teacher David" in chains being escorted for deportation to the international airport so he could answer to his outstanding arrest warrant. "Teacher David" learned the hard way that trying to escape from an unresolved past is not always a wise decision.

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## **Expert Volunteers**

Several countries around the globe have established both private and tax-funded agencies which offer developing countries the volunteer services of retired professionals.

Usually, these agencies are inter-governmental but in many instances they are supported by a consortium of both government and industry. In almost every situation, volunteer assignments are handled at an “official” rather than “local” level. The assigning organization accepts and processes volunteer applicants while either the host government or the NGO submits a volunteer request.

The concept to positively encourage and sponsor retired professional skills for the benefit of developing countries is excellent. We applaud the countries and industries that support such programs. These programs, however, need to be carefully administered and managed as illustrated by the following real life examples:

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As a retired civil engineer, and via a well-illustrated brochure, Mr. Klaus located what sounded like an exciting “developing country” volunteer opportunity for retired persons. He checked the list of assignment opportunities and was delighted to discover a repeated need for engineers.

The promotional information in the brochure indicated that this was a joint government-industry program where actual overseas assignments were geared exclusively toward retired persons and arranged locally through an “in-country” staff representative. Further reading indicated that volunteer positions lasted 90 days, round-trip travel expenses were paid in full, visas were arranged free of charge, and volunteers were offered a per-diem stipend based upon the currency of the volunteer home country.

The NGO that Mr. Klaus was eventually assigned to had specifically requested a volunteer with hand skill experience in metal-fabrication. The NGO produced below-the-knee aluminum leg prosthesis, which they both fitted and donated to land mine victims.

On his first day of volunteer service, it became immediately apparent that Mr. Klaus had extremely limited experience working with tools. The NGO workshop staff tried him out on simple tasks such as polishing rough aluminum edges and drilling rivet holes with a bench-mounted electric drill.

By lunch time, Mr. Klaus was totally frustrated and in a foul mood. He reported to the NGO management that he had spent his entire civil engineering career in an urban office planning large scale construction proposals. He telephoned the local “in-country” representative to complain about a “mistake in his assignment”. The representative became defensive and informed Mr. Klaus that it was too late to change the assignment and that he should “simply make the best of it”.

To his credit, Mr. Klaus did invest an additional day or two trying to make himself useful. He came up with the positive idea that he could use the NGO’s Internet connection to locate material and machinery suppliers in his home country, but he frankly admitted that he was severely lacking in computer skills, did not know how to use the Internet, and unless an NGO staff was willing to teach him, he would be unable to locate suppliers except by regular mail.

As the first week passed into the second, Mr. Klaus began showing up less and less and began to show up for work later and later into the work day. The NGO staff did what they could to make him feel welcome, but he was definitely “a fish out of

water”. On his final days at the workshop, Mr. Klaus ended up arriving for work with either a severe hangover or with his breath smelling like a portable brewery. After no more than 3 weeks into his assignment, Mr. Klaus disappeared altogether. It was later learned that he had located a young lady to spend time with and that they were enjoying each other’s company (much to the discomfort of the wife back home to whom he had been married for 35 years).

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Mrs. Rasmussen was a retired registered nurse. She was assigned to a volunteer position in a “third world” country specifically to assist with a rotating rural health program. Her enthusiasm and humanitarian ideals were genuine.



When Its Time To Give Back

She had been told that she would be working in local clinics, but had not been told that a “local clinic” (in the host country) often meant only a bare room, often without electricity, and often without furniture or medical supplies.

Soon after arrival, Mrs. Rasmussen’s first nursing assignment was located in a remote village accessible only by dirt road. The designated clinic space turned out to be a former classroom in a local school. The classroom was furnished with plastic stools and a folding table - nothing more – no equipment, no medicines, and no doctor.

Several waiting patients (mostly women with babies) met Nurse Rasmussen upon arrival. Her village clients lived in bamboo houses with thatched roofs where smoke from the indoor kitchens permeated the household including the hair, skin, and clothing of the inhabitants. The smell of smoke was almost thick enough to cut.

In order to conduct the clinic, Mrs. Rasmussen required a translator. With this translator’s assistance, she tried making “small talk” while conducting her initial client interviews. She reasoned that a measure of “woman to woman small talk” would help to humanize the event – so she asked the translator to inform the women where she was from and continued to describe the 4 star hotel in the city where she was living, the delicious buffet breakfast she had eaten that morning, and the hotel swimming pool (surrounded by romantic oil lamps) which she had enjoyed the night before.

This elderly, well-meaning volunteer had somehow overlooked the reality that her patients were dirt-poor subsistence farmers, had never seen a swimming pool except on TV, and had never eaten a buffet hotel breakfast in their entire lives. As the heat of the day progressed, the cultural divide between the nurse and her patients grew from a rift to a chasm. The constant smell of wood-smoked bodies, the absence of equipment, the minimal furniture, and the language frustration left Mrs. Rasmussen totally exhausted.

Mrs. Rasmussen spent only one day as a rural health nurse. She applied for re-assignment and secured a second posting in an urban hospital.

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Franz Grude had spent his working life with a company that provided management

training for small businesses. He therefore appeared to be the ideal retired candidate to assist and train a newly-formed cooperative of rural women who had been approved to receive a foreign mini-loan to produce chicken eggs with plans to market the eggs in the city.

He was informed about his assignment several months in advance, and although he knew nothing specific about chicken eggs, he invested a great deal of library and Internet time gathering useful information. When he finally arrived “in-country”, Franz was reasonably well prepared.

On his first morning of work, the government official who was assigned to oversee Mr. Grude’s efforts, met him at his hotel with a 4 wheel drive vehicle. Their destination was a rural community located in a dense jungle area at the base of a mountain range, about 25 kilometers south of the city. The views and landscapes during the drive out were lush and beautiful. Mr. Grude was in high spirits as the 4-wheel drive crawled over stones and sand in several dry river beds.

Mr. Grude was completely unaware that his assignment had been scheduled to begin at the end of the dry season and just before the annual arrival of the 5 long months of monsoon rains. As luck or fortune would have it, the first monsoon rains were already saturating the nearby mountain tops even while they were in route. By the time Franz and his host were ready to return to the city, the former dry river bed crossings had been transformed into “white-water” madness - depositing plants, tree branches, jungle brush, and even boulders half the size of the vehicle directly into the former “low water” crossings.

For safety, the vehicle was parked on high ground, the 2 men had no choice but to spend several additional days in the village, and then, when the water subsided, their only option was to walk out leaving the vehicle for another time. Safely back in the city, Mr. Grude requested and was granted a special meeting with the Project Director who was handling the approved assignment. He wanted to know how a project to market eggs had been approved for a group of women who’s village was inaccessible by road for 5 months a year. Sadly, Mr. Grude’s question was met with immediate re-assignment. Saving face and denying government responsibility proved easier than admitting and repairing a major assignment mistake.

Oversees agencies assigning retired volunteers to positions in developing countries must first understand conditions at the location of assignment. Mistakes cost energy, time, money, and when all three ingredients are preciously in short supply, mistakes such as those described should not happen.

Assigning agencies would be well served to conduct honest and timely orientation programs for retired professionals, especially to provide basic language skills as well as orientation on climate, health and medical conditions, food, accommodations, cultural taboos, plus a fair and frank assessment of the local economy. The British based Volunteer Service Organization (VSO) is an excellent example of a volunteer placement organization that regularly conducts in-country volunteer orientation.

It is also counter-productive for placement agencies to send people abroad who have a problem with alcohol or smoking. Volunteers should arrive in good health and with a full supply of whatever medicines they might need.

If retired volunteers require the constant service of guides and translators in order to perform their duties, the volunteer often consumes more energy than they donate. Likewise, a volunteer who requires a special diet (such as a vegan) may present problems for the host organization if the volunteer is unable to self-manage diet requirements.

Assigning agencies must always verify that the specific volunteer job skill matches the volunteer job requirement. Efforts which promote the image of a free “volunteer holiday” in an exotic far off culture risks a disservice to everyone involved.

Retired volunteers who accept such assignments should also take full responsibility to prepare themselves. With easy Internet access to the international information “highway”, a poorly prepared volunteer is often a prelude to a lazy or problematic volunteer. Inappropriate assignments can usually be traced to a mistake shared between both the volunteer and the assigning agency.

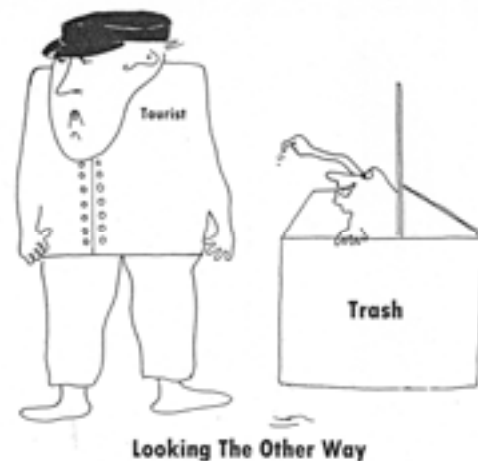
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## Success Story #2

Cousins Herbert and John Langley were both registered male nurses. In their European home country Herbert worked as a nurse in a physicians clinic while John worked at a health insurance company interviewing medical insurance applicants. Every year, because they had similar interests, they spent their holidays together. Both were single.

For several years, they had talked about traveling together to India, but they had always put it off “for another time”. Finally, when seaside holidays had lost their appeal, they planned a 30 day combination bus/train trip in India which was to start in Delhi and meander both “on and off the beaten track” until they reached Trivandrum in the far south. Neither Herbert nor John had any pre-warning that this innocent sight-seeing trip would change both of their lives, but it did!

Into their third week, and as they were sitting comfortably in the lobby bar of their Bangalore hotel relaxing with a drink before dinner, John looked out the window and saw a group of ragged boys climbing in and out of a garbage dumpster, apparently collecting scraps of discarded food in plastic bags. John got up out of his chair, walked out the hotel front door, and walked over to the dumpster to get a better look at exactly what was going on. What he saw shocked him to the core and dramatically altered the course of his entire life. Inside the foul smelling dumpster were 3 street children - small boys about 8 years old pawing through and eating rotting food scraps from the nearby hotel kitchen. John’s sudden presence startled the boys. They quickly scrambled out of the dumpster and ran away while John returned to the lobby bar shaken but anxious to relate his experience to his cousin Herbert.



For the next 2 to 3 hours the two men remained in the lobby bar reflecting upon the circumstances of their comfortable, affluent European lives. They reached the conclusion that they could either “blank out” and ignore the reality of what they had just witnessed, or they could do something about it.

Upon returning home, both men resigned from their jobs, vacated their apartments, withdrew their savings, and embarked upon a one year overseas volunteer opportunity as nurses in the clinic of a rural Indian children’s orphanage. They accepted this

position in order to gain experience living abroad as well as to gain experience working in conditions much more primitive than what they were used to at home.

At the end of their volunteer year, they moved to north Thailand, and with a “shoestring out of pocket” investment from their own savings, they opened a free clinic with a home visit program for poor families infected with HIV Aids. Herbert took on duties as a nurse while John (who had his own laptop computer) embarked upon fund raising and administrative record-keeping.

Today, this on-going facility is 10 years old. Both Herbert and John are completely fluent in the tonal Thai language. Herbert remained single, but John is now married to a local Thai and together, they have two lovely children.

After extraordinary effort, the facility they founded now has its own building, in addition to operating two mobile clinic vans. The free services offered include family counseling, medicines, HIV Aids prevention information in cooperation with local Buddhist temples, vitamin-enriched milk for HIV infected children, Aids orphan placement, and financial assistance for families who have insufficient funds for proper cremations.

Positive volunteer experiences similar to that of Herbert and John are not uncommon. They have become proven realities all around the world and regularly provide extraordinary contributions to a broad variety of NGO’s. The shared threads that weave all of these positive examples into one singular whole cloth include a harmony of compassion, skill, flexibility, dogged-perseverance, curiosity, and a passionate respect for life on earth.

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### **Success Story #3**

Charles and Rachael Dean embarked upon an “around the world” retirement adventure. They had been married 37 years, had 3 adult children, 4 grand children and were both in their mid-sixties. Charles completed a career as an industrial chemist. Rachael had been a career accountant.

After visiting several countries, and by the time they reached Cambodia, they were both travel weary, needed to stop, and felt a mutual urge to stay put in one place for awhile. Rather than lying around on a beach, they decided to offer themselves as volunteers. The NGO they selected was involved in clearing land mines....duties that were far too strenuous and dangerous for the Deans, so they volunteered their services to the office and the workshop.

Although Charles came from a highly professional background, he carried out a broad range of maintenance tasks in the workshop, including cleaning tools, replacing broken window glass, repairing a roof, and eventually giving all the walls of the entire workshop a coat of fresh white paint. Rachael volunteered her time in the office updating files, cleaning cobwebs off the ceiling, and even scrubbing down the staff toilet.

Not once in 4 weeks did either Charles or Rachael voice a complaint. Both were mature enough to realize that a successful volunteer contributes whatever is necessary in order to provide assistance. Rather than saying “NO” to menial tasks, they just did them, and they did them well. When they were about to leave Cambodia to continue their travel adventure, the NGO staff held a “farewell” party in their honor and presented them with “Certificates Of Appreciation” printed on hand-made mulberry paper.

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## **Information, Resource And Energy Theft**

Mr. Lorrell earned his living as a 16-wheel tractor-trailer long distance truck driver spending most of his work life “on the road”, traveling between container seaports and trucking agencies. As an “independent contractor” he made a habit of taking a 3 month holiday every winter in order to avoid driving on highways covered with ice and snow. Mr. Lorrell was only 3 years from retirement and because he didn’t like fishing or sports, he was concerned about what he would do during his retirement.

During the winter of his 62<sup>nd</sup> year, Mr. Lorrell decided to purchase a round trip ticket to India. As he experienced a myriad of new sensations, he was often shocked by the contrast between wealth and abject poverty. For the first time in his life, he saw children pawing through garbage for scraps of food, and families sleeping on sidewalks within view of jeweled monuments and religious icons frosted with gold.

As he later explained, what happened next was an “epiphany”. Mr. Lorrell suddenly saw himself walking down the future path of his life as the founder of an NGO dedicated toward providing educational sponsorship. Obviously as a 16-wheel truck driver, he was very aware that his driving skills were inappropriate to setting up a foundation. Because of this, Mr. Lorrell devised a strategy to invest the next 2 years of his winter holiday endearing himself to a well established Indian social service organization in order to observe and gather useful information.

The next year, and as soon as the weather turned, Mr. Lorrell headed back to India. He walked into the door of an HIV Aids facility which provided shelter and support for Aids orphans, and offered himself as a caregiver. Because he had a sense of humor and could play guitar and tell stories, he was accepted as a volunteer.

For the next 2 months Mr. Lorrell was a regular visitor at the orphanage and nobody gave him much thought as he photographed children, recorded videos, and used the orphanage computer to access his emails. To his credit, he did spend time with the children playing his guitar and teaching simple songs. At the end of his holiday and as spring was about to arrive back home, he returned to his country.

The following winter, Mr. Lorrell again appeared at the Indian orphanage, but this time he had a different agenda. He informed the director that he had set up a foundation in his country and because his Euros could buy more in India than at home, he had returned in order to build both a website and publish a brochure. The orphanage director provided helpful contact recommendations and Mr. Lorrell went on his way.

He did not return to the orphanage again until just before he was scheduled to return home. The director was in conference and had no time for a personal meeting so Mr. Lorrell left a copy of his newly printed brochure with an attached business card.

What the orphanage then discovered, was that Mr. Lorrell had manipulated everyone at the orphanage to his own gain. Without their knowledge or approval, several color photos of both orphanage children and staff appeared in Mr. Lorrell’s brochure. The brochure listed a website and the website was filled with photos and a video of children in the orphanage. Both the brochure and the website contained an aggressive appeal for donations and identified the photographed children as having been recipients of Mr. Lorrell’s sponsorship support. By the time the orphanage was fully aware of what had happened, Mr. Lorrell was already flying safely home to his country. The eventual receipt of Mr. Lorrell’s newsletter also revealed that during his volunteer time at the orphanage, he had copied their computer email addresses and included orphanage supporters in his own fund raising appeals. The Board of the

Indian orphanage soon voted unanimously to never again welcome foreign volunteers. No financial support was ever received from Mr. Lorrell or his foundation.

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### **Volunteer English Language Teachers**

NGO's are often inundated with volunteer applications to teach English. Unless the applicant has a teaching certificate plus experience, these applications are often viewed with suspicion. More often than not, they originate from individuals who are first and foremost in search of stimulating travel or holiday experiences, and secondly from individuals without specific volunteer skills. When attempting to teach English as an overseas volunteer, please secure and present teaching credentials!

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Olav Nordstrom arrived in his host country recently graduated from a small high school near Trondheim in north Norway. He accepted a volunteer position to teach English in a rural Nepali school. There were 16 senior high school students in his class. Olav's melodious Norwegian accent dominated his English. By the end of his first semester, all 16 Nepali students were almost perfectly mimicking Olav's Norwegian/English accent. This might have ended as an endearing story except that two of Olav's graduating students who tried to enroll in a Kathmandu university English language program failed the conversational English interview because of their thick melodious Norwegian accent.

On a more positive note, there are literally dozens of examples where experienced language teachers have made incredible and lasting contributions to cultures. The film "The King And I" illustrates just one example. Another significant example is the written Hmong language which is today used by several million people – a written language which was produced by Catholic volunteers.

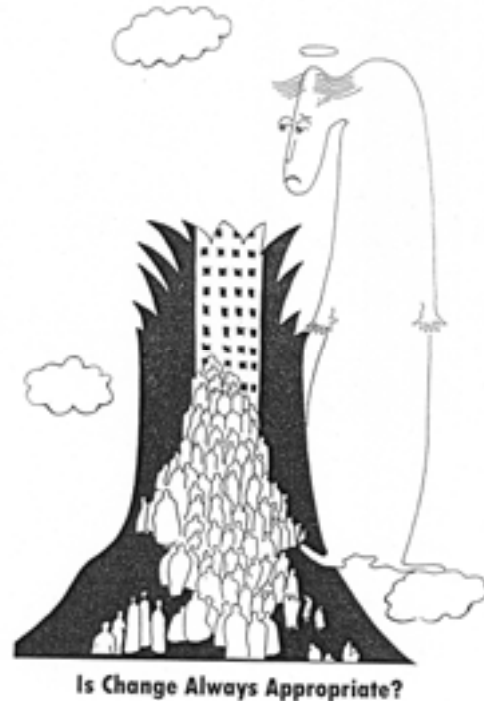
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### **Western Cultural Baggage**

When volunteers pack their suitcases for overseas assignments, it is strongly recommended that **cultural baggage be left at home**. Perhaps the most difficult and stressful aspect of volunteering overseas is the often unwillingness on the part of a newly arrived volunteer to tolerate, accept, or embrace a "different" perspective. Value judgments or rules of conduct which are standard in Europe, North America, or Australia, may not only be in conflict with the values of the host country, but they may also be irrelevant.

The new volunteer who learns how to "go with the flow" instead of investing energy to change or challenge the flow is more often than not a more productive volunteer. An impending storm should become self-evident if the volunteer confronts the host with "in-your face" questions masked within pre-judgments. Eight examples follow:

1. Why are all Mexicans dishonest?
2. Why don't Nepali's know how to solve problems?
3. Why don't Chinese toilets have toilet paper?
4. Why don't Vietnamese drivers look before entering traffic?
5. Why do Hindus bathe in filthy river water?
6. Why do Thais talk in circles without straight answers?
7. Why don't Buddhist monks get a real job?
8. Why do indigenous people smell bad?



To the ears of a volunteer host, all of the above questions may suggest a basic cultural disapproval, or, in a worst case scenario, may even ring like a racial slur.

Many languages outside the “west” contain expressions which provide keys to cultural values such as encouraging one to “remain cool”, “never mind”, “enjoy”, or suggest “nothing serious intended”. These cultures often endorse a tolerance for diversity rather than a confrontation with diversity. They often accept life in tones of grey rather than as black and white. In many non-western cultures life is defined as an on-going process of compromise which **celebrates rather than rejects human diversity**.

The volunteer who listens and learns before “pontificating axioms” will eventually (by exercising patience in preference to urgency), gain a deeper insight into answers for most of the puzzling questions within an unfamiliar culture.

With patience and experience one discovers eight possible answers to the above questions:

1. Millions of Mexicans are indeed honest.
2. Rote education in Nepal seldom rewards individual initiative.
3. Chinese provide their own toilet paper (or twig) in rural areas.
4. Vietnamese drivers allow the right-of-way to vehicles entering the road.
5. River water often entails spiritual cleansing – not a bath.
6. When speaking, Thais allow room for compromise.
7. A Buddhist monk represents the presence of Lord Buddha.
8. Water may be frigid, scarce, or body odors may be perceived differently.

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Jody and Steven accepted a volunteer assignment from an agency of their government that provided aid in the form of what was referred to as “mini start-up loans”

limited to \$300 per applicant. They were sent to a rural community where one year earlier, another volunteer, who had apparently processed several loans, had contracted malaria and was forced to return home.

Unfortunately, the former volunteer who returned home prematurely had not yet recorded or reported the loans he had already made. When later contacted, he claimed to have “misplaced” his notes during his illness.

Jody and Steven were assigned the impossible task of visiting area families in order to determine who had received loans. Word of the missing loan records apparently spread like wild fire throughout the community. After 2 weeks of interviewing, Jody and Steven were unable to locate even one former loan recipient.

Needless to say, in the eyes of local residents, this internal agency mistake made the two dedicated volunteers appear as if they were “circus buffoons”.

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### Size, Color, and Beauty

Western volunteers are often (but not always) both taller and larger than their hosts. Size often becomes a value judgment in itself. Beauty and skin color also provide fertile territory for value judgments. A volunteer who projects superiority by virtue of size, beauty, or skin color is in the wrong line of work and may, in fact, be perceived locally as a tumor rather than a contributor. On the positive side, a tall or physically beautiful white-skinned westerner who volunteers in Asia, Africa, or among indigenous people will find greater acceptance when projecting personal and cultural humility as opposed to arrogance. Hollywood and other forms of “western” media have already imposed many years of historical disservice to the concept of tolerance by promoting stereotypes based upon color tones. Many Asians, for example, admit that they often feel “looked down upon” by “western” Caucasians. Similar feelings are shared by many non-Caucasian people in developing countries. A good way to keep clear of this danger zone is to remain spiritually color blind.



### Confrontation And Anger

One of the most common mistakes “western” visitors make when traveling outside their own culture is to assume that confrontation and/or anger will “clear the air” and solve problems of misunderstanding. It may well be acceptable in Frankfurt, Copenhagen, New York, Los Angeles or Sydney, for example, to angrily confront the Director of an NGO about a problematic assignment or policy, but in many non-western countries both anger and confrontation are seen as an indicator that the confronter may be both spiritually and mentally unwell....inviting a reaction not unlike avoiding a contagious and threatening virus that risks being transferred from one person to another.

Life offers a myriad of ways to solve and clear up problems. Confrontation and anger are not among them and can negatively transform a blip into a volcano.

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#### **Success Story #4**

Yost and Brit had been recently married. They invested their savings on an Asian honeymoon. In their home country, Yost had worked for a perfume-maker while Brit was employed as a caregiver at an independent living facility for disabled persons. They had not planned to interrupt their honeymoon or become volunteers. It just happened! It happened when they became aware of the human suffering in the country they were visiting. Apparently, and in unison, it was as if a voice inside them had challenged them to provide help.

The interruption in their honeymoon led to a 10 month volunteer commitment, and eventually led to building a communication network in their own country which provided

on-going support for the always-struggling local volunteer NGO. Yost and Brit were in their early twenties when they were married. Today, they are approaching middle-age

and still directly involved as supporters of their first volunteer experience.

Neither Yost nor Brit saw their involvement as a temporary “fling”. Their overseas volunteer experiences triggered a lifetime commitment. Yost and Brit provide a vivid example of how volunteers can not only return home enriched, but also create productive avenues for providing on-going support in their home country.

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#### **The Visa Seeker**

Annalisa had just completed her Bachelor’s Degree in social work. She felt that after 4 years of study, she deserved a well-earned holiday. Annalisa sent her curriculum vitae to an NGO in rural India after she had “surfed” the Internet to review the beach “scene” in Goa. She figured she could work a little and then “lay back” at the beach.

Her curriculum vitae was impressive. During summers, Annalisa had worked as an orphanage caregiver, as a camp counselor for recovering addicts, as a lifeguard, and as a teacher of handicrafts. The only problem she had with the Indian assignment was that the position required a one year commitment in exchange for a “volunteer visa”. “Oh well”, she thought, “Once I get the 1 year visa, I can work 3 or 4 months and then find a plausible excuse to leave, perhaps *health reasons*, or whatever”. Annalisa choreographed and carried out all her plans (and her early departure) to perfection. Her hosts, however, only remembered her as the cause of fallout from her early departure.

Many NGO’s and government agencies can and often do provide assistance for volunteers to obtain long term “in-country” visas. However, volunteers who manage visas on their own will be greatly appreciated. Having done so, they will also be in a “cleaner” position (in regard to pre-arrangements) should the volunteer assignment prove unsuitable.

Most governments that welcome volunteers also maintain visa information websites that not only provide comprehensive details, but also visa application forms. Prospective volunteers need to realize that long term visas are both a courtesy and a privilege. They should not be abused!

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## A Final Story

In itself, this book represents a positive illustration of volunteer energy. Its author began his first volunteer experience 30 years ago working to secure equal employment rights within an Appalachian black community in North Carolina. At that time, a white man working with “black families” (especially in so-called “red neck” communities) was an unpopular and often risky commitment. It was not uncommon during those years to receive “friendly advice” in the form of cautionary suggestions to literally “watch one’s back”.

This initial “domestic” volunteer experience was followed by a sequence of overseas experiences that ranged from providing clothing to poor and needy rural Indians in the highlands of Guatemala – to organizing “Minke” whale appreciation in Norway – to working directly with Japanese atomic bomb survivors on a project to circle the Pentagon with “peace ribbons”.

The first long term volunteer experience (which lasted 8 years) was in Nepal providing educational scholarships for both Nepali and Tibetan orphans and half orphans. Consequently, and after many years volunteering in Nepal (especially working among dozens of extraordinary people who literally owned nothing other than their own clothing and a few blankets or cooking utensils), many of life’s “western values” and/or “assumptions” begged to be re-defined. And they often were.

Volunteering outside of one’s birth country for extended periods of time can often result in problems of *adjustment re-entry*, especially as one ages. What frequently happens is that long term volunteers begin to feel like “visitors” rather than “residents” of their birth country. Commuting between an “affluent west” and a “barely emerging east” is not unlike being caught between a “rock and a hard place”.

In 1990 at the age of 57, the author took the giant leap not only to make a permanent residence change to Asia, but to also commit the rest of his working life to being a full time volunteer. Results from this decision have led to establishing north Thailand’s first disabled-controlled Foundation in addition to a disabled-run service center, a wheelchair production workshop, a disabled publishing program, and a mobile rural home-visit program for disabled persons. Last but not least (and surely the most exciting point of all), volunteering has opened up an ever-expanding and challenging perspective on life itself!

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Yes, to volunteer, especially to volunteer overseas, can be an extraordinary adventure, but it is rarely a “piece of cake”. Challenges often include learning a new language, exploring unfamiliar values, understanding a less urgent sense of time, alternative approaches to problem solving, a continual interaction with a broad variety of personalities who may think and react quite differently than what one is accustomed to, and of course continual exposure to new foods, smells, music, rhythms, and even nature. Mandatory age retirement or “*shelving lessons learned through life*” is fortunately, not a volunteer requirement!

### Reminder List Of 8 Positive Tools For The Prospective Volunteer

1. **A sense of humor**, especially an ability to laugh at oneself can often be the strongest span in building a cultural bridge.
2. Every **attempt to speak the language of the host country**, no matter how short the assignment, will produce positive results. Also when speaking English, try to speak slowly, enunciate clearly, and use common and simple words.
3. **Come prepared**. Preparedness includes learning about the host culture in order to avoid surprises. It also includes being personally prepared in regard to required medicines, food supplements or additives, special clothing needs (for weather conditions), adequate finances, passport and document safe-keeping, document back up copies in case of loss or theft, bank contacts, home-contact addresses and telephone numbers, and all other personal requirements while abroad including even such minor, but important items as allergy sprays or creams which have proved successful for the volunteer but may not be easily available in the host country.
4. **Music**. Like humor, the ability to share music is often a key in closing cultural gaps. Music is often referred to as “a universal language”. Whenever possible, bring along a musical instrument.
5. **Games, theatre and hand skills**. Volunteers who know how to play finger games, who can twist balloons into abstract and animal forms, or who can apply make up as characters or clowns will always be endeared to both children and parents, even in the most difficult of situations. Likewise the ability to demonstrate and/or teach hand skills, especially skills which are unfamiliar in the host country are always invaluable. Simple skills, especially skills related to the natural environment (hunting, fishing, food gathering, agriculture, construction, cooking, etc) will immediately transform the volunteer from an observer into a welcome and equal participant. Whenever a volunteer can communicate that “we are all in this together” it will produce a bonus. Aloofness or acting like “a fish out of water” or even (God forbid) falling into a role as a visiting dignitary have no place in overseas volunteering.
6. **Bring resources** – and be prepared for problem solving. Suggested resources include books, pamphlets, tapes, internet addresses, CD’s, videos, step-by-step diagrams, how-to, and especially photos of family. Don’t tell people about your family. Show them! If you have a laptop, bring it!
7. **Empathy, flexibility, and self motivation** are appreciated everywhere.
8. **Limit expectations**, and endorse a flexible sense of time.

### A Reminder List Of 8 Qualities To Leave At Home

1. Arrogance.
2. Bad habits, including alcohol, drug, and tobacco misuse.
3. Anger or rebellion.
4. Excuses and rationalizations.
5. Manipulation.
6. Self pity.
7. Proselytizing.
8. A rigid mind set.



## **Setting Standards**

Governments, NGO's and Volunteer Assigning Agencies need to adopt tighter and more professional volunteer standards. When requested, volunteers should be required to provide:

1. Copies of professional diplomas or license certification for assignments that require professional skills. In other words, if a volunteer makes claim to a specific profession (for example doctor, nurse, lawyer, architect, engineer, etc.), such a claim should be supported not only with actual documents of certification, but also with employment evidence within that profession.
2. When requested, volunteers should be willing to provide a police clearance which certifies a clean police history in their country of residence.
3. Letters of reference which include full access information to the individuals or firms which provided the reference.
4. Copies of bank statements (upon request) to verify sufficient "in-country" travel funds.
5. Emergency contact information in the volunteer's country of residence.
6. A copy of the volunteer's passport and visa.
7. When requested, volunteers should be willing to provide refundable security deposits for assignments which involve the use of expensive equipment or the expenditure of NGO funds.

In today's world, when it has become standard procedure for all citizens around the world to provide verification only to rent a car, why then, is it also not acceptable to require verification when seeking responsible volunteer assignments? The positive results from adopting higher standards will far outweigh the short term irritation, or inconvenience. Providing volunteer service is a serious matter and should not be taken lightly. All parties involved in the overall volunteer experience are well advised to professionalize application procedures and standards of performance.

## **Recommendations For All Agencies Working With Volunteers**

1. Define, publish, and post clear volunteer expectations including "**Do's and Don'ts**". This orientation list should include specific volunteer duties, information on chain of command, work hours, number of working days in a week, dress code, information about time off, health requirements, use and responsibility for equipment, and should also include information on local "taboos". A thoughtful and appreciative effort should also include helpful local information such as a map, currency exchange, transportation, medical resources (doctor and hospital) plus a few suggestions on "where-to-find" reasonable rents, a bank, a post office, a book store, internet access, and food, restaurant and market sources. Balancing this publication between expectations and helpful practical suggestions conveys an appreciative and warm volunteer welcome.
2. Agencies seeking volunteers need to accurately and honestly describe local working conditions and available equipment. If spaces and equipment are minimal or in a deteriorated state of repair, this should be clarified.
3. Upon arrival in the host country, volunteers should be provided with a basic orientation as a "hands-on" follow-up to published information. Likewise, agency or NGO management and staff should also be given pre-arrival orientation on what to expect of volunteers as well as how to provide a

welcoming and supportive work environment. Agencies should caution staff to avoid comments or actions which might be interpreted as discriminatory.

4. All agencies need to practice what they preach. The expectations imposed on volunteers should also be required of regular staff. For example, to offer a volunteer only 30 minutes for lunch while allowing staff to take off half an afternoon suggests waste, discrimination and hypocrisy.



5. Agency management and staff need to learn how to listen and review. One of the most common contributions attempted by volunteers is to offer suggestions toward what the volunteer perceives as a “better way of doing things”. Nobody (particularly management) knows all the answers to everything, and very often volunteer suggestions can and do result in positive changes that provide rewards for agency staff, not to mention the agency itself. If, on the other hand, a volunteer suggestion sounds inappropriate, it is more constructive to explain “why” rather than to say: “no”, or ridicule the suggestion.
6. Agencies need to establish regularly scheduled performance reviews that invite opportunities to resolve problems and improve effectiveness. Reviews should work two ways – guaranteeing feedback for both the agency and the volunteer.
7. The presence of a volunteer often provides an important “expanding” experience for everyone involved including management, staff, and especially the volunteer. Improving staff access to the English language skill is only one of the “expanding” examples. Tolerance and patience are therefore essential building blocks for a successful volunteer assignment.
8. All agencies and NGO’s need to continually review volunteer assignments in order to insure that volunteers do not feel they are wasting their energy, resources, or time. Most volunteers do what they do because they want to “make a difference” or make a “positive contribution” to the lives of the people they work with. Boring volunteers with meaningless or unproductive assignments is counter productive.

### **About The Author**

Don Willcox has worked as both a domestic and overseas volunteer for more than 30 years – in Appalachia, Guatemala, Nepal, and Thailand. He is the founder of two continuing Asian volunteer foundations – **Hands In Outreach**, an educational sponsorship program in Nepal, and the **Foundation To Encourage The Potential Of Disabled Persons** in Thailand. In 1999 he received Thailand’s “Volunteer Of The Year” award. Don is also the author of more than 30 books, including several bi-lingual self-help books published in Nepal and Thailand.

### **The Illustrations**

Volunteer illustrations in this publication were graciously contributed by long time friend Inger Kantanen of Finland.

### **About The Publication**

This publication matured and improved because of the direct and positive **volunteer** editorial skills of David Werner at Healthwrights, P.O. Box 1344, Palo Alto, California, 94302, USA. Among his lifetime efforts, David is the author of “*Where There Is No Doctor*”, “*Disabled Village Children*” and “*Nothing About Us Without Us*”. David’s life is one more extraordinary example of a life devoted to “giving” Thank you David!

For more information about this publication, please visit our websites at: [www.freedomwheelchairs.org](http://www.freedomwheelchairs.org) and [www.infothai.com/disabled](http://www.infothai.com/disabled) For readers interested in the subject of disability, we have other books available at email:

[assist@loxinfo.co.th](mailto:assist@loxinfo.co.th)

For additional information on Healthwrights publications, visit [www.healthwrights.org](http://www.healthwrights.org)

**“Sample Volunteer Application”**

**First Name** \_\_\_\_\_ **Middle Name** \_\_\_\_\_ **Last Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Home Address:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Home Telephone (Include Country Code):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Next Of Kin Address: (In Case Of Emergency)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Date Of Birth:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Passport # And Country:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Visa Details (If Available)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Education (Including Degrees And/Or Specialized Training And Name and Address Of Schools Or Institutions)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Employment (Please list work experience for the past 5 years including location, job title and duties performed)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Character and Employment References – (Please provide 3 names and addresses)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Please Tell Us About Yourself And Why You Wish To Volunteer:**



**Sample Volunteer Evaluation Form**

Volunteer's  
Name\_\_\_\_\_

Home Country &  
Address\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Email\_\_\_\_\_

Date Of Volunteer  
Arrival\_\_\_\_\_

Work  
Performance\_\_\_\_\_

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Attendance &  
Punctuality\_\_\_\_\_

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Language  
Evaluation\_\_\_\_\_

Attitude And  
Adaptability\_\_\_\_\_

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Signature and Date\_\_\_\_\_

Appendix 3

**Sample Letter Of Appreciation**

Date\_\_\_\_\_

Name Of Volunteer  
Address Of Volunteer

This letter is being provided as thanks and as an acknowledgement for your generous volunteer contributions to our work.

We especially want to thank you for your specific contributions toward

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and the assistance and friendship you provided to members of our staff.

We wish you good health and every success as you continue on in your journey through life. Please consider yourself as a member of our extended family.

You are most welcome to visit us any time. Thank you again.

Letter

Signature  
Title Of Person Signing

Name and Address of NGO