
Your Punishment ... Community Service

Get caught breaking the law and you'll likely be punished. Exceed the speed limit and you may be required to pay a fine. Drink and drive and you may have your driver's license taken away. Steal from someone and you may spend some time behind bars. Commit some other crime and you may get the worst punishment of all ... *community service!*

Stop the insanity! I'll pay the fine, take the bus, and spend some time in the pokey ... but please don't make me do community service! Are you kidding me? We *punish* people by requiring them to provide community service? We *punish* people by requiring them to help other people? Are you kidding me?

I am utterly amazed that we live in a society that considers service to our community as a form of punishment. It shouldn't be considered a punishment to serve our community ... it should be considered an honor. In fact, we should all be required to provide a certain amount of time to serve our communities.

Research shows that since President Bush issued his call to service in 2002, nearly six million more Americans have begun volunteering in their communities. I'm not certain how many were volunteering prior to his call to service, but the number is still small when you consider the population of the United States is nearly 300,000,000.

As leaders, we should be using our influence to encourage people to give back. Some of the best lessons we'll ever learn will come from serving others. There are several reasons we should all be willing to provide community service, including:

It will put your own life in perspective

In pursuit of our own success, we sometimes forget what the rest of the world is like. You'll find it's difficult to complain about your family after you've spent some time with kids who never knew their parents. You'll find it's difficult to complain about your home after you've spent time with people who don't have a home. You'll find it's difficult to complain about your job after you've spent time helping less fortunate people fill out a job application. By taking the time to help others, you may just discover that by helping others, you really are helping yourself.

You'll become more accepting of other people

Take a look at the people close to you. We have a tendency to surround ourselves with people with similar interests, lifestyles and beliefs. At the same time, we tend to alienate people who don't think like we think, or look like we look, or talk like we talk. When we serve the people in our communities, we will likely be helping people who are not like us. As a result, we become more accepting of other people.

You'll learn the importance of a single person

Some people think of community service as providing for a group of people. While that may be true in some instances, your efforts can help you see the importance of a single person. Although you may be building a house for Habitat for Humanity, you may learn the story of why a father is struggling to provide for his family. Although you may volunteer at a retirement home, you may learn the story of a grandmother who's made a great contribution to the world in the way she raised her children. Although you may be working with abandoned and abused children, you may learn the story of a young girl's dream to make a difference in the world. Community service may be about serving the community, but for you personally, it may be about learning the importance of a single person.

Nobel Peace Prize winner Albert Schweitzer once said: "I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know. The only ones among you who will be truly happy will be those who have sought and found how to serve." As the son of a Lutheran pastor, Albert Schweitzer dedicated his life to the service of others. Imagine the impact we could have if we just dedicated a fraction of our lives to the service of others.

Service to others should not be seen as punishment. Nor should it be seen as something you do for three hours on a Saturday morning. When you get to the point that serving others is not just something you do, but something you are, the feeling will be better than any paycheck you'll ever receive. The money you earn will be spent and soon forgotten. The feeling you get from helping others will stay with you for a lifetime.

Here's to a lifetime of helping others!

God bless!

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