

Strategy for Development

A PHILOSOPHY OF SERVICE

By Global Volunteers Co-founder and President Burnham J. Philbrook

Each of us is accountable for our own personal development. However, we are also entrusted with gifts and talents to be shared with others. Global Volunteers provides a direct way to share those gifts and talents. We are dedicated to building a foundation for world peace and justice by enabling ordinary people to make a contribution through service to others, and in the process enrich the opportunities for mutual international understanding.

WAGE PEACE & PROMOTE JUSTICE

While national governments have the primary responsibility for maintaining peace, they are limited in what they can actually do to ensure a just and peaceful world. Individuals, on the other hand, can make tremendous personal contributions toward peace and justice. All of us who hope for peace are challenged to take on some of this responsibility.

Our strategy is a direct approach of waging peace by encouraging and enabling people throughout the world to spend short periods working with and learning from local people in communities other than their own. It is a people-to-people strategy based upon the recognition that war and injustice are born of insufficient human and economic development, and that individuals from any community working as volunteers can assist people from other communities and cultures in their development. Furthermore, when people are engaged as volunteers, they enrich their awareness of the earth's cultural, ethnic, religious, and racial diversity, discover that we are all far more alike than we are different, and frequently establish meaningful friendships with the people with whom they serve. It is our hope and belief that this newfound awareness and the new friendships will result in multitudes of people urging their respective governments to institute and honor mechanisms which require the peaceful resolution of disputes, which otherwise might deteriorate into war.

Development. The word "development" has many definitions. We use it to describe a process whereby people achieve their full human potential and reach for the fullness of life. Life's fullness is reflected in personal and community integrity, culture, wisdom, humility, respect, love and spirituality.

This type of human development occurs in communities that are striving for self-reliance. There should be no argument that local people, wherever they are, have the primary responsibility for the care of their families and communities, for the ethical use of their resources, and for realizing their full human potential. Global Volunteers believes that local people, when functioning as a community, have the capacity to do whatever is necessary to become self-reliant. Equally important is the simple reality that it is not possible to merely give others what they need to become self-reliant.

Role of the Outsider. Global Volunteers was founded on the belief that outsiders (people who are not part of a local community,) can provide some catalytic assistance to empower others toward self-reliance. Over the years, we have come to learn that the role of the outsider in the development process, whether as a volunteer or a paid consultant, is vital, albeit precarious.

Outsiders are most valuable in facilitating, advising, encouraging, and working shoulder-to-shoulder with local people in their efforts to build their future.

Global Volunteers is committed to supporting local people in their struggle to become self-reliant. However, we operate within the context that it is not the function of outsiders to "do local projects." That is the responsibility of local people. Nor should outsiders attempt to impose their views or expertise on local people. Only local people really know what they need. Moreover, solutions imposed from the outside are doomed to failure because local people are not, by definition, brought into the decision-making process. The role of the outsider is to serve - to share who they are and the talents they have been given. Perhaps the words of Mother Teresa capture it best, "*God does not require that we succeed. God only asks that we serve.*"

Citizens of one country too often know too little about people in the rest of the world. This is not healthy for any of us. Peace and justice can only prevail where there is mutual international understanding and friendship. Thus, we - and the world - need opportunities for ordinary people to share meaningful experiences with ordinary people from across the globe.

We have found that people everywhere need and want to share their personal gifts and talents. However, it is not always easy for individuals to discern how to best make this type of contribution. Global Volunteers affords such an opportunity. A contemporary theologian observed that the poor of the world are enslaved; they are shackled by their struggle for daily subsistence. He also observed that the affluent of the world are likewise enslaved; they are chained to their material possessions. We are both enslaved, and thus, neither the economically poor nor the economically affluent can fully appreciate the full value of life.

Global Volunteers offers the possibility to shatter those chains. Many of our service programs are in rural communities in developing countries, emerging democracies and economically impoverished villages and small towns in developed countries. By working with and learning from economically struggling people, the materially affluent volunteers can learn first-hand that the mere acquisition of possessions is not a very satisfying route to happiness and that love and friendship, stable families and vibrant communities can be reality, even amidst enormous hardship. At the same time, the economically poor can acquire new skills and catalytic assistance from the volunteers, thus creating new possibilities for self-reliance as they continue to enjoy the richness of their culture, communities and simplicity of life.

Some Global Volunteers teams work in areas that are more affluent. While the people in these communities may not be poor, the role of the outsider is the same, and the opportunity to work with and learn from local people and to wage peace through mutual understanding is just as relevant as in an economically impoverished community. In these days of global trade and market economies, it has become imperative that all of us collaborate with others to build bridges of understanding and minimize the sometimes disastrous effects that misconceptions create. For example, in some places Americans are viewed negatively, in part because of actions taken by the U.S. government or multinational corporations based in the U.S. This is unfortunate because most Americans are kind, caring, thoughtful, respectful, generous, and friendly people. Wherever we work, we find that the local people quickly discover this reality and their

misconceptions about Americans fade away. Our goal is to in bring people together to improve mutual understanding.

The key to the success of our work at every site is for volunteers to become "servant" to the host community. It is through the process of serving others that we exhibit the best of our humanity, and the more we demonstrate our goodness, the more we are able to develop that part of ourselves. By serving others, we honor the human dignity of those we serve while acknowledging our own dignity in the process.

LOCAL PEOPLE ARE IN CHARGE

Global Volunteers' philosophy of human and economic development presupposes three critical elements. First, while Global Volunteers sometimes works in urban areas, we primarily **focus on rural communities and small towns** because the overwhelming majority of the economically impoverished live in rural towns and villages. A serious rural-urban dichotomy has emerged in many parts of the world, creating a wide chasm between the countryside and the urban metropolises. One result of this division is a massive migration of people from rural villages and small towns to urban centers in the hope of improving their situation. This rural-urban migration is threatening the very survival of the already beleaguered cities in many countries. E. F. Schumacher, author of the highly acclaimed *Small is Beautiful*, wrote "*Unless life in the hinterland can be made tolerable, the problem of world poverty is insoluble and will inevitably get worse.*"

By working with rural communities and small towns, Global Volunteers hopes to increase the capacity of local people to become self-reliant and to experience hope for their future. By encouraging and enabling rural people to build a better life for themselves, we think it is possible to slow and even halt this enormous and potentially catastrophic migration. Our experience in a Guatemalan village offers cause for hope. In 1978, San Miguel Conacaste set out on a comprehensive community development program. Ten years later, after enormous work and tremendous local effort, not only did the people remain in the village, but also some who moved to Guatemala City returned home.

Second, the **scope of development must be comprehensive**. Maurice Zinkin wrote that: "*Poverty reflects itself in every aspect of life: poverty and illiteracy, poverty and garbage in the street, poverty and malnutrition. Poverty and high death rates are not separate phenomena to be separately attacked. They are one comprehensive phenomenon which must be cured all together.*"

A Central American medical doctor, who after studying in the United States went home to assist his people, offers a graphic example. He wrote:

"When I first returned . . . , I worked with others to begin medical care in rural areas. I did this because our number one problem was that out of 100 children, 25 were dying before they were five years old. You know why? Diarrhea. So I tried to educate people about how to care for the children. But I had to learn to speak in non-technical language and much of what I was trying to accomplish depended on working with literate people, which wasn't the situation. So then I

got involved with literacy so I could communicate the ideas that would be life-saving. As time passed, it became clear that education and literacy depended on having individuals that were well fed so they could be alert and attentive and this then demanded better production which could not occur without land reform and so on."

Successful development is the result of a comprehensive and dynamic process. The complex interrelatedness and mutual interdependence of the economic, social, technical, institutional, and cultural variables in a community require that they all be dealt with simultaneously. If effective change is to occur, no variable can be ignored and no variable can be dealt with separately. By attacking all the problems systematically, and by effectively dealing with all the barriers to development, the hope, confidence and motivation of local people can be unleashed and extraordinary results achieved. In many communities where Global Volunteers works, volunteers are engaged in a variety of projects that address a wide range of issues. In other communities, we are only asked to work on one project, such as teaching conversational English. Nevertheless, in all cases, we strive to engender hope because hope is the principle catalyst that allows all other obstacles to be overcome.

Third, and most important, **local people are the source of development**. Individuals, families and neighborhoods must initiate and conduct their own development efforts through community-based organizations. Programs that are centrally controlled, or even centrally planned, do not inspire development. Top-down approaches simply do not work. Effective development is initiated at the local level and requires the full participation of local people.

Global Volunteers does only what local people ask us to do. The reason is simple; in order for people to become self-reliant, **they must be in charge**.

Local people embody their cultural, social and economic issues. They know their needs and their priorities. They are the ones who realize the barriers to, as well as the possibilities for, their development. They must articulate their needs and identify the barriers that prevent those needs from being met. They must develop the plans to release those barriers and be mobilized to implement those plans.

There is substantial evidence that, although appropriate development technology donated by outside organizations may ease the burdens of the impoverished or those struggling with new democracies, it will not be effective in assisting people in the development process unless they "buy into" it. This is a nearly universal, but all too often misunderstood, principal. Kusum Nair, in her account of village life in India entitled *Blossoms in the Dust*, illustrates this point. She quotes a government official responsible for rural farming projects who described this phenomenon:

"We carry manures and improved seeds in a trailer and offer to deliver them right at the doorstep to induce these (farmers) to use them. We offer them loans to buy the seeds and manures. We go to their fields and offer to let in the water for them. We ask them to try it out first in two acres only, if they are not convinced. They

could quadruple their yields if they would only take our advice and at least experiment. Still they are not forthcoming."

We experienced the same phenomenon in Russia. When Global Volunteers first started working in Russia, shortly after the failed coup attempt of August 1991, everything "American" was held in high esteem. Many believed that western-style free markets and democracy would produce a better life. The mere fact that a Western "expert" was scheduled to make a presentation was sufficient to draw a crowd. Many "consultants" enjoyed the honor by telling the Russians how they ought to remake their society in the image of western economies and democracies. National governments and international financial organizations established economic goals and benchmarks for the Russians to meet while American University professors created the plans to meet those goals.

The results were not good. As the economic situation throughout Russia deteriorated, and life for many became worse than it was under communism, many Russians concluded that the promise of capitalism and democracy are "false promises." Many decided that what works in the US and Western Europe may have little application in Russia because the economic systems, histories and cultures are so different.

This may or may not be the right conclusion. Nevertheless, just as we learned from the example of the farmers in India, free people will decide for themselves what they will and will not do. Neither agricultural technology nor democracy can be imposed. A development strategy, which is based upon outside government agencies, religious organizations, or non-profits doing the job for or attempting to impose solutions on local people, is doomed to failure. Global Volunteers understands that it is only when local people decide to act that positive change will occur. It is only when local people decide to implement development plans, that those plans have any currency. And it is only when local people take a leadership role in the creation of those plans, that they have any chance of success.

Thus, Global Volunteers is committed to encouraging communities to create and implement their own development plans. Our experience reveals that when people become the architects of their own agenda, they are also more inclined to assume the risks of using new technology, and to generate the physical labor necessary to shape an innovative future. In addition, where local people work together within community-based organizations, they share the opportunity to reap tremendous benefits. **A community awakened to the possibility of achieving their collective hopes and dreams is a powerful force, a force that holds the promise of new life and self-reliance.**

Given this reality, Global Volunteers does not supplant the role of local people. It is both inappropriate and counterproductive for any outsider to propose to a local community what it is that they ought to do to improve their livelihood or advance their human condition. To the contrary, our volunteers only do what local people specifically ask us to do. We do not impose our judgments or values upon the communities we visit. We do not decide for others what they need or what they ought to want. We do not even presume to know what they might need. Our only function is to serve in a manner that is consistent with our invitation. By respecting local

prerogative, we acknowledge and honor the responsibility that local people everywhere are obligated to meet - the responsibility for their own development.

Global Volunteers' fundamental objective is to simply help local people do what they have decided to do. We are not primarily concerned about constructing schools or medical clinics, teaching English to children or adults, caring for children, creating jobs or improving health care. We are focused on increasing people's capacity to do that which they have determined is important for their future. It is in this context that volunteers become a valuable resource for the communities served. Over the years, we have been invited to teach conversational English in the classroom, tutor English teachers, care for abandoned infants, contribute patient care, explain how successful entrepreneurs employ the basic principles of free enterprise and sound business practices, train home gardeners in the field, teach planning and problem solving by facilitating community forums, help local people build schools and health clinics, identify crop diseases, and construct water purification systems. However, in the absence of a specific project invitation, we do not "do" anything in a community, even when we might "know" it is a good idea. Nor do we tell local people how they ought to do any of these things. If asked, we respectfully explain how we might accomplish something in our homeland, and allow the local people to decide if there is any aspect of our process they wish to employ.

Economic Development is Based On Renewable Wealth

Through community action, local creativity and labor become the added value to local natural resources. How these resources - land, water and sunshine - are utilized determines the success or failure of many economic development efforts. If these resources are squandered or abused, the efforts will eventually wither. However, if they are conserved and developed wisely, the effort will have a reasonable chance of success.

It is widely established that education, creativity and human labor added in value to natural resources can generate tremendous renewable wealth. Farming is a familiar example. Soil, seed, water, manure and sunshine will produce a crop. However, if wheat is not harvested, the crop will not yield anything except for its esthetic beauty. On the other hand, a crop that is harvested can reasonably be expected to render a return for the labor invested. However, if the soil is eroded or becomes waterlogged, the yield will not represent a renewable source of wealth and in fact, the cropland may finally have to be abandoned. But, when soil, seed, water, manure and sunshine are combined in proper proportion along with local creativity and hard work; when the seed is wisely chosen, the land is faithfully cultivated, and the water is used sparingly, then the seasonal harvest may become a renewable source of wealth.

Successful development strategies build upon this concept of renewable wealth. They recognize that, while people may need some outside catalytic assistance to initiate their development efforts, local communities have the capacity to cultivate their natural resources, the capability of adding the necessary value, and the desire to generate their own development.

Self-Reliance is the Ultimate Objective

When local communities are able to produce their own food, educate their children, ensure preventive health care, reduce their need for large families, practice the precepts of their religion

and honor their culture, then people can strive to develop their full human potential. This does not mean that individuals must become self-sufficient. Rather, it implies that through mutual dependence, communities are able to develop a cooperative self-reliance whereby the needs of all are met. Through the use of local natural resources, local labor, local decision making, local consensus, and some outside objective assistance, the developing community can meet its own basic needs by producing goods and services which it needs, exporting surpluses to other communities, and importing what it doesn't produce.

I remember an occasion in India in the mid-1970's that illustrates this point. I was working as a short-term volunteer consultant on a rural community development project. One day, several of us were assigned to dig a latrine -- the first latrine in this particular village. We all understood the importance of latrines and the subsequent health benefits. Our only digging tools were bamboo sticks. When the project director happened along, I asked why we only had bamboo sticks for digging. I said, *"If you knew we were going to be constructing latrines, why didn't you tell us before we left home and we would have brought along collapsible shovels. That would have made this job a whole lot easier."*

His response has stuck with me ever since. He said, *"This is the first latrine that's being dug in this community. If you had brought along those shovels, it might be the last latrine because people do not have shovels here. You couldn't bring along enough shovels to fulfill the needs of this community and all the surrounding communities."*

What I learned from that exchange, and have confirmed on numerous subsequent occasions, is that the key to the development process is self-reliance. People must be permitted to do what must be done with what they have. It is our opinion that self-reliance is achievable even in the most economically impoverished areas, provided the natural resources that belong to all the people are available for the people to utilize, provided the community has a little outside catalytic assistance.

Other strategies of development have not been concerned with local self-reliance but rather with the growth of the national economy as a whole. Development has generally been measured by a country's gross national product *per capita*. However, too little attention has been directed to the distribution of the benefits of economic growth. The theory offered, until recently, has been that through investment of resources in the established economic structure the benefits would "trickle-down" to the poor. The assumption has been that as GNP increased both the rich and the poor would reap the benefits, although there has been no agreement that the benefits would be distributed equitably. The reality, however, is that what might be good for the economic establishment is not necessarily good for the economically poor. Only limited benefits, if any, have accrued to the poor of the world. The primary beneficiaries of trickle-down theories have been the wealthy.

THE "SERVANT LEARNER"

Global Volunteers strives to support others in their efforts to end their hunger, to become literate, to improve their health care, to stop their children's' senseless deaths, to ease their day-to-day struggle for subsistence, and to improve their overall quality of life. Global Volunteers enables

volunteers to empower local people to become more and, in the process, local people empower the volunteers to become more as well. Global Volunteers service programs enrich the people in the communities where we work, and the local people in those communities, in turn, enrich the volunteers.

Volunteers' Role in Development

Global Volunteers acts as a partner in the development process by assisting local communities in efforts that enhance self-reliance. To ensure that volunteers can make a positive contribution in this process, we ask our volunteers to take on the role of a "Servant-Learner". As servants, volunteers agree to do whatever they are asked to do within their limitations - within the parameters of their ability. (It is important to note that the servant willingly agrees to perform and should not be confused with the enslaved who participates only under duress.)

As learners, volunteers are encouraged to open themselves to the new, hopefully to learn much like a child learns, with a fresh perspective. We invite volunteers to put away their preconceived notions, biases, and prejudices while they are in the host community, thus enhancing their opportunity to learn. For it is through the mastery of learning that we can genuinely achieve our own personal development.

The "Servant-Learner" is a "good neighbor," someone who comes along and sees that you're working on a project at your home and says, "Can I lend a hand?" Sometimes that neighbor gives us the momentum to get started. For example, if you are planning to paint your house but you are a bit overwhelmed by the magnitude of the endeavor, a helpful neighbor might say, "If you have an extra brush, I'll give you a hand." This is the typical context in which Global Volunteers works.

One of our teams serving in a developing country was asked to help dig a ditch for a clean water system. Now you might ask, "Why encourage people to travel half way around the world to dig a ditch? Certainly even the poorest of people can do that." That question is even more poignant given this particular team of volunteers because among them there were several teachers, a school superintendent, a couple of lawyers, a journalist, a nurse, and a couple of business people. These were highly educated people, and they were all assigned to digging a ditch with shovels and pickaxes. Some might argue that these volunteers could have made a more substantive contribution if they had used their particular skills and expertise rather than digging a hole in the ground.

However, the servant does what s/he is asked to do, and this team was asked to help with the ditch for the potable water system. It was an important project. Contaminated water is a killer - particularly of children. Potable water is a lifesaver. Still, that in itself may not justify the use of highly skilled professionals for the excavation. To fully understand the value of the Servant it is important to know that in a subsistence society, where people live off the land they do not survive if they do not work the land. Consequently, it is extremely difficult to organize a group of community people to dig a ditch, even for a life-saving potable water system.

When the people of this village became aware that 14 strong and energetic volunteers were coming to their community to work with them, they decided to take advantage of that resource

and to put them to work. The plan for the water system, which would bring clean water directly to their homes, had been discussed for several years. The decision to do it had been made sometime before. Nevertheless, organizing the effort was more challenging. However, now there was an unexpected resource available. So there they were, 14 Global Volunteers and 40 villagers strung out in a long line digging a ditch that would hold pipe through which clean, potable water would flow. The volunteers became the catalysts for the local people to do what they had already decided to do. On subsequent service programs, the water pipe was laid and the water was hooked up. The result was that most of the modest village homes were provided running water that comes from pristine mountain springs.

As in many stories of development, the water did not solve all the community's problems. The villagers soon discovered that running water needs to drain, and there was no sewer in the village. Water ran out of their homes and into the streets, deteriorating the already rutted roads. This was a complication that was unforeseen by the villagers, but they soon figured out a solution. With the help of other volunteer teams, they installed a community sewer system. The results were clean, potable water and a sewer system that will grow to serve the health of the village children as well as to serve the mutuality of understanding that Global Volunteers strives to accomplish.

The Servant is not a Problem-Solver

Volunteers who want to be effectively engaged in assisting local people in development know that they cannot solve local peoples' problems. This is frustrating for some volunteers, because so many people who want to volunteer have been trained as problem-solvers.

Years ago, there was an American western TV series called "Have Gun, Will Travel." The principal character was a hired gun fighter and his business card read, "HAVE GUN, WILL TRAVEL." Well, many of us could have a business card declaring "HAVE SOLUTION, WILL TRAVEL" because our education system teaches problem solving and many of us are paid to solve problems.

However, in a developing community, the problems can be dreadfully complex and the solutions equally difficult to come by. Moreover, those problems are not the outsider's responsibility. They are the responsibility of the local people, and they can and must solve their own problems. The outsider simply cannot become entangled in the problem-solving process.

Thus, when a community asks whether they should start a particular project, Global Volunteers responds that only the local people are in a position to know that. However, when we are asked "*Do you have any suggestions as to how we might implement this new project we have decided to do?*" or "*How do you think we could start this project in a way that might work better?*" it provides a situation where the outsider can begin to be of some assistance.

For example, in Pommern, Tanzania, a community where Global Volunteers has been working since 1986, we were asked to help build classroom chairs and desks for the secondary school. Our host created a design for the furniture and the local people had sufficient materials and some hand tools to construct it. They wanted all the desks and chairs to function and look pretty much alike and asked for help in accomplishing that. The volunteers were all from the United States

and one of them explained how he and his colleagues might do that in his home community. First, they would build one desk and one chair - a prototype of sorts - to make sure that the product, as drawn, met their needs. Second, they would use the prototype to set up an assembly-line process to build the furniture ensuring that all the desks and chairs looked and functioned alike.

The local workers were not familiar with the concepts of prototype or assembly line. The Tanzanians' standard procedure would have been to build each desk and chair one at a time. However, they liked the concept as presented. Of the volunteers, only one had ever worked on an assembly line. However, every team member understood the notion and value of the assembly-line process. Accordingly, the volunteers and the local people first built a prototype chair and desk using the local design, materials and tools. When the prototype was modified sufficiently to be acceptable to the school leaders, an assembly line was set up to manufacture the rest of the furniture. Forty desks and chairs were constructed to the thrill of all.

Global Volunteers helped the Tanzanian villagers do what they had already decided to do. The volunteers' role was not to decide that desks and chairs were needed, what they would look like, or even that they should all look the same. Those were decisions made by the local people. Global Volunteers' role was to add a little value, a little creativity to the process. In that process, not only was the specific task accomplished, but also the local tradesmen were exposed to the new concepts of prototype and assembly line.

Community Work Projects

On all community projects, volunteers work hand-in-hand, alongside local people. Our expectation is that if the local community invites us to send ten Global Volunteers to help them on a labor project, there will be at least ten community volunteers working on the same community projects. This not only ensures that we work on community priorities, but more importantly provides the occasion for the volunteers and the local people to learn from and about each other and to establish meaningful friendships. In fact, it is in working together - toiling, sweating, laughing and sharing - that mutual understanding is rooted.

While our volunteers work along side community people, we never do a project "for" a community. In fact, if local people do not participate, we do not work. On our first team in the Mississippi Delta in the United States, we were asked to help construct a community building. As the team leader on that particular trip, I assigned 12 of the 23 volunteers to work on this important project. On Monday, the morning work was to begin, only three local people showed up to work. The mayor was quite apologetic and assured me that there would be more local people on Tuesday. Nevertheless, we were clear about the importance of local people being in charge and their being held accountable. I only permitted three members of the team to work on the building that day. The other volunteers sat idle. They were not happy about this since they had come to work, but they honored the process. The next day, six or seven local volunteers showed up at the work site and an equal number of Global Volunteers worked with them. By the end of the week, the local people far outnumbered our volunteers, not only on the construction project, but also on all the community work projects.

When this team of European Americans left this African American community at the end of the service program, the local people knew they were in charge. They also knew that this group of volunteers had not come to their community to do their work or impose their standards or values, but rather to work with them and under their direction. Equally important, the jobs got done and the Global Volunteers and the local people enjoyed each others' company, learned from and about each other in the process, and gained a much deeper mutual understanding than they ever could in any other setting.

Elements of Success.

In order for an outsider to be of genuine service to a local community, Global Volunteers has discovered that at least two elements must exist. First, volunteers need to know what needs to be done and how they can be supportive. Largely, this is up to the host and local people to communicate to the volunteers. In most communities, there is a major project planned for the time each team is scheduled to be there. Often a major project will continue over many months while several teams of volunteers visit the community.

Second, the host and local people must be aware of the skills and capabilities of the volunteers. The significant objective, from Global Volunteers' perspective, is to ensure that the volunteers' skills are made known to the community. Because each team of volunteers is different from another, the team leader identifies for the host and community the resources the team has to share. Each team member also has the opportunity to identify for either the host or the community leadership, the skills they are willing to put at the community's service.

Not all resources brought by the volunteers are always used effectively by the community; but that is the local prerogative. We have learned, however, that once a community learns how to effectively employ volunteers, the potential held by any particular team can be truly beneficial. In addition, after volunteers learn a bit about the culture, customs and needs of the community and how to be of genuine service, the possibilities flourish.

Project Leadership.

We ask the host and community leadership to assign a local person to head up each project with which our volunteers are involved. After visiting with the local leaders and ascertaining which projects the team will work on, Global Volunteers' team leader may also assign a volunteer to take on the role of the counterpart to the community project leader. For example, when we are asked to help teach conversational English, one local teacher and one member of the Global Volunteers' team generally have primary responsibility for overseeing the teaching process in each school and coordinating the key elements of the work.

Ideally, each team participates on a variety of projects rather than just one. The particular assignments depend on the needs of the community and the skills of the volunteers. Global Volunteers provides some capacity in the form of materials, tools, etc. Where the project is ongoing and there is a need for funding to complete it, Global Volunteers often provides financial assistance. We ask community leaders to furnish us written requests and explain how the tools, materials, or funding are directly related to the community projects on which the volunteers will be engaged. (Global Volunteers prefers to purchase materials, books, tools, etc. in the countries where we work, depending on availability and cost.)

Results-Oriented Volunteers.

Global Volunteers recognizes that it is extremely important to most volunteers to be fully engaged while they are in the community. After all, the volunteers expend a substantial amount of money and valuable time to be of service. We have advised our hosts and community leaders that it can be extremely frustrating for "results-oriented" volunteers to have nothing tangible to do after they have traveled so far, spent so much money and are in the community for such a short time. Furthermore, our hosts understand that it is a tragic waste to the community if there are skills, energy, and resources available but not utilized.

However, sometimes reality simply takes control and there is nothing they or we can do to alter that course. Global Volunteers works in places that may not have reliable infrastructure. In a few communities, there is no reliable telephone system, no dependable public transportation system, no power tools, no electricity, and overcrowded classrooms. In other communities, there are students without textbooks, infants without sufficient food, hospitals without medicines, and children without parents. At any moment, the best-laid plan can be rendered inconsequential. The concrete blocks may not show up and then the school walls can not be constructed; the students do not show up because they were told the volunteer teachers would be there the following week; or the local people are unable to work because of a death in the community.

Life in a developing community is often unpredictable, particularly for those of us who are just visiting. However, in this state of unpredictability is enclosed a profound gift to those who believe they are in control. That gift is the new awareness that neither we nor any other mortal is in total command, and life is the more interesting because of it.

Moreover, we have learned that it can take several teams of volunteers visiting a community before the host organization, the local leaders, and Global Volunteers are able to create a working relationship that is mutually beneficial. It takes time for our hosts to learn how to best use volunteers. Until they master the art of using volunteers, local people are not able to fully capitalize on their skills.

Learning About Each Other Holds Unexpected Promise

Even though Global Volunteers is committed to supporting any community project, we have come to understand that our most important purpose is not the performance of tasks, regardless of how important, complex or simple. The most vital work Global Volunteers is involved with is that of building relationships with people from different lands, different cultures, different ethnicity, different races, different lifestyles, and often, different languages. We are dedicated to providing volunteers, host personnel, and local people the opportunity to establish mutual understanding, deep and lasting friendships and hope for the future, so all of us can realize the fullness of life.

By working hand-in-hand with local people, we not only demonstrate that the volunteers are committed and constructive workers, but more importantly, we provide the local people the occasion to gain a genuine sense of who the volunteers are as people. In addition, we have the opportunity to learn about them in a more genuine way as well. As we learn about each other,

we realize that our day-to-day struggles are unique, yet we also discover that we are far more alike than we are different.

What is primarily different between us is our situation and how we respond to it. Economic poverty is a debilitating way of life. It results in high infant mortality, illiteracy, poor public health, etc. However, amidst these prevailing hardships and struggle for survival, economically impoverished people often have a spiritual richness coupled with unbounded hope for a better future, and they possess enduring love and care for their children, extended families and communities. To be able to possess such fulfilling gifts of life amidst such overwhelming difficulty is a new learning for many volunteers, and one that can be brought home to their own families and communities.

My wife, Michele, and I have three sons. When the middle one, Nicholas, was just less than two, he burned himself by spilling a cup of boiling water over his chest. His burns were dreadfully severe. We rushed him to the hospital, which was less than two miles away. The physicians and nurses in the emergency room tended to him immediately. They cleaned his skin and applied medications and bandages. The burns were so acute that he had to go back to the clinic every day for three weeks so the bandages could be changed. Michele and I were, of course, terribly worried.

Nick is fine now, no permanent scares. I often think about his burns though, and what it would have been like had we lived in a developing community where there are no hospitals, let alone sufficient bandages. I have wondered how, as a parent, I would have responded if my two-year-old son had been burned there. If his bandages were not properly changed every day, infection would have set in and, if that went unattended, perhaps he would have died. I personally cannot contemplate a more devastating tragedy than the death of one of my children. I have wondered how poor people, without any hope for basic health care, deal with that type of situation day-to-day where, in some countries, up to one-third of their children die before their fifth birthday. Yet, they have this tremendous hope, love, care, and joy of living.

My wondering has turned to awe the more I travel, as I am blessed with an ever-growing and fresh perspective of the world and the spiritual vitality of the people who inhabit it. It is our hope that all of us from the "economically developed world" will have the chance to witness this vitality of the human spirit as we lend a hand to help alleviate some of the hardship that others endure day-to-day.