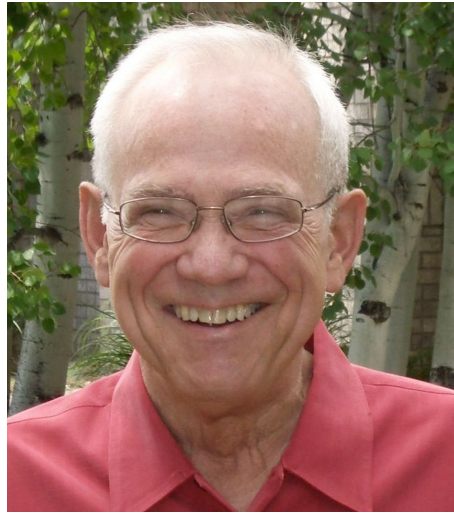


Mapping the Service Landscape



Bob Atchley

Service is the experience of being of help to others. Service can be an attitude or stance we take with us into all of our interactions. Service can also be results of specific roles we play in groups or organizations charged with helping in myriad ways.

In their best-selling book, *How Can I Help?*, Ram Dass and Paul Gorman assert that humans have a basic impulse to care—to care for and about other humans, other animals that occupy our planet, and the planet itself. Being in touch with our inner spirit and wisdom is the foundation upon which genuine service rests.

So, we have awakened the sage within and are in touch with our inner Source. How then do we take these qualities out into the world we live in? If we take the approach that service is a way of being that we take with us into all life situations, then we are making a shift in the vantage point from which we see and make decisions about needed action. If we take the approach that service is done by taking on roles in organizations whose purpose is helping others, then we must blend wisdom and spirit into how we see and act as role players.

None of us can be all things to all people—none of us! We must be aware of our strengths and preferences, so we can effectively match ourselves to available service opportunities. We need usable maps. Two basic approaches are: 1) identifying service opportunities in the community where you live, and 2) finding communities in need of the field of service you want to work in. Many big-city newspapers carry weekly columns aimed at connecting prospective volunteers with sponsored service opportunities in the community. By reviewing these columns over a period of four to six months, one can get a good sense of the service landscape, the types of efforts needed, and how to connect with sponsoring organizations.

The Internet offers many websites that can match potential volunteers with service opportunities in local communities, states, and even abroad. Here are a few examples:

bouldercamera.com/volunteer

volunteer.unitedwayfoothills.org

volunteermatch.org

linkedinforgood.linkedin.com

givegab.com

goabroad.com

Here are a couple of personal examples of how my wife Sheila and I found service opportunities:

We attended an orientation on the needs of the homeless in Boulder County, Colorado. We selected a specific organization, Boulder Outreach for Homeless Overflow (BOHO), which filled some of the gaps in service that could not be met by the Boulder Shelter for the Homeless. We started by volunteering to be on a steering committee to establish a network of local religious congregations willing to allow use of their church facilities as overnight Emergency Warming Centers during the winter months. We worked through the Service Committee of the Boulder Friends Meeting to offer over-the-counter medications (Tylenol, Advil, multivitamins, decongestants, cough-drops, etc.), first aid supplies (bandages, Vapo-Rub, foot powder, etc.), and clean socks at the BOHO warming centers. In the process, we listened to a lot of stories. Homeless people often feel invisible and in need of a listening ear. We offer compassionate listening, both to homeless people and to the staff of service agencies charged with helping them. We have been doing this service for ten years.

I learned early in childhood that I had been given a good singing voice. I joined choirs at church and in school. I could see how the music touched and uplifted audiences. In my thirties I began writing my own songs. I first wrote about love. Then I wrote about the spiritual journey. Then I began doing songs that address issues of social justice. I also try to offer a few humorous songs. I am very clear that my performances are service aimed to inform and uplift.

In 2012, I packaged my thoughts and songs about the spirituality of service into an hour-long program called "The Spirit of Service." I mentioned this to a friend and was invited to present it to a conference of 500 senior services workers in the New York City area. Then I was asked to do it in Denver for 50 staff of the Alzheimer's Association of Colorado. Then I presented it to a Sage-ing International gathering at Sunrise Ranch in Loveland, Colorado. Word about this program spread with little effort on my part. To date, it has been offered 26 times at conferences and retreats in all corners of the U.S. I have an adequate retirement income from my career as a writer and university professor, so I donate my services and only ask reimbursement for travel and lodging. This is an example of "free-lance" service.

In my experience, bringing a service attitude to everyday living is an effective way to see what is wanted and needed, but it also takes some experience to learn how to gracefully produce action that is both welcome and effective. Be patient.

Taking a service role in an organization should start with training on the organization's goals and service philosophy and on the specific skills needed to do a good job. Good supervisors also give volunteers regular feedback on how good a job they are doing.

“When We Clearly See, We Are Drawn to BE LOVE and To SERVE.”