

Volunteering: A parable

by Michael Saint-Onge

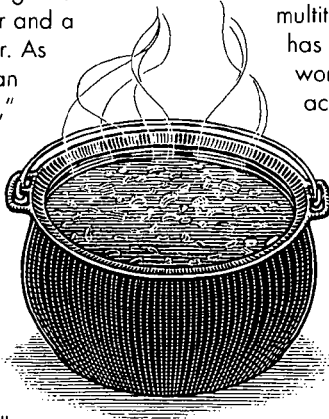
One of my favorite fairy tales is called "Stone Soup." A man comes to a village, bragging that he can make a delicious soup made from water and a few stones. The villagers all gather around to watch. He lights a fire, fills a big pot with water and a few stones, and begins to stir. As he's stirring, he sees a woman with a few carrots. "Woman," he calls out, "the only thing better than stone soup is stone soup with carrots!" She reluctantly agrees to surrender the carrots just for the opportunity to taste a soup made from stones. Next he spies a man with a potato, and he talks the man into adding the potato to the soup as well.

You know the rest of the story. One by one, the villagers contribute what little they have until a delicious soup is made, and the villagers shake their heads and say, "Who could have believed such a wonderful soup could be made from stones!"

Committee work is like making stone soup. The contributions by the committee members, however small, add flavor and body to the soup. Different people add different items, each ingredient being vitally important to the overall flavor of the soup. There are several other parallels: The individual ingredients, taken by themselves, don't amount to much. It is the pooling together of the resources that make enough soup to feed the village. In these days when no one ever seems to have enough time, a group of people contributing even a small amount of time, taken as a whole, can make a huge difference. Lastly, the end result is a communal celebration—an opportunity to share with colleagues. Volunteering for committee work has just such an effect. Friendships are forged as a result, and missions are accomplished.

Now, having been both the soupmaker (the "Chair"), and a villager (a committee member), I'd be lying to you if I didn't tell you that both demanded some sacrifice. The soupmaker is in charge of lighting the fire, stirring the pot, and motivating the villagers to contribute what they can. Several times panic has set in as I

envisioned ladling out water with gravel in the bottom. Fortunately, though, something always gets accomplished. Sometimes it isn't as hearty as it could be and other times the soup takes on an amazing flavor and aroma that literally feeds the multitudes. The villager, too, has to recognize that it requires working together—each according to his or her ability. Grumbling that one contributed more than the others does nothing for the flavor of the soup. People do what they can do, and ultimately every little bit helps. We are all in this together.



Leaving aside the fairy tale, I must tell you in all honesty what volunteering

professionally has meant to me. I have seen first hand how fulfilling it can be. I have fallen in love with my profession all over again. Yes, I know it sounds corny, but I have. Do you know what that means? It means I get up in the morning and look forward to going to work. My self-confidence has grown a great deal (and it needed to, let me tell you!) and I have met so many wonderful people, colleagues and friends, that support me and encourage me to keep reaching.

Now I know what you're saying. "Who has time?" No one, and everyone. The wonderful thing about an organization as diverse as ours is that there are so many opportunities to serve, some that demand a great deal of time and energy, and others that require but a few hours. You can decide on what level you'd like to be involved, but I urge you to do something on the Chapter, SIS, or national Association level that demonstrates your commitment to your profession. Talk to people. I assure you, somewhere there is a group, a committee, a task force that could use your particular skills and talents. Fair warning, though: Psychologists say that volunteering tends to be addictive, and I know it's true. Once you see what a difference you can make, you'll want to do more.

And just wait until you taste the soup!

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