

Compassion Counts More Than Ever *by Michael J. Berland*

INFORMATION FROM A PARADE POLL CONDUCTED BY PENN SCHOEN BERLAND LLC WITH A NATIONAL ONLINE PANEL OF ADULTS AGES 18 AND OVER. SURVEYS WERE COMPLETED BY 1008 RESPONDENTS. MARGIN OF ERROR +/- 3.1% - SEE THE LINK AT THE BOTTOM OF THIS ARTICLE.

America is in the midst of a boom--and one that is benefiting and bonding us all. "During past tough economic times, there was a decrease in volunteering," says Patrick Corvington, CEO of the federal Corporation for National and Community Service. "But today there's a 'compassion boom' of people helping others." An exclusive new PARADE poll shows how and why so many Americans are working to improve our communities and the world.

"Public service" has become more than a phrase or a school requirement in our country--it's now a way of life for Americans of all ages. "People who are out of work are volunteering to stay connected to their communities and to hone their job skills," Corvington explains. "But I think part of what is driving the overall increase is the growing understanding that service is an essential tool to achieve community and national goals."

The findings of the new PARADE poll confirm Corvington's observations: Respondents were almost unanimous in the belief that it is "important to be personally involved in supporting a cause we believe in" in our communities (94%) and in the world at large (91%). More than three out of four (78%) think that the actions of one person can improve the world, and 78% also believe they're more involved in making a difference than their parents were.

The Americans surveyed by PARADE are particularly proud of one very personal way that they're contributing to the greater good: Ninety percent said that they are working hard to teach their children the importance of activism. They're imparting these lessons in a variety of ways, including leading by example (64%); talking to their kids about important issues and causes (51%); discussing their own charitable contributions or efforts with their children (35%); taking them to meetings or when they volunteer (32%); urging them to follow role models who are working for positive change (31%); and encouraging them to donate their own money to causes (25%).

Jack Brannelly, 45, an attorney in Draper, Utah, brings his 9-year-old daughter when he volunteers at an elder-care facility. "To put her hand in the hand of a 95-year-old at the end of her life teaches my daughter about the people out of the public view who still need affection," he says. "This heart-to-heart contact teaches her one of the most important things we can do despite our busy lives. "

WHY AMERICANS ARE DOING GOOD

Most of the poll respondents are motivated toward public service by simple altruism--60% want to help other people, and 57% want to make the world a better place. However, many people are specifically moved to act on behalf of their own communities. Nearly half of respondents (49%) want to improve their neighborhoods. Daniel Freedman, 27, a Los Angeles law-school student, and his friends started a nonprofit organization that uses the resources and talent of area universities to address local environmental problems. "It's like what Gandhi said about being the change you want to see in others," Freedman explains. "You have to start in your own backyard."

What tips people over from having good intentions into acting upon them? More than two-thirds (68%) say personal experience has been a major impetus, with 40% saying their motivating experience was a positive one, as in "Someone did something good for me, and I want to give back." A family member or friend's request (33%) and learning about an issue from the news (28%) were other catalysts.

There are other reasons for civic engagement as well: It makes people feel good about themselves (39%); it's a moral obligation (37%); or it fulfills their sense of duty (36%). "While I've never been abused, homeless, or an addict," says Jackie Ryan, 33, from Sarasota, Fla., who works in sales, "I look for ways to get involved in those causes because it makes me feel like I'm helping people." She volunteers for a local food bank and a drug-rehabilitation facility, as well as Habitat for Humanity.

HOW THEY'RE DOING GOOD

Over the course of their lifetimes, almost all respondents (98%) have engaged in at least one activity to make a difference, and an inspiring 91% have done so in the past 18 months. In terms of volunteer work, 37% delivered food to the hungry; 30% helped organize a fund-raising event; and 32% participated in a cleanup at a local beach, park, or other public area. Almost one in four volunteered at a soup kitchen or food bank (24%), participated in an athletic event to raise money for a cause (21%), or mentored a student (19%).

In a sign of our wired times, the Americans surveyed are utilizing technology to spread the word about issues and to connect with others. More than one in four (27%) have



PARADE asked 1,008 Americans what they'd do if given \$100,000 to donate to charity. Here's how they'd share it:

Food and shelter for the needy	\$15,953.21
Research to cure disease	\$14,311.54
Disaster relief	\$9,308.97
Animal welfare	\$8,783.46
Youth programs	\$6,514.53
Poverty relief/job assistance	\$6,234.83
Education	\$6,069.00
My religion's charity	\$5,921.93
The global environment	\$5,340.51
Public health	\$4,924.82
Human rights	\$4,422.10
My immediate environment	\$3,628.49
Literacy	\$4,422.10
Other religious charities	\$2,262.90
Promoting world democracy	\$1,732.32
Visual and/or performing arts	\$1,638.83

turned to e-mail, Facebook, or Twitter to communicate about a cause. Jackie Ryan has posted on Facebook in order to encourage friends to join her in volunteer activities and donate to events like the 3K race she recently ran to raise money to fight child abuse.

Many respondents have opened their wallets to do good, with 67% buying charity raffle tickets, 58% purchasing something unnecessary to support a cause, and 34% sending a check to a charity after hearing or seeing a touching news story.

Despite the fact that most of the people surveyed said they've made cutbacks due to the economic crisis, 87% supported a cause financially in the last year. In 2009, respondents gave more than \$400 on average to the single cause they cared about most. Americans aged 18 to 24 gave the least--around \$100--while those aged 65 and over averaged more than \$700. According to the PARADE poll, generosity continues to be the American way.

Who's Changing America Today?

The PARADE survey has uncovered three distinct types of Americans who are driving change in our communities and country today.

YEPIES (YOUNG, ENGAGED PROBLEM SOLVERS)

Yeppies--a group of young people distinguished by a reliance on social media and socializing to fuel their activism--came into existence only a few years ago. They enjoy volunteering and have the most faith that individuals can solve social problems. Improving the world is both important to them and a way to connect with like-minded peers. Open to a variety of causes, they're particularly susceptible to getting involved because of a friend's "ask." They derive great stimulation and satisfaction from their activism and donate often and widely. Two-thirds of Yeppies are women, and of the three types, this one has the highest percentages of African-Americans and of single people.

RAPID RESPONDERS

Rapid Responders are not out to improve the entire world--their civic engagement is much more focused and personal. Their causes tend to stem from a specific problem, like a health or neighborhood issue, that may have come to their attention through a family member's or friend's negative experience. Rapid Responders often organize community events to raise awareness or money for the causes they support. Of the three groups, they're the most likely to have been involved in a local beach or park cleanup. They believe that the government has the most responsibility and the best resources to improve our society.

THE MISSION-MINDED

The Mission-Minded consist of mostly older Americans who are largely motivated by their faith. To them, supporting basic needs, like food and shelter, is a religious duty, but they may also rally to a cause they learn about from a secular community leader. Like

Yeppies, they actively seek out opportunities for civic engagement. Generous with time and money, they're the most likely of the three types to travel in order to volunteer. The Mission-Minded are the least likely to cite a negative experience as a catalyst for action and have the most confidence in the ability of religious groups to fix the world's problems.

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Source:

<http://www.parade.com/news/what-america-cares-about/featured/100307-compassion-counts-more-than-ever.html>