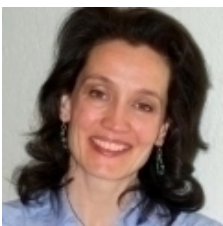


Giving back comes in many forms

By Mandy Kendall

My Soroptimist group had a meeting recently that focused on all the different committees that exist within the club, outlining all that they do and what would be required of someone joining that committee. I can tell you that there are a lot of things to do in that club and it seemed totally overwhelming to think about which committee to join, let alone what to do once you signed up. I think most people would like to do something to contribute to a community, whether locally or globally, but often get put off before they even start; so I decided to focus this week's piece on how to find the best way for you to give back.

Why give back? Most people probably have very personal reasons for giving back. A great sense of belonging, satisfaction, fulfillment and pride can come with giving back to your community.



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Everyone, especially kids, benefits from giving back. It provides an opportunity to experience cultures, lifestyles and situations you might not come across in your day-to-day life. It teaches tolerance, commitment, responsibility, compassion and shows how one person really can make a difference.

Whether you are getting back into the workforce or would like to make more friends, volunteering can be hugely sociable (if that's what you want) and may end up helping you while you are helping others. There are often opportunities to learn new skills that will serve you in other areas of your life. Maybe you're looking for a career change? Community service can be a great way to sample different workplaces and can offer opportunities you may never have thought of. Community service can also be a great education, offering a chance to experience a variety of jobs that will serve you well in any future career choice.

Where do you start?

How much time do you have? – Before you even start investigating how you can give back, first spend some time outlining what works best for you. How much time do you have to spare? I recommend you start with less time than you think you have to spare as you can always commit to more but it's often very difficult to cut back once you've committed yourself to something.

What do you like doing? – I have a colleague that works tirelessly for a local charity but he is very upfront about not doing any of what he calls the touchy feely stuff. So he does all the heavy lifting, driving and logistical things and everyone is happy. Giving back often means donating some of your precious spare time so it's worth making sure you're going to enjoy it. Some people prefer group activities; others are more lone-ranger types. Some like planning while others like doing. There will be something that suits your personality and strengths.

Research – Just asking friends and neighbors will often produce lots of good ideas about how to give back to your community most effectively. Alternatively you can go directly to those places most often in need of help and find out what they need. (Community center, hospital, church, halfway house,

historical restoration, youth organization, food bank or soup kitchen, neighborhood adoption or cleanup programs, Boys and Girls club, animal shelter to name a few).

Interview them – Find out what's involved with a particular project and what would be expected of you if you were to join.

Don't want to take time away from your family? Look into projects you can do as a family. Making baskets to give to less fortunate families at holiday times or helping a neighbor with chores they can't manage on their own (many hands make light work!). Helping out at a local animal shelter is a great education and fun too. Finding an organization that serves the elderly and taking food to people who are home-bound brightens everyone's day. Done together, these types of projects strengthen family bonds and offers lessons in commitment and responsibility to the kids too.

There are many different ways you can give back.

Organize – Events/meetings/clean up – a lot of people love doing things but they just don't like organizing. So if you have been blessed with the planning gene you can often galvanize a lot of bodies into action...most people will help out if they are told what needs to be done.

What can you donate? Giving your time, donating money, offering expertise, loaning equipment or just spreading the word ... everything helps.

Share your skills – Most of us have at least one pretty cool skill we could offer to teach a group or an organization or use on their behalf.

Share contacts – You might not be able to help yourself, but you may know people who can or even companies that have services or products needed by a voluntary organization. Making the right connection or introduction can make a huge difference to a project.

Sponsor – Maybe you own, or know, a company that could help out a local charity by sponsoring an event. A win-win situation.

If you can't find a project that interests you, go ahead and start your own. With a little research you are likely to find a lot of like-minded people who would love to help you.

Until next time.

Mandy Kendall operates Health Connective in South Lake Tahoe. If you have any questions, would like some advice, or would like to request some Qwik-e tips on any health and wellbeing topic, please feel free to drop me an email at healthconnective@gmail.com, visit us on Facebook, or keep an eye out on Lake Tahoe News for regular Qwik-e tips on how to make healthy changes one Quick and Easy step at a time.