

This speech was presented by Thelma Domenici of Thelma Domenici & Associates at the Annual Conference of American Women's Activities, Germany (AWAG) held May 1–5, 2005 in Garmisch, Germany

The Six Faces of Volunteerism

What did you want to be when you were little? How many of us wanted to be a doctor? A teacher? An artist? How about a banker, a firefighter or a fighter pilot? A mom? An astronaut or a businesswoman?

How many of us wanted to be a community servant, an agent of change, a social advocate, a volunteer? And yet, in this room, how many of us have become career volunteers? This wonderful concept called career volunteerism isn't a nice to have or what people do when they retire. It's a vital civic necessity based on motivation and passion, freely undertaken as a means to create greater equality, mentorship and social support in a world of devastating inequalities.

What does the face of volunteerism look like? I imagine that it's a wonderful amalgamation of who we were when we were 12 and believed that we could change the world; who we were when we started our first job full of creativity and eagerness; who we were when we ventured out in our third career wise with experience and knowledge; and who we were after our second child was born seasoned by sleeplessness and worry but filled with greater joy and love than we ever imagined. Volunteers are ordinary people making extra-ordinary contributions to our communities.

There are five faces of volunteerism: Graciousness, kindness, abundance, love, and commitment.

The first face of volunteerism is graciousness. It's a state of being.

When we seek to define ourselves or to create our identity, do we limit our potential in stating, "I'm just a Mom" or "I'm just an attorney" or "I'm just a volunteer"? Do these terms define us in their entirety? Aren't we also, kind and nurturing, thoughtful and generous, trend setters and philosophers, agents of change and gracious beings? That word, "gracious" is the principal on which Thelma Domenici & Associates was founded. Who we are, our identity, is not just a computer program we click on when we have to go to a convention, or when we work with school children, or when we tend to the sick. Graciousness is a state of mind and an element of our being that can, and must be shaped and developed, expanded and expressed.

Good manners never go out of style.™

The Six Faces of Volunteerism

Graciousness is a state of being, a fundamental essence we invoke when communicating appreciation and warmth to people we care about. Do you know a gracious person? What makes them gracious? I have found that they listen very well. Gracious people possess inner warmth and sensing that pulls you in and builds comfort in conversation. They often have a great sense of humor but know when to use it. They dress impeccably, carry themselves with confidence but are radically humble in their accomplishments and demeanor. Gracious people are generous, many monetarily but all with their time and attention to others. They speak with you as if you are the most important person in the world at that moment. To be a gracious volunteer is to be a person willing to step into a community, provide the skills, or assistance needed, without personal compensation or recognition. The reward is in the giving. A genuine act of kindness made because it was the right thing to do, because someone needed a friend, advice or assistance.

Did you know that kindness, the second face of volunteerism, is contagious?

Wouldn't it be great if kindness was an epidemic? Research has shown that the levels of serotonin, that wonderful naturally occurring substance in our bodies that promotes immunity, comfort, peace and well-being, can be increased by one simple act of kindness. Even more amazing, kindness extended, received or observed beneficially impacts the physical health and well-being of everyone involved. This is how the kindness epidemic begins.

(Walgreens story)

So, the next day I was coming out of a parking garage late one evening and pulled up to the booth to pay for my hourly parking. As I fumbled in my purse for money, the attendant smiled and said, "The car in front of you paid your fee. And actually, she overpaid. Here's the dollar owed." I stared at the attendant and told her I didn't know the person in front of me. She replied, "The woman instructed me to tell the next person who came to my booth to have a wonderful evening." That small act of kindness kept me thinking.

I was at the grocery store waiting in the check-out line and there was a woman with a busy toddler behind me. I asked if she would like to go in front of me as she didn't have nearly as many groceries as I did and it looked like the little guy was really ready to go. The woman gratefully thanked me. I simply smiled knowing that in some way I had returned the kindness shown me the previous evening.

This idea of kindness is particularly relevant as we community servants interact with others. The following story is a beautiful illustration of the perfection of kindness at a



Copyright © Thelma Domenici & Associates, all rights reserved.

Good manners never go out of style.™

The Six Faces of Volunteerism

most generous and basic level and how it transforms everyone involved. This story is about Shiah and will touch your heart. (pg. 45 Wayne Dyer)

The third face of volunteerism is abundance. Develop an attitude of gratitude.

Did you ever notice that some people never have enough, while others always have enough? When you shift to an abundance mind-set, you recognize the unlimited source of can-do energy and ability. You are what you think. You can't be anything else. Instead of recognizing what you don't have, consider the abundance of what you do possess; health, shelter, food, clothing an education, a brilliant mind, passion, commitment, skills. Once your self talk ceases to dialogue about what isn't or what you don't have, you move to an energized state of "How can we get this done?" Imagine God saying, "Well, I'm done producing oxygen. I'm just too tired today." This great Source is inexhaustible. Connecting to this Divine Source by changing the way we think and the way we talk will lead to wonderful opportunities to be of service. It is our responsibility to live our lives in-service to others.

Love, our innate responsibility, is the forth face of volunteerism.

Poets and philosophers have pondered it. Songs are written about it and we strive to find it in our lives, our families and our communities. It is difficult to talk about the virtues of love without brining in the Divine Source from which all of us emanate. Love is the force behind creation, behind good will, behind positive change. Love is cooperation rather than competition, societies working together in harmony rather opposition for the greater good of humanity. Where there is love there can be no judgment. Recognizing that we all emanate from this Divine Source means we have an innate responsibility, a legacy of benevolence, to enhance human potential, recognize inequalities and provide working solutions. Love can and will change the world. It's as simple as teaching a child to read, helping a new mom build confidence in her mothering skills, educating a man to work for himself...as the saying goes, give a person a fish and they eat for a day. Teach a person to fish and they eat for a lifetime. As agents of change, it is our highest calling to teach with love, to heal with love, to act with love.

The fifth and final face of volunteerism is commitment; the promise or pledge to bind ourselves to a certain course of action until it is completed.

We often see the word commitment used in the business arena; "... a commitment to providing quality service" or "Our commitment to our shareholders." But when I speak about volunteer commitment, I think about passion and responsibility. You wouldn't be here today if those words weren't essential to who you are.

Copyright © Thelma Domenici & Associates, all rights reserved.

The logo for Thelma Domenici & Associates features the name "thelma" in a light blue, lowercase sans-serif font, positioned above "DOMENICI" in a larger, bold, dark blue uppercase sans-serif font. Below "DOMENICI" is "& ASSOCIATES" in a smaller, dark blue uppercase sans-serif font. To the left of the text are three dark blue circles of varying sizes, arranged vertically.

Good manners never go out of style.™

The Six Faces of Volunteerism

Whether you are passionate about children or seniors, education or the environment, commitment helps you prioritize your civic interests. Responsibility is the action prompted by that commitment. It's the expression of your passion. It's showing up when you say you are going to. It's making a financial contribution and putting your money to work. It's giving of your talent and expertise to organizations that will benefit from your knowledge. Mean what you say, do what you say and finish what you started.

I urge you to commit with passion to a noble pursuit, whether it's your career, your family or your community. We came into this world with nothing and we will leave this world with nothing. So give of your talents. Be of service. Make a difference. Change your world.

I'd like to leave you with a poem by Foley that describes each of you. It's titled

"I'll Show You a Volunteer"

Show me a person who spends hours in training without pay, and I'll show you a volunteer.

Show me a person where a cry for help brings split second dispatch, and I'll show you a volunteer.

Show me a person who is devastated when lives are lost or maimed, and I'll show you a volunteer.

Show me a person who is graciously welcomed as a next-door neighbor, and I'll show you a volunteer.

Show me a person who takes criticism more than compliments, and I'll show you a volunteer.

Show me a person who sets their clothes out before they go to bed, just in case they have to go out in the middle of the night, and I'll show you a volunteer.

Show me a person who sacrifices home life, TV,... even tender moments, and I'll show you a volunteer.

Show me a person visibly moved at the strains of our National Anthem, and I'll show you a volunteer.

Copyright © Thelma Domenici & Associates, all rights reserved.

The logo for Thelma Domenici & Associates features the word "thelma" in a light blue, lowercase sans-serif font. Below it, the word "DOMENICI" is written in a larger, bold, dark blue, uppercase sans-serif font. To the left of "DOMENICI" are two small blue circles. Below "DOMENICI" is the text "& ASSOCIATES" in a smaller, dark blue, uppercase sans-serif font.

Good manners never go out of style.™

The Six Faces of Volunteerism

Show me a person who may be asked to give more than just dedication, and I'll show you a volunteer.

Show me a person who is asked to give more...and more...and more, and I'll show you a volunteer.

Thank **YOU** for being who **you** are. It's a full-time job!