

Realized Worth's **Transactional vs. Transformative Volunteering** framework is the basis for how *the most effective corporate programs* approach social impact.

We recommend using this tool as a guide for learning and discussion between your team and your employee volunteer leaders.



TRANSACTIONAL VOLUNTEERING

There's nothing wrong with a transaction when it's what's needed or wanted.



Sometimes, a transaction in the context of volunteering is an **agreement two valued partners make** between each other.



Sometimes, a non-profit just **needs a job done** – quickly and efficiently – without the burden of an ongoing relationship.



But other times, transactions in the context of volunteering are a **problem**.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM WITH TRANSACTIONAL VOLUNTEERING?

Transactional volunteering focuses on “helping”, “giving back” or “making a difference”. **This is hugely appealing to corporate or organizational volunteering programs** – we want people who participate to feel good.

In fact, data supports the idea that, whether we planned for it or not, volunteering does make us feel good. Naturally, companies are focused on finding the sweet spot between giving to the community and benefitting as a company. That's why so many corporate volunteering events focus on team-building, skill-building, and driving employee participation.

And sometimes, the only intended outcome... is just to have a nice day out of the office.

None of these outcomes on their own are bad – in fact, they're great! **But they are all too often prioritized at the expense of nonprofits and the exclusion of communities.**

This is when transactional volunteering becomes a **problem**.

As Social Impact professionals and employee volunteer leaders, it's important that we internalize our own understanding of the potential problems transactional volunteering can create.

When have you experienced transactional volunteering that does not produce a positive outcome for the community or the participants? Read below for guidance.



TRANSACTIONAL VOLUNTEERING

When are transactions in the context of volunteering a problem?



Problem #1: The Helper is in power.

Solution: Our programs must be designed to benefit all participants. When we go into a situation expecting to both give and receive, we take an important step toward equity.

Problem #2: Transactions are labeled as “relationships”.

Solution: Like any healthy relationship, we must prioritize: 1. gaining a shared understanding of needs; 2. agreeing that all parties are comfortable meeting the other's needs.

Problem #3: Events are reported as impact.

Solution: Design programs to achieve societal impact that takes place well beyond the timeframe of volunteer events.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM WITH TRANSACTIONAL VOLUNTEERING?

If we're not careful, transactional volunteering can – and often does – divide people into the “haves” and “have-nots”. It says, “You have a need. I have power to give it to you. Therefore, I will be generous and give you what you need...after I decide what makes it worth it to me.”

Transactions are not relationships. Transactions are a quick fix, a limited exchange, a moment in time.

Transactional volunteering may appear harmless. It often comes in the form of identifying a task a nonprofit or community seems to need help with, getting that task done, checking off the hours logged, or the team-building achieved, or the skills developed, and then – walking away. Hopefully in that process, the non-profit benefits from the task, but our part is over. We dust off our hands, exchange a few high fives, and walk away.

But what we don't realize is that we left too soon! **We closed the door on the impact that was well within reach** because we acted as if the objective of corporate volunteering is to hold volunteer events, but **that could not be less accurate.**

Often, when we become a Social Impact professional, we're so happy to finally have a fulfilling and meaningful job that we expect it to be easy. And really, how hard can it be? Doing good is doing good. But, CSR, ESG, Corporate Citizenship, Community Engagement, Social Impact...they're complicated.

The way to maintain your sanity through all the confusion is to understand the overarching objectives that guides them all. Read below for more.



**CORPORATE
VOLUNTEERING**



**TRANSACTIONAL
VOLUNTEERING**



**TRANSFORMATIVE
VOLUNTEERING**

What's the objective?

All companies with Social Impact programs should have a **formal program vision and a clear set of business-aligned objectives.** (See our *Strategic Program Structure Framework* for more.)

All companies with Transformative programs understand that, over and above all other business and community objectives, **the shared objective that we are all working to achieve is *mindset shift*.**

WHAT'S THE OBJECTIVE OF CORPORATE VOLUNTEERING?

The objective of corporate volunteering, over and above all other business and community related objectives, is *mindset shift*. There is an internal change that becomes possible when we build relationships with people who are outside our day-to-day proximity.

While it's a given (or should be) that event-based volunteering always serves the genuine need of the non-profit or community, corporate volunteering should go beyond that.

In order to achieve its true impact, corporate volunteering must be intentionally designed to impact the mindsets of employees.

This is where Transformative Volunteering comes in.

It's easy to get caught up in thinking volunteering is transformative as long as it feels good, participation is increasing, and senior leaders are talking about it – but none of that is actually transformation. **Can you think of a time in your life when something happened that changed you forever?**

Transformative Volunteering is the same. It changes us. And sometimes it hurts. Read below for more.



TRANSFORMATIVE VOLUNTEERING

While Transformative Volunteering can be meaningful, joyful, or profound, it can also be hard.



When something is transformative, that means it effects change. But **change is not always easy.**



Like the process a caterpillar goes through to transform into a butterfly, **transformation may not always be what we expect.**



Transformation can be tough. But, like the caterpillar, it's a **process that allows us to emerge differently, beautifully.**

HOW IS **TRANSFORMATIVE VOLUNTEERING** DIFFERENT?

The word “transformation” gets used a lot these days. It’s often used synonymously with the word “meaningful” and, ideally, it refers to change. When something is transformative, that means it effects change. But change is not always easy. **So, while Transformative Volunteering can be meaningful, joyful, or profound, it can also be hard. It can be uncomfortable.**

And that’s okay! If you feel some discomfort while engaging in community impact activities, it means you’re on the right track.

Think of a caterpillar in its cocoon. We love the story of a caterpillar's transformation into a beautiful, majestic butterfly. We learn it as children and it’s inspiring. But, did you know that, in the chrysalis, the caterpillar’s body dissolves into liquid? That doesn’t sound meaningful – or at least it doesn’t sound like it feels meaningful. It sounds painful! **And the truth is: Transformation can be tough.** It can be a process.

But, like the caterpillar, it’s a process we must go through if we want to emerge differently, beautifully.

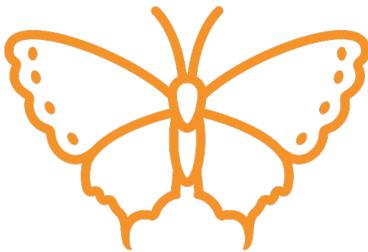
When was the last time you attended a volunteer event that changed you? Maybe it taught you a new way to think about your role in social issues. Maybe you learned something that challenged what you thought you understood about a particular community of people.

Read below to understand the steps that make Transformative Volunteer different and see if you can find the parallels that took place at the event that changed you.



TRANSFORMATIVE VOLUNTEERING

What are the steps that make Transformative Volunteering different?



Step #1: Challenge Assumptions.

At the start of every social impact activity, a trained leader sets the tone by inviting participants to expand their perspectives on the *who and the why* of this project.

Step #2: Focus on People.

Throughout the activity, participants are guided to think beyond tasks and focus on people. This helps us avoid sacrificing effectiveness to efficiency.

Step #3: Engage in Critical Reflection.

At the conclusion of the activity, a trained leader facilitates a process of critical reflection, helping participants make sense of their experience.

HOW IS TRANSFORMATIVE VOLUNTEERING DIFFERENT?

We all walk into unfamiliar situations with assumptions about what to expect or why things are the way they are or how we can contribute.

Step one in creating space for transformation is being challenged. You can learn more about this in (tool title).

Step two is just to volunteer, and to focus on the people rather than tasks.

Step three is to engage in a process of reflection. All of these are simple and intentional.

Transformative Volunteering focuses on people and is structured to meet people where they are, even if it's uncomfortable. Transformative Volunteering is a pathway to deepen empathy. Empathy is more than "putting yourself in someone else's shoes." It is a literal shift from a mindset of "helping" to one of "belonging".

In this new mindset, we no longer posture ourselves as "us" versus "them"; we're all just us.

When we implement Transformative Volunteering, our social impact activities have the potential to shift how people think and act; to evolve how we see ourselves and others; to genuinely experience lasting change.

What can be added or removed from your Social Impact programs to add elements that create space for transformation?

	<h2>TRANSACTIONAL VOLUNTEERING</h2>	<p>vs.</p>		<h2>TRANSFORMATIVE VOLUNTEERING</h2>
<p>The focus is the task (a “transaction”).</p> <p>Volunteering is a way to “help”, “give back” and “make a difference.”</p> <p>Projects can divide people into the “haves” and the “have nots”.</p> <p>Activities are unlikely to change lives of the participants.</p>	   	<p>The focus is change. The focus is people.</p> <p>Volunteering is a way to deepen empathy.</p> <p>Projects may unlock the potential for lasting relationships.</p> <p>Activities have potential to shift how participants think and act.</p>	   	

MORE ON TRANSFORMATIVE VOLUNTEERING

Transformative volunteering creates an environment for lasting relationships that impact every facet of our lives – our homes, our communities, our workplaces. Over time, we learn to relate with those who we may have perceived as “other”, and our empathy deepens.

In a corporate setting, there are three non-negotiables that indicate whether Transformative Volunteering is taking place:

1. Every employee who plans and leads a volunteer event is **trained to facilitate Transformative Experiences**;
2. Every employee who facilitates a volunteer event **leads a brief and a debrief**, and;
3. There is an **evaluation process** – even if it’s an informal one – that tracks the key metrics of transformation.

When we implement Transformative Volunteering, our social impact activities have the potential to shift how people think and act; to evolve how we see ourselves and others; to emerge from that chrysalis transformed.