

## LET ME THINK ABOUT IT

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"Should I - or shouldn't I?"

This is a question we all have to consider throughout our lives. It may involve deciding whether to buy something, make a decision about our health, or volunteer in the community or within an organization.

Volunteerism is as great a virtue and everyone should give back to the community in some manner. It can be very rewarding - one of those 'feel good' experiences. In fact, Canadians are well known for volunteering for good causes; at all levels - locally, provincially, nationally and even internationally (with organizations such as the United Nations or Doctors Without Borders).

But like anything, 'too much of a good thing' is not always in our own best interest. All of us have known friends, family members and colleagues who are always helping out others and have a 'volunteer CV' which makes you wonder how they manage to do anything else. Obviously these individuals are very dedicated people who enjoy nothing else than being involved. But even this can take its toll - mentally, physically and even financially.

This is not to say that you should not volunteer - each and every one of us should. It is a very rewarding way in which you can put your spare time to use in a very constructive and positive manner. But you should also keep something else in mind - your health and well-being.

At times it is hard to say 'no', isn't it! It starts by being asked to volunteer your time. Based on your experience or background, you know that you will be able to contribute in a meaningful manner to a particular group or organization. So you roll up your sleeves and 'dive right in'. Usually there is a bit of a 'learning curve' - as with any organization - but some are quite a bit steeper than others.

The more you get involved, the more time you spend as a volunteer along the way picking up a few more tasks and projects as you become more experienced and knowledgeable about the organization. You may even sit on an extra committee or two.

As you get more experience with any organization, an intangible factor develops - you learn to multi-task really well. This actually pays dividends in your 'real job'. You get a lot accomplished, and best of all - it feels really good, doesn't it!

**But** - be careful not to over-commit - it is human nature, especially with experienced volunteers to take on too much. In other words, those dedicated people, for the most part, have not yet learned to say **NO**. So you think it's easy to say no? It's not. Especially when it is a good cause, that will benefit people or the community, and you know you can make a **difference**.

So rather than saying 'yes' or 'no' right away, try '*let me think about it*'. Look at the 'big picture' and give it your thoughtful consideration. Ask yourself a few questions:

- What is my motivation for doing this?
- Am I likely to enjoy the involvement? The challenges?
- Do I have a personal or professional interest in the organization?
- Is the time commitment (ie. hours per week or per month) reasonable?
- How long is the commitment to the organization, committee or project (days, weeks, months or years)?
- Will I be expected to 'move up the ladder' to an Executive or Chair position? If so, is this what I really want or have time to commit to?
- And perhaps, the most important question - do I feel this will make a significant difference to the community or group it serves?

Now that you have thought about volunteering, and have made a decision on whether or not to be a volunteer, you may be asking about how this may relate to your health. Good question!

Volunteering is good for the community and can be very rewarding. It can provide an outlet for extra energy and be a positive mental break from your usual daily routine and activities. At the same time it can be very demanding on your time. If volunteering starts to take up more and more of your free time, maybe you should think of cutting back or prioritizing your involvement. You do not want to compromise your health or well being by trying to do everything. Be wary of taking up every weekend for 'the cause' and continually taking time away from family, friends and even your 'real job'. Make a sincere and conscious effort to make your community and organization better but leave some time for yourself.

At the end of the day, your hope is that you have made a difference. Every little bit helps. If you don't volunteer, you cannot contribute and there will be no difference.

Volunteer - it's good for you and it's good for the community. So don't be shy!

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