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Editor's View

Get Involved

It matters whether you volunteer for organizations you care about.

My mother is a doer. When she's in an organization, she's involved in that organization. She's always making phone calls or preparing materials or baking a cake for some group. (Her most incredible accomplishment, I think, is the elementary school library that she and a group of other women created and catalogued from nothing.)

Even after she went to work full-time once we were all in school, my mother continued to be involved, though she cut back some. She found tasks that fit her schedule.

I am my mother's daughter. I started doing volunteer work as a teenager and never stopped. Over the years, I've served on the boards of half a dozen or more organizations, run a number of fundraisers, baked more brownies and cranberry breads than you can imagine, made phone calls, stuffed envelopes and much more. (I've also formed some of my deepest friendships doing these things.)

In the last few years, I've been quite disturbed as organizations I care about have a hard time attracting new leadership. The number of people willing to help in any way seems to have gone way down while the number of people who feel they can join and have programs without themselves contributing has gone up. In one social organization my husband and I belong to, we've seen people feel offended at being asked to stay and help clean up after an event. We always thought clean-up was one of the fun parts when we did it with friends—it just kept the party going a little longer.

So I was disturbed, but not surprised, when I received an e-mail recently asking me what's going on with FoxPro User Groups. The writer told me that in his local group, the only way to get new people to step forward was for the entire board to resign and force an election. He also pointed out that another group in his area had recently merged into a larger group. (Oddly enough, though, the recent demise of the Boston Computer Society, one of the oldest and largest computer user groups in the country, was not related to lack of volunteers, according to my sources.)

Why are organizations having such a hard time getting people to help? One reason, especially for community organizations, is obvious. Most women today are working—they're not available during the day and don't want to go out at night. I'm not sure what the other reasons are, other than a general feeling of busy-ness in our society.

When I started working part-time, I cut down on my volunteer activities and when I switched to full-time work, I cut down some more. But I didn't quit. Even during the busiest spring of my life while, in addition to my regular load, I was writing a book and planning my son's Bar Mitzvah, I managed to run the Little League snack stand and help with the school fair. I'm not trying to pat myself on the back or sound like SuperMom here—those activities were important to me, so I made time for them.

That's really what it comes down to—what's important to us. If we want an organization, whether it's the Boy Scouts or a charity or the local FoxPro user group to thrive, we have to be willing to give as well as to take. I've learned that I can't spread myself too thin—if I take on too much, it all suffers. So, while we've been very active in the baseball league, Marshal and I have never done much for the soccer or basketball organizations—we figure other parents who aren't running baseball will do those.

Another secret I've learned from years of volunteer work is that, no matter how much I hate a particular task, there's someone in the organization who doesn't mind doing it. This gives me the freedom to agree to do the things I'm good at and enjoy and know that others will take on other responsibilities. So, I don't generally sign up for phone chains because I can't commit to getting calls made, but I always agree to bake for school events because I love to bake and often take on typing because I spend so much time in front of the computer anyway and I can do it on my schedule.

If you're already a volunteer, thanks. Somehow, even if you're on the other side of the world from me, your efforts help me and my family. If you're not involved, find one group that you believe in—your neighborhood association, the local Girls Club, your Fox Users Group, or anything else - and one task you're willing to take on and see where it leads. The world will be a better place and you'll be better for it.

Survey Results

Thanks to all of you who took a few minutes to fill out our reader survey. It helped to give us a better picture of where you are right now and what kind of help you need from us.

Most gratifying was how many of you said you don't have a least favorite part of the magazine—you like it all. Many of you also listed "everything" or something similar as your favorite part.

Based on those we heard from, almost all of you are at least looking at Visual FoxPro, even if you haven't started to use it for production applications yet. But even so, a fair number are still working in FoxPro 2.x.

Perhaps most interesting is the variety of responses regarding client-server and Internet/intranet development. Some of you are heavily involved in one or the other (or both) while others are just starting in those arenas and others don't see either one in their immediate future. Serving these diverse needs will be challenging, but we believe we are up to the task.

We're always happy to hear from readers about what we're doing right and what we're doing wrong. So, even if you didn't get a chance to fill out the survey form, feel free to drop us a note at FoxPro@advisor.com and let us know what you think.