

THEATER OF GENEROSITY **TOOL #5** STRATEGIC VALUE OF VOLUNTEERS

This tool defines why we want to integrate **VOLUNTEERS** more fully into the caregiving team and the strategic impact of the generosity of time.



Our organization is surrounded by people who give of their time to make life better for others. They give for the pleasure of contributing and living a meaningful life. These volunteers represent our highest and most generous instincts as humans—and a source of enormous potential for healthcare.

Often the role of volunteers has been narrowly defined. People rarely imagine a teenager teaching a patient how to use a biofeedback game, an artist creating a piece to celebrate a person's healing journey, a Fortune 500 executive providing business acumen, or an agent of the Geek Squad rounding to help people solve technology problems. Poets, musicians, cosmetologists, storytellers, listeners, gardeners, chefs, massage therapists, and people of so many other creative abilities are often strikingly absent from the current ranks of volunteers.

They await a new place and calling in healthcare as integral members of the caregiving team. Traditional roles will not evoke their creative energies and full contribution. They wait on us to imagine something more compelling that strikes to the heart of their identity and abilities.

With them we can create a world-class experience for patients and families that would otherwise be unattainable. And with them we can do something equally remarkable—support clinicians and other staff by creating a healing, nurturing, regenerative space for them.

Generosity is the strongest path available to create what we would most love to do both for patients and staff. It is not possible to hire all the people it would take to do what is abundantly available through the generosity of our community. But even if we could hire for these roles, generosity provides advantages that make it preferable. It is not simply a choice we make because we cannot afford to do otherwise. It is a choice we make because generosity contains a power all its own to heal and open hearts.

THE IMPACT

RAISE PATIENT SATISFACTION SCORES

Evidence suggests it is not only specific things like clean floors and clear communication that influence HCAHPS scores. It is the overall experience. So anytime we surround a patient with more beauty, inspiration, wisdom, and gratitude, we impact the way people perceive any particular aspect of care. But more importantly, there is something more at stake than satisfactory medical care. A healthcare event can be a portal to lifelong transformation. To achieve our highest purposes, we must think differently about the kinds of people engaged on our team.

WIN THE HEART OF THE COMMUNITY

Some organizations win a share of people's hearts. They have sometimes been called "firms of endearment." And research suggests they outperform good to great companies three to one. Perhaps the greatest benefit to engaging more diverse volunteers is to vest more people as allies and partners. Currently most people see themselves only as consumers. But anyone who participates with us by giving their time becomes a co-designer and emotional owner. The relationship moves from a transaction to one of joint participation in the great work of healing.



INCREASE PHILANTHROPY

When people invest in an organization, they often think first of how to give of themselves rather than their resources. Perhaps this is why volunteers give more money than non-volunteers. Some of the highest wealth donor-investors will only give in places where they are integrally involved as partners and allies. They are not simply check writers. The generosity of time, especially if more creatively defined, is a path of initial engagement. As such it is of immense value to the foundation. Immersion with a caregiving team can also be part of the experience a donor receives after giving a gift. It continues to connect them to the difference their money makes in the organization.

IMPROVE CLINICAL OUTCOMES

An emerging body of research suggests that generosity heals—not just the one who receives, but also the one who gives. There is no time when a person is too weak, too poor, or too powerless to give. And when a person gives, he or she often shifts the relationship to their own limitations and disabilities. Hundreds of studies now exist documenting the impact of giving in patients experiencing things as diverse as AIDS, organ transplantation, and chronic disease. Volunteerism is a healing modality. Thinking of patients as volunteers, rather than volunteers serving patients, opens a groundbreaking area of innovation. It is for this reason that some hospitals now call their department of volunteers the Center for Healing Generosity.



ABOUT THIS TOOL

This tool is part of a series designed to help change the way people experience generosity.

Often when patients enter a hospital or clinic, they don't consciously think about generosity. They know little about the people who have given to make a particular service possible. They rarely learn about the remarkable ways the people caring for them—from physicians to housekeepers—live generously. And there is nothing that creatively describes the generosity of the organization itself. No wonder so many people perceive hospitals and clinics as profit-centered institutions.

Generosity heals. We are only just beginning to discover its power to transform our culture and relationships, enhance the patient experience, connect the community, and even alter clinical outcomes. It's not just about fundraising. As we think differently, we discover greater potentials.

SUPPORT CAREGIVERS AND OTHER STAFF

Just as volunteers can surround a patient or family with generosity, they can create a nurturing space for caregivers. In some places volunteers do things as diverse as give a short massage, bring healing teas, create a more alive space through music or art, etc. Caregivers who are stretched and fatigued cannot possibly create extraordinary experiences for patients and families. So this is often the first place to begin. One small impact on the quality of life and retention of caregivers may be as important as anything we can otherwise do with generosity.

PROVIDE TRAINING

Anytime someone is in a healthcare space, they learn. The learning aspect of volunteerism can be heightened to attract a greater number of more diverse volunteers. At least one health system is working with a local college to make health coaching part of the curriculum. These students then volunteer as health coaches in a semester practicum afterward—and have preferred placement in medical school. Other hospitals work with massage schools. Boomers Leading Change in Health has one quarter of its volunteer positions supported by AmeriCorps which provides a \$1,000 per month stipend and health insurance for full-time volunteers and health insurance. AmeriCorps also offers a \$5,000 college tuition credit which can be transferred to children or grandchildren. In these and other ways, generosity and education may be linked more closely to create an enhanced healthcare experience for patients and communities.

Perhaps the greatest definition of a community hospital is that it is created of the community for the community—it is not simply sitting in a community. This is how most hospitals began. So it is most appropriate that this is how we are once again creating the future.



About the AUTHOR:

Leanne Kaiser Carlson is a healthcare futurist and thought leader for innovators engaging philanthropists in new ways. She helps organizations discover the healing power of generosity and advises CEOs, foundations, and philanthropists. Leanne is one of three founders of the Kaiser Institute and directs the Program in Philanthropy. She can be reached at 303.659.8815 or info@kaiser.net.

