

Ideas

The spirit of voluntarism

Coles offers insights into volunteers

Culminating a lifetime of writing about the struggles of children and women, Harvard child psychiatrist Robert Coles now examines the motivations and challenges of people who serve others. The result is a call to service.

By KATHERINE NOBLE

Warning: Don't read this book if you read books to occupy your leisure time. Robert Coles' new book probably will make you want to spend your time as a volunteer.

It may not have been the author's intention, but it's difficult to read "The Call of Service, A Witness to Idealism," without feeling guilty for not devoting one's entire life to community service.

The stories of altruism, sacrifice and dedication that fill the pages of Coles' latest book are heartwarming and inspiring.

One would be hard put to find a more compelling documentation of good works than in Coles' book.

The book is a record of voluntarism and activism that Coles, 63, has witnessed throughout his life, and was written, he says, as a tribute to his mother and father, volunteers of different sorts.

Perhaps it was the stark contrast between his liberal, idealistic and activist Catholic mother, and his stoic, serious and almost cynical father - and the fact that they both devoted years of their lives to volunteer work - that led Coles to investigate the motivations for voluntarism.

Coles, using a narrative approach he's applied in previous books, brings many people, young and old, to life. Quoting volunteers verbatim has the effect of holding up a mirror to the reader, who may end up questioning his or her own motivations for helping - or failing to help - others.

There's the story of eight-year-old Tessie, caught in the midst of school desegregation in the South, who goes to school every day among mostly white children, holding up her head and walking proudly past protesting mothers.

There's the story of two college volunteers who tutor inner-city children and wonder whether their work



Robert Coles

BOOK REVIEW

is really helping.

"I will leave that school some days, and while I'm sitting on the subway, I feel so sad, so upset - I feel I'm not really being of help to anyone except maybe myself," laments the female college student.

There's the story of a well-to-do mother who devoted her free time to golf and gardening until her daughter was diagnosed with leukemia in 1975.

At the hospital, the white mother meets a black mother who also has a daughter undergoing chemotherapy. To get to the hospital, the black mother and her daughter ride two buses and the subway, arriving already exhausted for the treatments.

The white suburbanite begins driving the family to the hospital.

"My mother became a little different after Alice got sick," the girl's sister tells Coles. "She has been going to church a lot, and she doesn't worry about the usual stuff - what we eat and whether she's overspent on her allowance! She goes all the way to Roxbury to help that family; they've become her friends."

The girl continues: "Daddy is scared because of the neighborhood, but Mom says the people are very

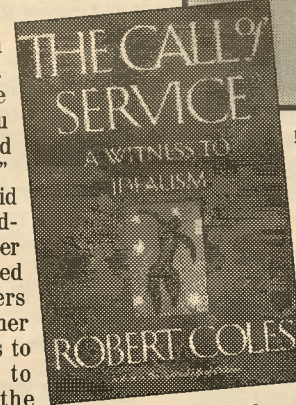
nice to her. She says they're nicer than our neighbors ... they'll stop you on the street and ask you how you're doing, and they seem to mean it."

Coles writes: "Amid all the fear and sadness of that illness, her mother was awakened to the needs of others as well as those of her own daughter. ... As to service, it's hard to decide which of the women offered more to the other."

This kind of "personal and idiosyncratic" service, brought about by a fateful encounter at a hospital, is one of hundreds of stories of human beings helping others that Coles tells in his book.

But the book isn't just about the good that people can do. It also is about why they do it. In between each story is Coles' commentary as teacher, psychiatrist and activist, on the challenges and frustrations of voluntarism and social activism.

That the book was published as President Clinton is launching his National Service Plan, is coincidental. Still, the timing underscores the



"THE CALL TO SERVICE"

AUTHOR: ROBERT COLES
PUBLISHER: HOUGHTON MIFFLIN
COMPANY
PRICE: \$22.95
287 PAGES

movement afoot in the U.S. to bring public service to the forefront of social change.

Coles says he believes students today are turning more and more to service.

"Half of my students are doing community service," Coles says of

the undergraduate course he teaches at Harvard College. And although motivations may differ, reaching out to others is, Coles believes, fundamental to human beings.

"If you even watch little children, they'll see another child in distress and they'll react," says Coles, a child psychiatrist.

"I think it's a fundamental part of us to reach out."

Coles' latest book is a moving portrait of the spirit that drives ordinary Americans to try to make life better for other people. And it may be doubly moving if reading it spurs people to become volunteers themselves.

"The Call of Service" is indeed a call to service.

Gaining public trust

NSFRE leader focuses on fundraising ethics

At a time of increased government and media scrutiny of nonprofit fundraising, the National Society of Fund Raising Executives is making efforts to improve donor trust and heighten public awareness of the role of professional fundraisers. The Philanthropy Journal recently talked with Patricia Lewis, president and chief executive officer of NSFRE, about her organization's agenda for change.

JOURNAL: NSFRE and four other national nonprofit associations are now working on a Donor's Bill of Rights. What was the impetus for the bill and what will the document say?

LEWIS: It just seemed to be something that would be useful to us as a profession. It's part of trying to help people understand that this is a two-way relationship, that donors have rights and they should know what they should be asking for. Donors have a right to see financial

statements, to know how their gifts will be used and they should be offered the mission statement [of the organization soliciting funds]. We'll be distributing the bill through NSFRE members and will have a press conference once it's finalized.

JOURNAL: NSFRE has also formed a task force to look at member salaries after finding that women fundraisers earn less on average than men.

LEWIS: The parity issue is significant. We found that the national average salary for men in the profession is \$52,000. For women, it's \$40,000. After three surveys in a row showing the same thing, we decided to do something about it.

JOURNAL: What's it like to be a woman in the fundraising field?

LEWIS: It's not really a gender issue. This is a profession for people with certain qualities - outgoingness, a commitment to philanthropy and the not-for-profit sector. It's a profession that has great flexibility. Women can come in and have flexible hours.

Q & A

Many women come into the profession after having been volunteers.

JOURNAL: What's the most important challenge facing the fundraising profession today?

LEWIS: Figuring out how to advance the profession in a way that's ethical. We have a responsibility to promote the fact that we believe there are ways that philanthropy can be respectful of donors. I'd like to see NSFRE maintain a leadership role in building the public trust.

JOURNAL: Do people understand what fundraisers do?

LEWIS: Not at all. I think people have a very negative view of fundrais-



Patricia Lewis

ers. The overriding sense is that fundraising is a hustle. It's not. There are hustlers who call themselves fundraisers. But fundraising is a process. The practice of fundraising is not easy. You have to be both gregarious and highly organized, present your cause and connect with potential constituents. That doesn't come out of one's hip pocket. It comes out of continuing education and skill development.

JOURNAL: The national ACLU is being criticized for failing to disclose a \$500,000 gift from Philip Morris USA to its members. What's your feeling about the issue of donor confidentiality in nonprofit fundraising?

LEWIS: My personal opinion is that when an organization receives a contribution from a source that could be controversial to the mission of that organization, they should disclose it to the board. That puts the governance of an organization where it belongs - not with the public or the media, but with the board. I think donors should be offered the opportu-

nity to be anonymous. But organizations shouldn't hide the sources [of contributions].

JOURNAL: Are fundraisers reaching out to new kinds of donors?

LEWIS: I think women are the new philanthropists of the 1990s. Our tradition is to ask the men, but women are being asked more now. Another group is young career people in their 30s, usually with dual incomes. And there are a lot of minority populations that have not been recognized but are very philanthropic.

JOURNAL: National surveys show that individual giving continues to grow despite economic hard times. Why do people keep giving?

LEWIS: People believe in causes. That's always been part of how we do things in this country. They give because they are asked. How many millions of people do we have in this country who've never been asked? I really am a proponent of philanthropy as a partner with business and government in improving our communities.

O'HERRON & COMPANY

INVESTMENT COUNSEL

3301 Woman's Club Drive, Suite 148

Raleigh, NC 27612

PHONE (919) 571-7722

FAX (919) 828-7911

TECHNOLOGY

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the United States to parents who speak English and Spanish.

"Thanks to the previous posting we were able to hire an additional staff person this summer," wrote Caroline Arvani-Cardona of Legal Services in her electronic thank-you note. "Ms. Billareal is extremely mature and a fine person. After our experience, we highly recommend this program."

If a request for finding bilingual employees isn't exactly unusual, consider the cry for help from Debby Warren at Raleigh's N.C. Client and Community Development Center of Legal Services of North Carolina.

Warren, whose breadth of low-cost housing knowledge is impres-

sive, nevertheless didn't know much about affordable alternative sewer systems for Eastern North Carolina, site of several new community development projects. Many sites don't percolate properly, she announced in an electronic message to NC Exchange/ HandsNet's Q&A forum, called Across the Back Fence.

Back came a reply from the NC Rural Communities Assistance Project Inc. Not only did the answer briefly discuss some options, but — in a stroke of coincidental good fortune — NRCAP was about to publish "Considering Alternatives: A Guide to Wastewater Technologies for Small Communities."

Clearly, one of HandsNet's major goals has been achieved in North Carolina: Enhancing cross-disciplinary issues among groups working in different areas.

Even better, some might say, is

the realization that technology can advance the credo of sharing that is fundamental to the ethical and practical survival of nonprofits. Thanks to computer networking, everything you do does come back to you - just much faster.

ELECTRONIC CONTACTS

NC Exchange/HandsNet:
Terry Grunwald, (919) 821-1154.
Housing: Martha Are, (919) 833-6201.
Agriculture: Betty Baily, (919) 542-1396.
Women: Anne Mackie, (919) 833-4055.
Low-Income: Lynnette Williams, (919) 832-7130.
Nonprofits: Leslie Takahashi, (919) 571-0811.
Politics: Diane Henderson, (919) 261-2689.