

Planning a Service Learning Experience

You can be the difference between service that is and service that seems. Below is a checklist to make sure the project you're leading and participating in turns values into value.

I. Planning the Project:

- Is the project rooted in partnership?** Service should be done with – not for – the community
- Is the service work needed?** Volunteering is about having a real impact on the community. Remember: the community defines what is helpful
- Is the service work appropriate for the age, ability, and size of the volunteer group?** Volunteers are most effective – and often most passionate—when the service work meets their skill set and there is enough engaging work to be done for the amount of time set.

II. Orientation/Pre-Service Framing- Do volunteers know why, who, and how they are serving?

- Connect the project to camp curriculum
- Model generous listening and being present to set expectations around behavior during the project
- Educate on the social issue being addressed
- Learn about the partner/host organization

III. Project Reflection:

- Recap the individual and group volunteer experience
- Celebrate the accomplishments and put them in context of the larger social issues yet to be solved. *Volunteers should feel like they have made an impact, but have not solved the problem- there is more work to be done.*
- Connect the volunteer experience to Jewish values and camp values

IV. What's Next?

- Spark conversations – even uncomfortable ones—that allow volunteers to contemplate their service in the greater context of their values and life decisions.
- Bringing it back to camp:
 - Share experience with others at camp
 - Continue to support the partner organization through indirect service projects
- Year-Round Engagement:
 - Reunion activities
 - Connect campers to their local organizations that do similar work

Part I: Framing: *How Not to Be a Schmuck*

Opening Question:

- When you're serving as a host, what makes for an ideal guest? What makes someone a bad guest?

A volunteer is a guest in the community where they serve. The community members and service partner are our "hosts." To understand how we can not be schmucks while serving, let's take a look at general expectations of guests in Jewish tradition:

Jewish Encyclopedia, "Hospitality: Duty of Guest"¹

(citations omitted, formatting adjusted, and edited for gender neutrality)

The guest [in Jewish tradition] was [instructed] to show gratitude to the host in various ways:

- While the host was to break bread first, the guest was expected to say the blessing after the meal, which included a special blessing for the host's well-being, future success, and favor in the eyes of God.
- The guest was expected to leave some of the food on their dish, to show that they had more than enough. If, however, the host asked them to finish their portion, it was not necessary for them to leave any.
- It was the duty of the guest to comply with all the requests of the host.
- They may not give of their meal to the son or to the daughter or to the servant of the host without the host's permission.

Discussion Questions:

- What responsibilities does this text put on guests? What are some of the other things that you do as a guest to show respect to your host?
- The phrase "being hospitable" most often refers to a host's responsibilities. How does it feel to put parallel responsibilities on the guest?
- To what extent are people serving outside their own communities and organizations "guests"?
- As Jewish volunteers, how can we apply these traditional Jewish responsibilities of guests to our service today?

¹ This text is compiled from a variety of Jewish sources, including the Talmud and Medieval commentaries. For full citations, see <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/7905-hospitality>

Part II: Post-Service Reflection

Text One: Mishnat, Pirkei Avot 2:16

לא עליך המלאכה לגמור ולא אתה בן חורין ליבטל ממנה.

It is not incumbent upon you to finish the task. Yet, you are not free to desist from it.

Discuss:

1. What have we accomplished together during this project?
2. What, if anything, feels unfinished?

Text Two: Maimonides, Mishneh Torah 6:6

The Mishneh Torah was written by Rabbi Mosheh ben Maimon, also known as the Rambam or Maimonides, who lived in 12th century Spain and Egypt. It was an attempt to codify all of Jewish law as it existed until that point and to make legal research easier.

If a stranger comes and says, "I am hungry. Please give me food," we are not permitted to check to see if they are honest or not; we must immediately give them food.

Text Three: Leviticus Rabbah 34:14

Leviticus Rabbah is a collection of sermons that analyze and build on the text of the biblical book of Leviticus. It was compiled between the 5th and 7th centuries in Babylon, and while the authors were rabbis during that period, their individual identities are unknown.

Some say that careful inquiry should be made in regard to beggars who ask for clothing to ensure that they in fact have the needs they claim, but no inquiries should be made in regard to food. Others say that, in regard to clothing, no inquiries should be made either.

Discuss

1. Why do you think these texts distinguish between the need for clothes and the need for food? Do you agree that there is a difference between those needs?
2. Did the work we did today meet a need in the community? How do you know?
3. How do we truly know what someone else needs?

Part III: Deepening the Experience

Generous Listening

Listening Activities

- **Telephone (younger campers):** Have group pass along a message - see if it stays intact. Consider using a message that is an “I need” statement- but also throw in some tricky words to keep it fun. Example: I need help procuring some peppers, pineapple, and other produce to put on a pretty pizza pie.
 - If the message stayed the same:
 - How does it feel to have kept the message the same through our whole group?
 - What did you personally do to ensure you repeated the sentence correctly?
 - If the message was changed:
 - How does it feel to have failed at keeping the message the same?
 - What could you have done to avoid the problem?
 - How would you have felt if you were the person who needed these ingredients, but your list wasn’t heard correctly?
 - For all: Based on your experience with this telephone game- how do you think listening is related to being a good volunteer?
- **Generous Listening (older campers/staff):** Pair up and have each person answer the prompt: Share about a time when you didn’t feel heard or listened to- what happened, how did it feel?
 - Have the partner repeat back what they learned.
 - Did your partner accurately re-tell your response? How did it feel?
 - What do you think “generous listening” means?
 - How does “generous listening” relate to your work as a volunteer?

Concluding Activities:

- **Listening in Judaism:**
 - The following piece by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, the former chief rabbi of Britain, looks at the role of listening in Jewish tradition: **“Judaism is a religion of listening, not seeing. That is not to say there are no visual elements in Judaism. There are, but they are not primary. Listening is the sacred task. The most famous command in Judaism is Shema Yisrael, 'Listen, Israel...'**
 - How have you seen Judaism as a religion of listening? What examples can you think of where it was highlighted/values?

