

Moving Beyond Charity and Activism



Send him mail.

"Insight for the Young and Unrestrained" is an original weekly column appearing every Thursday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by Gregory V. Diehl. Gregory is a writer, musician, educator, and coach for young people at EnabledYouth.com. Archived columns can be found [here](#). IYU-only RSS feed available [here](#).

The Problem with Activism

Activism is an act of charity committed by people seeking a higher purpose beyond their ordinary daily actions. Most people tend to separate their actions into those they "have to" do and those they really "want to" do. We've all worked jobs we didn't particularly enjoy because the financial reward was necessary to sustain ourselves economically. Our primary pursuits and existential dilemmas often consist of finding more ways to spend less time doing what we we don't like and more time doing what we do like.

Many people die never feeling they got to spend any significant portion of their lives doing what they would have wanted. Perhaps most people never really learn what it is they actually enjoy doing. All of us naturally seek larger purposes outside of ourselves when our momentary physical needs are satisfied. The great trap lies in tricking oneself into a perpetual repetitive cycle of immediately seeking another momentary superficial need to fill at the moment a previous one is done.

Let's say you are one of the more advanced apes in our species. Let's say you've had enough experiences and intentionally sought enough personal growth that you can firmly stand in the knowledge of who you really are and what you really want. Great. Now you can just feel all the more frustrated at your lack of ability to actually achieve your goals. Now you have to learn to silently accept that 99% of your life is determined by forces beyond your control and even invisible to you. In the world we inhabit, self-knowledge sounds like a prescription for severe depression.

Only the extremely clever ever figure out how to turn what they love doing into a means to satisfy their pressing economic demands. An entrepreneur is a special kind of person who has the right mind to spot opportunities, devise plans, and implement ideas. An entrepreneur gets really good at learning what other people want and offering it to them in

a new way, or otherwise convincing them to want something they didn't previously know they wanted.

That's really the hard part, isn't it? You can have all the passion in the world and it won't mean a thing if you never learn to convince other people to care about what you do. No business or product would ever succeed in the market if it depended exclusively upon the level of enthusiasm of the people promoting it. If you truly feel as though you've figured out what it is you want to spend your life doing, you've now got the extremely difficult task of learning to express that action or purpose in a way that satisfies the personal selfish interests of others as well as your own. You've got to take what is inherently valuable to you and make it valuable to other people.

Welcome to adulthood maturity, where it's no longer just about making yourself happy. It's about integrating your life cohesively with others who in at least some small regard share your conception of happiness. This is the only way big things ever get done and new roads get built. Fighting for causes and activism in general may solve our momentary emotional desires for action, but they generally aren't constructive, and they don't have nearly the same potential for long-term cumulative results. We've got to get ourselves together enough to collaborate and build something new.

Making Purpose Profitable

The accumulation of currency as a direct reward for results produced is the most useful method of measuring success devised by man. How can you know that what you are doing is worthwhile and contributing to the betterment of others? Simple: people are willing to pay for it. This is the beauty of profit incentive. If what you care about and think you can accomplish is really so amazing as you believe it to be, prove it by putting it on the market to compete with literally every other product a person could be spending their finite time and resources on. If it is particularly exceptional, they will be eager to pay especially large sums of money or make repeated purchases.

Everyone cares about something – we wouldn't get out of bed in the morning if we didn't. If you can take what you would have been doing for free given the opportunity to do so and formulate a plan to get other people to pay you to do it (without defrauding them) you have achieved success.

Think of all the things you do or have done in your spare time because it gave you some sense of fulfilling a noble or higher purpose. Think of something you wish you were able to spend all or most of your time doing. Why don't you spend all your time doing that? Probably because you either lack the ambition to do so or your time, resources, and thoughts are overburdened by the other tasks in your life you "have to" do.

By making the evolutionary leap away from volunteering your efforts to exchanging them

for equal value, you only further enable yourself to make greater progress in your activism and chosen purposes. You also create sustainability in your actions – every time you successfully perform the task at hand it creates more possibility for you to perform it again. If every action is a net gain to all parties involved, long-term cumulative progress becomes possible. In principle, this is how a business or corporation is supposed to function: as a mechanism for sustainable growth toward a specified goal.

Asking for money in exchange for what have traditionally been considered “noble” tasks is still seen as untasteful by most people with the best of intentions. It is believed that a practice loses its righteousness and altruistic importance when money is exchanged or the benefiting party is asked to offer up something of their own to participate. But a world built upon self-sacrifice is necessarily short-lived and unsustainable. A society where all people increase their capacity to act in every exchange is the only one where it is possible for every day to be better than the previous one.

This is the beauty of the free market. The history of man’s progress can be summarized as a gradual increase in the individual’s ability to choose for themselves where their best interests lie and to work with other individuals who can help them get closer to those interests. When you can make the psychological shift away from feeling the need to give away your abilities and resources to exchanging them for the abilities and resources of others, you contribute to the overall progress of mankind and the building of a freer civilization.

Money is only a means, and a darn useful one at that. If others are not willing to pay for what you have to offer, your skillset is either so far ahead of its time and out of place that no one will recognize its value, or you haven’t been able to adequately express its value to others, or it really isn’t as valuable to others as you think it is. At that point, it might be time to rethink your chosen interest and purpose.

But in all likelihood, there are others out there who care about the same things you do and share in your conception of happiness who would be very fortunate to have your physical and intellectual prowess at their disposals. The internet and other communication technologies have made it unprecedentedly easy to find these people and contract with them for win-win exchange. It is only by freeing ourselves from the bondage of laboring for the purposes of other people instead of our own that we truly come to feel fulfilled and that we are participating in the activism we seek.