



Giving of Talents and Time



Why should we give of our time and talents? What's in it for us? What's in it for others?

Terry Trout, founder of SeekSpark, a Customer Experience consultancy; former executive at Cbeyond; and Board member of St. Vincent De Paul, The Aquinas Center and Women in Technology led those present at the March 8th BELIEVES session in a time of reflection and discussion to ponder just this.

“MLK said, ‘What are you doing for others?’ Pope Francis challenged us ... “what are you going to do,” stated Trout. There is no lack for inspirational people calling us to service to others.

For Trout, 20 years ago she said she heard a calling from God to get involved in her parish.

“I say it was God, but really it was my 8 year old daughter Lindsey.”

Trout had been hearing messages about getting involved in the parish and had been encouraging her twin daughters to serve as altar servers or in the choir.

“Then one day my daughter said, ‘Mom, what are you going to do?’ That was a tipping point for me,” said Trout — as a parent and, more importantly, for my faith. “The next Sunday, I introduced myself to the chair of the Communications committee and offered my help. Later, I was called to be a Eucharistic Minister – literally, Father Austin called me up to the altar because they were shorthanded at Mass. What this showed me is that the only qualification to be involved is saying ‘yes.’”

Getting involved in her parish was also an experience that Trout believes God worked through for her to continue seeing Him more in other areas of her life.

“Jim Geiger was the chair of that committee and I went to work for him in Tampa and eventually moved to Atlanta with the founding of Cbeyond,” stated Trout. “I tell people that getting involved in my parish changed my faith life, my social life, and my career.”

When Trout became a part of the Cbeyond executive leadership team, she ultimately was responsible for launching the company's community engagement program.

“We laid a foundation for community service as a part of our culture because we knew it was good for our employees and we wanted them to have that joy. But we were also a startup with limited budget and wanted our name to be in the communities where we sold. And it worked. Before we sold the company, we had given 80,000 hours of community service in our markets. At Cbeyond, one of the most frequent reasons for coming to work for us and for staying as an employee ... was our culture that encouraged community service. In terms of name recognition, we were right — there was no better brand for us than our smart, talented and generous employees.

She added that volunteering makes us feel good, but, practically speaking, it also helps us to expand our network, build a resume, and more.

“Non-profits need your skills,” said Trout. “If you are early in your career, community service is a great opportunity to develop in new areas to take leadership and demonstrate skills. I often encourage young professionals to take their successes and references from community work and share it with their manager. It is a great way to display initiative, show leadership and communicate your energy. All these factors can position your readiness for a new opportunity and give your boss confidence to give you a chance.

One thing that energizes Trout the most from her work with non-profits and churches is the perspective she takes away from those she is around.

“You will meet great people when you volunteer – and they will be cool! I say that because there is something extraordinary about people who look outward, focus on something other than themselves and roll up their sleeves, Trout said. These are the kind of people you will learn from, have fun with and possibly work for some day. I promise you – you will add connections, learnings and friends.”

Trout also shared that “When you share time and talent, you can become a role model and it is your job to invite others. We’re all looking for someone to show us how to engage.”



Trout also pointed out that volunteering for work with a non-profit is good for her, because engaging with them slows her down and develops her inquisitiveness and consensus building skills.

“In a non-profit, the ‘Mission’ takes on great importance as it should and not every decision is made as fast as you do in a business,” stated Trout. “For me, I’ll often think ‘can’t we just make a decision?’ But over time, I realize the dialogue and process is what makes for the best outcome.”

While it may seem that the benefits received personally and professionally from the giving of one’s talent and time is enough, Trout said it gets even better spiritually.

The three key things that she drew everyone’s attention to reflect on spiritually were:

1. The possibility that there is something for us to do on earth that only we can do
2. The opportunity to grow in our relationship with God, and
3. That God will never be outdone in generosity

“God works in our world one person at a time,” said Trout as she opened her remarks in this portion of the discussion. “You have the opportunity to make a difference. God’s been using us as His instruments forever. His plan is to save us by working in and through us.”

Trout added that our lives are God’s gift to us, and how we live is our gift to God.

“God gives us gifts to know, love and serve Him. But we have to choose to embrace those gifts and the graces He wants to give. He will never force himself or the tremendous treasure He has for us on us. We have to invite Him in – we have to find ways to make ourselves open to those things that will help us spend eternity with Him. I find that when I serve others, I serve HIM. I get out of the center and put God there. And I have personally learned that I am at risk if I live at the center of my life. I am susceptible to worries about title, salary and what others think of me.”

In short, Trout shared we wouldn’t be who we are, or do what we’re doing if God wasn’t giving it all to us, and in the end God will bless each of our levels of faithfulness (2 Corinthians 9:11). He won’t be outdone in generosity.

Covering as much as she did early in the session, Trout took a moment to pause and ask everyone in attendance to spend a few minutes reflecting on and discussing the question: “How do you think we grow and change when we share our time and talent? Is there anything that stops us from doing that?”

At one table, Eric Maust, a business banker at JP Morgan Chase, commented, “We only have so much time so choosing what we do is key. For me, where I spent that discretionary time is a big thing to consider.”

Steven Menendez, a parishioner at Holy Spirit Catholic Church and Warehouse Supervisor at McMaster-Carr, felt the second question on what stops us from growing and changing when we share our time and talent is a bit easier.

“There’s an element of selfishness in that, but I’ve learned the more I give time away the more I get back,” said Menendez.

Kevin Patrick, owner and founder of Kevin Patrick Law, added that after he recently started his own practice, he realized he felt his life was very compartmentalized, but now he sees it’s about being a part of people’s lives, which feels more integrated.



After the table discussions wrapped up, Trout said she wanted to share the following five tips on sharing time and talent before the session came to an end.

Tip #1: Do what you can do when you can do it, and take steps along the way to listen to what you’re called to do.

Tip #2: Follow your passion – Sharing time and talent takes energy – so find a place where you have an interest and in an area that brings you joy

Tip #3: Do what you do out of love (1 Corinthians 13). Without love, even the best deeds mean nothing.

Tip #4: Remember it's really not about you. True generosity is giving without expectation of reward. The blessing is the giving itself. God will provide the joy.

Tip #5: Just do it. Don't worry about the lack of ability or talent. If we introduce ourselves and ask how we can help, God will take care of the rest.

"What is valued in the world so often is meaningless in God's eyes," Trout said. "In my time of adoration prayer, I struggle so much reflecting on how so much of what I do during the day means nothing to God. What God really wants is for us to be a reflection of his love on this earth.

One quote that I get drawn to in all of this is by St. Teresa of Avila, who said

*Christ has no body now on earth but yours,
no hands but yours,
no feet but yours,
Yours are the eyes through which to look out
Christ's compassion to the world
Yours are the feet with which he is to go about
doing good;
Yours are the hands with which he is to bless men now."*

With that quote shared, Trout opened the remainder of the time up for questions.

Eric Maust thanked Trout for providing encouragement to seek what God gives that only we can do.

"How did you discern this?" Maust then asked Trout.

"If you know my full faith story, you'd understand it's not all rosy. I grew in my faith during the times when I needed help most; learned to depend on God and then came to an understanding of how much fuller my life is and how much more content I am when He is at my center. As far as knowing where to engage, you simply listen to where you are being called, said Trout. For example, at Holy Spirit I wound up facilitating a Women's Bible study at night because having a leader was what they needed to start a program at night for working women. I never would have guessed how it would change my life. I've grown so much in my friendships, in an appreciation for scripture and a love for how relevant the Bible is to the life I am leading today".



Steven Menendez asked Trout if she could share a bit more about how she integrates work and faith.

Trout responded first by commenting on an organizational level.

"At Cbeyond, I was blessed. We founded the company to be welcoming to all faiths and employees knowing they could bring their whole self to work ... not leaving their faith at the door."

Then she commented more personally.

“On a more personal basis, the key is when people want to know where you get your joy from. This is what brings people to faith. One time a woman at work asked me, ‘How do you do it all?’ I said, ‘I pray.’ I shared how I found strength in daily prayer. That Monday, she stopped by to tell me that she had gone to Church. A few weeks later, she told me that she had joined a bible study. Later that year, she gave me an invitation to the Church play that she was performing in. And when she came to say good-bye as she took a new job, a promotion, a move to one of our other cities, she told me that her life began to change when she reconnected with her faith. That was the closest I had ever experienced in terms of evangelization and it made me realize that we never know who, when or how we might make a difference in our example, our talk, our sharing of faith. I committed right then ... never to be afraid to speak openly about my faith.”

The next BELIEVES session will be on Tuesday, April 12th when Monsignor Frank McNamee shares his reflections on “Shepherding the Spirit” from his time as a pastor at CTK and beyond.