

‘Teach India’ - Times of India, Corporate Social Responsibility

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When we talk about “Giving Back to Society”, what does it mean? You would answer, “Social Service”, right? Giving Back to Society is a social service, where you try to give back your time and energy to the marginalised, I think most of you do that. Once, Alex Mark said, Giving Back to Society is when we pay our taxes to the Government. Has anybody considered doing social service? What holds you back? I think we all, at some point have considered doing some social service, but for some reason, it has not translated into action. Often, time is a consideration. Time is really a relevant and a valid consideration, because when you are young, you are busy with your studies, studying hard to do well, that is your priority. It is understandable, so that is one of the reasons.

What could be another reason? The second very valid reason, actually is, you do not feel you measure up with tasks. Suppose if you want to volunteer as an NGO that deals with mentally challenged people, you may feel like, “I do not know what to do, how to handle people who have this problem”, so you stay back. Another question I want to ask is, suppose you go to your parents and you tell them, “I am going to volunteer two hours every day at the Dharavi Slum.” What would be their reaction? They may answer, “Go and Study!” That is actually true. At the back of their minds, they may think it is a great idea, but given, where you are, just now, they may not really encourage it.

So what happens because of that is we push doing something good for another day. We might well say, “We can always do it tomorrow.” What Tushar Gandhi just mentioned, “Tomorrow never comes.” That is true! Tomorrow never comes, so do not wait for tomorrow. Just to highlight the point, let me take you through my personal journey, from my student days many years back to my association with teaching and how it took me ever so long for my tomorrow to actually come.

At the age of eighteen I had an inclination towards social service. I really wanted to do some good work. I was quite keen, but then I came up with excuses. I found that I needed to concentrate more on my education. I did my Chemical Engineering from the US, then I came back to India, I got into the family business, started a small-scale factory dealing with chemicals, got married and raised a family. After I had completed all my responsibilities, I decided it was high time to be a little more proactive and got into some kind of social service. I decided to look for NGOs that were around. I zeroed down on an NGO called “Dignity Foundation”, that is very much in existence today. It was a wonderful organisation and after some consideration I finally approached them and managed to convince them that I wanted to be a volunteer. They asked me to read to a blind lady. Once a week, I was supposed to read to a blind lady, which I did, and you will not believe that it was the most rewarding and enriching experience of my life. It gave me a totally different insight into the world of the visually impaired. It was a dark but fascinating world and a very difficult world. It gave me an immense pleasure knowing that I could do something for them, and I also began to value my eyesight every single day after that. I did this for twelve years!

Then I felt I could and should be doing something little more than that. So I kept looking for ways of helping out and that is when I came across the ‘Teach India’ initiative. This is not ‘Teach for India’. Both of them are two very different projects. I saw the advertisement for ‘Teach India’ in the *Times of India* and it caught my attention. I read their requirements and it sounded interesting and when I read that the British Council had partnered with them, I was convinced that this would be a good programme. That is what really made me take the next step.

I went through the interviews and after being selected I got trained with them to teach ‘Spoken English’. This programme was for about four months and I went through the programme and enjoyed every bit of it. It is a fantastic programme, really, wonderful programme. So, that could

have been the end for me as far as 'Teach India' was concerned. Had it not been for Asha D'souza who came up to me and asked me if I could actually work for them, I would never have taken up the challenge. I had just put it at the back of my mind and she called me again and she said, "Why don't you give it a try? Try it for two or three months." I thought about it, somehow it did fit into my personal schedule. I later told them that I was actually contributing to the programme and enjoying it. That was five and half years back. I am still with and everything is going on really well.

The thing about volunteering is you know, we put it on the back burner and forget about it, What I would urge you, is to volunteer now. When you are young, you are all full of ideas, full of energy and full of enthusiasm. Do it now and there are so many opportunities available to us, so many options, and if you Google, pick up the NGO of your choice, see what suits you. If you like it, try it, if you do not, back out, there is no problem. But I really think what we need to do when it comes to volunteering, is taking the first step. Just try it; you may not like it, that is fine, just try it. There are so many options to volunteer for. 'Teach India' is one of the options to volunteer for.

Let me take you through the 'Teach India' programme and what it has to offer, hopefully I would like to convince you to join in for the next volunteering training. 'Teach India', is a *Times of India*: CSR initiative. CSR stands for Corporate Social Responsibilities. To simply put it, it is a social responsibility of the corporate to get into the social space with some programme that benefits the marginalized. *Times of India* developed the 'Teach India' programme for that purpose and by the way if I am not wrong, India is the only country to have CSR initiative mandatory. It is mandatory that companies plough certain percentage of the profits into this sort of a programme. *Times of India* came up with 'Teach India'.

Let me briefly take you through what the programme is all about. It is a spoken English programme for youth and for employment. When we

talk about spoken English, it is not written English, it is only spoken English, and the spoken English is foreign. We teach the students how to communicate by using everyday language, to help them get employment. And we teach youth not children. British Council is our knowledge partners, so we constantly dialogue with them. They develop the course material for us which is absolutely outstanding.

The learner profile is youth and the average age is from 18 to 30 years old. A lot of them are employed. They are well educated, graduates, some are even post graduates but, they are educated in the vernacular language, in Urdu or Marathi. Therefore, their English is restricted and they are from an under privileged background. The classrooms are provided to us by the NGOs, some do not have benches, so the requirements are basic. Now, our focus has shifted to colleges. I now teach at Rizvi College. I was happy to discover that the students actually benefitted through this programme.

If you would like to consider the 'Teach India' programme, this is what you would have to look at. The students are from 18 to 30 years old. 35 to 40 volunteers train at a given time and there are 5 centres scattered all over Mumbai. The age of volunteers are from 18 to 60 year and they are not only college students like you, they come from all walks of life. There are also doctors, engineers, students, housewives, it is a lovely mix of people, totally different backgrounds, different education, but there is one commonality there, and that is they all want to do some social service. So it's a wonderful wide range of volunteers.

Now this is important. Now what do we expect from the volunteers? Two parts to volunteering. First is, you will undergo a training with us, and the second part, you will deliver the teaching as per the training. The training is something we are very serious about. It is an eight day training, which works on successive weekends. Like for instance, say Friday, Saturday, Sunday, following weekend again Friday, Saturday and Sunday and then the third successive weekend will be Saturday to Sunday. So there are 8 days of training, full day training from 9 to 6 PM.

Now this is a serious part because if you have applied for the programme we would first have a telephone interview, where we would give you the dates of the training, and only if you could commit to those dates you can apply. If you have something else scheduled, like you are travelling or you have exams coming up, then we would tell you, “please, do not apply.” Because you will not be able to go through the training successfully. This is the only part where we would want your commitment, right at the start. And only if you agree to that, then we would take you on to work. The training is done by the British Council. It is a fun experience and not like lectures, where you sit down and the teacher talks.

Once you have finished the training successfully, you go and teach at NGOs or a college of your choice. You would have a class of 25 to 40 learners. There will be two teachers sharing the work. Each teacher will teach thrice a week, two hours a day on alternate days. You are required to give 6 hours per week. The learners will come all the six days. So 6 hours are all you are expected to teach, and the duration of the course will be two and a half months. With the training and the teaching, it takes about 4 months.

Volunteers will receive two certificates, one is for the training and other one is for the teaching. Now, this may not be important for a 50 year old lawyer or people over 50 years. But do you think it is important for young students? The answer would be “Yes!” and at the top you would also think why? First it would look great in your CV. We have a lot of college students, especially Second and Third Years; they come here only for the certificate. We do not mind that as long as they deliver the programme in the way we want them to. It really looks good on the CV, because it shows, as an individual, you go beyond academics. If you are planning for higher studies abroad, for instance or even for a job, you have this as an additional qualification and with names like *Times of India* and British Council backing up adds further weight. So it is very valuable, especially for people who are just in college or getting out of college. That is a good reason for you all to sign onto this. Like I said

this is a four month period cycle, and there are three or four cycles in a year. We have completed 21 cycles of training and the next cycle is going to happen in June 2019. Hope to see you there.