

VOLUNTEERISM: MY PERSPECTIVE

“WE MAKE A LIVING BY WHAT WE GET
BUT WE MAKE A LIFE BY WHAT WE GIVE...”

REFLECTIONS ON MY JOURNEY

I have often been asked why I spend so much time, effort and even my own money on volunteerism. Like most people, I did not do volunteer work in my early years. Instead, I was chasing success in the normal economic parlance of accumulating wealth. However, I did participate in IEM activities; I was a member of IEM as the affiliation was necessary for my professional work. I did not realise then that IEM would be my introduction to voluntary work later in life.



It takes hard work and persistence to build good rapport between IEM and the Perak State government. With Ir. Simon Yeong, Vice Chairman of Perak Branch (left) and Dato Seri Ir. Nizar bin Jamaluddin, Perak State Exco for Investment & Corridor Development (right)

That was 30 years ago. Besides IEM, I was also a Rotarian and did a 6-year stint as a Councillor with the Ipoh City Council where my voluntary services took on a new dimension, that of serving the public at large instead of just engineering professionals in IEM.

Today, as I reflect on my long journey with IEM and the Ipoh City Council, I often wonder if it is all worth the while. Certainly, there have been numerous challenges along the way but through the trials and tribulations, I have learnt that by giving to and serving a good cause, we help make the world a better place. That in itself, is a reward of immeasurable value and well worth the sacrifices made.

WHY VOLUNTEERISM MATTERS

Volunteerism is a basic expression of human relationships. It is about one's need to participate in society and to feel that one matters to others. The social relationship intrinsic to



Braving the sun to help build a better community for the residents is part and parcel of a Councillor's voluntary role with the Ipoh City Hall

volunteer work is critical for individual and community well-being. In addition, the ethos of volunteerism is infused with values such as solidarity, reciprocity, mutual trust, belonging and empowerment, all of which contribute to a better quality of life.

Our economic system prescribes the social structure for how we work and what it means to succeed in a world of limited resources. It is premised on values of self-interest and competition to achieve maximum satisfaction. It won't meet expectations of higher values that we seek once our basic survival needs are met. However, volunteerism is able to address this as it focuses on values, consultation and cooperation as well as allows for the human spirit to thrive.

VOLUNTEERISM IN IEM

Volunteerism has always come naturally to me and my passion to serve has seldom swerved from the noble



"Building bridges" to the Federal government: Current and future leaders of IEM pay a courtesy visit to Y.B. Puan Yeoh Bee Yin, Minister in Ministry of Energy, Science, Technology, Environment & Climate Change (MESTECC)

objectives of the posts that I have been entrusted with. However, for many volunteers, there is often a disconnection between what they are trying to achieve and what the organisation is trying to accomplish. This causes disharmony, creates animosity and detracts from the overall objectives. In some cases, protractors realise their folly, retreat to correct their approaches and perhaps come back with more appropriate actions. In other cases, they continue to champion personal agendas, oblivious to other opinions and so, often inflict serious or permanent damage along the way.

In voluntary organisations, a diversity of opinions ensures that individuals do not dominate or supplant the common good. There are rules and regulations, standard operating procedures, accepted practices and even simply traditions to guide the process of decision-making and how things are done. Altruism lies at the heart of volunteerism. This means we work by consensus, cooperation and compassion, not by competition, conflict and confrontation.

Perhaps the problem is that not everyone has had the opportunity to experience the joys of giving, sharing



Sitting as President of IEM requires serious deliberations and tough decisions. In deep thought with IEM Deputy President Ir. Ong Ching Loon at CAFE036 in Singapore

and knowing that good deeds, no matter how small, can bring about positive changes and betterment to others. Admittedly, it can be a rather big jump in faith for those whose lives are conditioned by competition and to take and keep what is ours, to a life where we give back to society without any apparent reward.

IN RETROSPECT

What then is it that makes us serve IEM members and indirectly, the engineering community at-large, though volunteerism? Are we truly altruistic or are we simply indulging in personal glorification/gratification? Are our efforts aligned with the IEM's aspirations or are we simply championing our own individual agenda?

These are questions I constantly ask myself. I'm sure other volunteers too ask themselves the same questions. Our answers may not be the same or be right but these questions will guide us to be cognisant of the basic tenets of volunteerism.

I end with a quotation: "Volunteers do not necessarily have the time; they just have the heart." ■



IEM office bearers have light moments too. Happy faces at the end of a long work session. From left: Ir. James Yong (Chairman, Sabah Branch), Ir. Mohd. Khir (Hon Secretary), Ir. Choo Kok Beng (Past President), Ir. David Lai (President), Ir. Ong Ching Loon (Deputy President) and Ir. Abdul Razak (Chairman, Perak Branch)