

## PODCAST- Episode 5

### Volunteering

Hello,

I am dr. Charles David Tauber, CEO of the Coalition for Work with Psychotrauma and Peace (CWWPP). You can see what we do and how we do it on the website [www.cwwpp.org](http://www.cwwpp.org). We very much welcome your comments on this podcast and your ideas for future podcasts.

Today's podcast will be on volunteering, and it will be based on our experience with volunteers and the experience of other organizations.

Let's talk about some first considerations in volunteering.

Why do you want to become a volunteer? You might want to learn about various places, people, subjects, and that's good. What we consider a bad motivation is to push yourself forward only to get another note on your CV, and only to spend time. We think it is very important to think about the people you are going to work with.

How long you are going to stay? Will that be valuable for the organization or for the people you are working with? We know a lot of volunteers who stay a very short time, and who create more problems through the fact that they stay a short time and the fact that they are there, than they do good.

What you can contribute? Do you have skills or expertise that will be useful to the organization and/or to the people with whom you'll be working? Also, you can contribute to attitudes that might not be there. That is also very important.

What can you learn? What can you learn about the content, the people you work with, about what you are doing and, very importantly, what can you learn about yourself while you are volunteering?

You should not become a volunteer if it's only for you and, very important, when you will be more of a burden to the organization or to the people you are working with than you will be a help. Unfortunately, we have seen that on quite a number of occasions.

If you are going to be a volunteer, you need to prepare for it. You need to learn about the organization that you are going to be working with and what it does. What are its tasks, its politics, and who are the personalities involved? You might even want to speak with previous volunteers. You also need to learn about the region you are going to, that is, the region in general and specific issues that are present in that region. You also want to learn about the specific areas of interest to the organization that you are going to be working with. Figure out if your skills and knowledge will be useful to them.

We recommend strongly that you get some training before you become a volunteer and, very importantly, training about trauma and secondary traumatization.

Virtually nobody is exempt from secondary traumatization to at least a certain extent while being a volunteer. Learn about it! Learn about the traumas of the people with whom you might be working with. That is very important!

While you are volunteering, there are several points. First, your relationships. Your relationships with other staff should be cordial. I don't think personally that they should get too close, especially if you are spending a short time there. Look at your relationships with your bosses, and with the hierarchy. How are you relating to those people, are you doing what they say, or you are doing only what you think is right? If you think they are doing wrong things, how are you relating to them in that sense? Also, regarding your relationships with clients, under no circumstances should you have a sexual relationship or a very close relationship with a client, especially, if you are going to spend a relatively short time doing your volunteering. This is not to say that you shouldn't be friendly with the clients, but you need to keep a certain distance and you need to remain objective with your clients.

Another point with volunteering is getting the supervision on the content of what you are doing, in other words, professional supervision. Are you doing things right, what questions do you have? Never be afraid to ask questions. That is very important.

Another point is getting psychological supervision. That can be within or outside of the organization from a specific supervisor. This is extremely important; we cannot emphasize this enough. What we mean by psychological supervision, is how your personal life and your professional life are interacting. How are you interacting with your clients, how are you interacting with the material? You may be getting secondarily traumatized, as we mentioned. It's very important to get that psychological supervision. Sometimes, you do it in a group. That is called intervention.

Also, while you are volunteering, we ask you to be very careful about your behavior. Don't get drunk, high, or anything like that. Conduct yourself properly within the community. Remember, you are the representative of the organization with which you are working. It's very important to conduct yourself properly.

Once you are finished with volunteering, we think it's very important that you get some debriefing. Get it from an external source, talk to somebody about what you did, talk about both the content and the psychological side. Also, we recommend that you do some personal debriefing, in other words, write what you did, evaluate what you did, figure out how you reacted to it, and what you've learned from it.

I have also done volunteering in the past. I've also worked with a lot of volunteers, and I can tell you from all that experience that volunteering is extremely valuable. Everybody who volunteers learns from it, but please, do it adequately.

Thank you for listening and thank you for watching this podcast.

We hope to see you at the next one, next week.

Goodbye.