

Why Tuesday is my Favorite Day

Tuesday mornings are my favorite day. I jump out of bed (the only morning I do this willingly), put on blue jeans and sneakers, carry my suit to the car for my work later in the day and head out to a shelter where for two hours I will have the time of my life playing with two year olds.

I am a Playspace Volunteer for Horizons for Homeless Children, an organization dedicated to improving the lives of homeless children and families in Massachusetts. (www.horizonsforhomelesschildren.org) This week I spent fifteen minutes guessing where Tiger was as a two year old girl continued to ask “where’s Tiger?” as I shrug say “I don’t know! and she lifts up the block, we find Tiger and she screams with surprise and we start all over again. During that time I am not thinking of the gazillion things that can consume me: the calls I have to make, the meeting I need to prep for, or the groceries I have to pick up on the way home.

I have the most popular lap. It takes only few minutes from the time I sit on the floor for one of children to go the bookshelf, grab a book, and walk directly to me and plop on my lap. There is nothing like a toddler sitting in my lap to keep me in the moment-I know I am giving something to them-with all the craziness and chaos that homelessness brings the opportunity is pretty rare for Moms to just sit and read to their kids. By providing a daycare within a homeless shelter, the children are able to receive consistency and routine where they otherwise may not. We also give the children an experience of seeing adults that are happy and not stressed-out. One morning the kids were fidgety and starting to have a meltdown. My “Playspace Buddy” and I jumped up and started singing the hokey pokey as a way of engaging the little ones. We were dancing, singing and kicking our legs back and forth. One by one all of the kids stopped what they were doing and just stared at us-stunned really as we continued to sing and play and laugh hysterically. They literally had their mouths hanging open. I realized that they may have little if any experience of adults playing and laughing. It can be profound the effect we can have on these kids.

We all have days that we would call “bad”- the car breaks down or the new car we ordered won’t be ready for another TWO DAYS!! Our computer crashes, we lose a document and can’t find it in that “search files” thing You get the picture.

Now picture a typical day in the life of a homeless woman with a two-year-old child in a shelter needing to look for work and an apartment all on likely what will be a minimum wage job. Where every morning is a struggle to find hope and not fall into despair.

Each and every time I go to the shelter I am humbled- by the chipped paint on the walls, the tiny claustrophobic rooms that the moms share with their children, the serenity prayer I see tacked to one of the doors, the fact that when I say “so long” at the end of my shift, and I am asked where I am going and sometimes it is “home” and I realize they don’t have one.....

Balance. We all struggle to find it in our increasingly busy and multi-layered lives. To me it is important to fit volunteering in because of what I gain from it. I often am told that I am “amazing” in that I volunteer. What my friends and colleagues will never know is how much spending time with these kids does for me. I love children. To have a two year old sit in my lap while I read to them, hopefully teach them not only the English language, but also about unconditional love and safety. Knowing I am making a difference while having a blast playing with toddlers, I experience pure joy.

There are so many benefits to be gained by giving to the community. New skills can be learned and connections can be made. When changing careers over ten years ago, I built an entirely new resume by volunteering for special events and fundraising events that provided me with the experience I need to transition into the hospitality field. Networking and making new contacts can work for our current businesses as well.

Each of us can find a volunteer opportunity that fits their with their schedule. Evenings would be difficult for me as I attend many networking events at night. By volunteering on Tuesday mornings I can then drive to Boston if my day requires, or back home to my office.

There are hundreds of opportunities to volunteer for a cause that fits with your passion. It could be working one-one with the elderly, working for a political campaign, or helping to support efforts to lessen the effects of global warming. There are two web sites that I have found that assist people in finding volunteer opportunities that match their interest: www.networkforgood.org and www.volunteermatch.org. It is as easy as entering your interest and your zip code and you will find many opportunities that will fit with your interest and time commitment.

At the end of the day, I suggest that we not only measure our success by how many sales we made or business objectives we achieved but rather by what we have given to others:

“A hundred years from now it will not matter what my bank account was, the sort of house I lived in, or the kind of car I drove...but the world may be different because I was important in the life of a child”. (Author unknown)

Susan Sambrano is a member of NEWBO and is the President of Elegant Venues, a marketing and sales company that showcases historic mansions and estates for weddings and social events. She is currently representing the Algonquin Club of Boston, a historic private club in Boston's Back Bay.