



Service

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Service should be a keystone policy for any leader – whether as a leader of a nation or of a family. I have always believed in service, service for its own sake versus service for monetary gain or service in support of personal ambition. I learned about service from my parents but also from the Boy Scouts and the US Army. At the same time, I will not hold myself up as the poster-child for volunteerism. I do what I can but I am not that person who dedicates every waking hour to the service of others – some paid and others miraculously with no monetary compensation whatsoever. Whether it the healthcare worker who deals with mentally- or physically-challenged patients or the first responders who can never live to a timetable since emergencies do not make reservations in advance. Or it is the retiree who, rather than kick back and enjoy a well-earned rest, mans an emergency response line or grabs a crossing-guard paddle and ensures the safety of our young ones – again, oftentimes unpaid. These people are amazing.

Sadly, I feel that the commitment to service is waning in our country when it should, in fact, be on the increase. I don't know whether it is indifference or perhaps that our free time is being sucked up by Netflix, Fortnite or Facebook. I also fear it may be that our sense of national – or even familial – pride as been replaced with skepticism and pessimism. Our optimistic pioneering, all-for-one spirit has been replaced by one of self-doubt, lost innocence and uneasy mistrust. The good news is that a continuous, committed and controlled re-introduction of service on a local, regional and national level could be just the positive jolt we need to get back on track with American Exceptionalism. But it needs to start at the top.

Service should become an integral part of government policy and it should begin with mandatory service including, but not limited to, military service. I am a strong believer in the notion that freedom is not free and the cost of freedom could come at the very highest price possible. That being said, offering another's life in the defense of any notion, whether freedom, national sovereignty, self-defense, whatever must be done so with the greatest gravity and seriousness by those endowed with the responsibility to make such solemn decisions. He, she or they must be made aware of the treasure for which they hold control. They must have at their disposal all necessary resources, equipment, material, planning, and clarity of vision to minimize sacrifice that their sacred charges might be ordered to make.

As mentioned, military service is only one of several options. What a national service requirement should mandate is that each of our citizens to graduate high school or an equivalent by the age of 18 years old be required to complete mandatory service for a period of two years. I am fully aware how difficult this will be to get one's "arms around" from a conceptual perspective – to take 2 years when one is only 18 – but it will pass quickly and the return on investment for the individual and our country will be well worth the time. Besides the military young adults could select from almost any other industry, including healthcare, government, construction, arts, sciences, etc. Virtually any industry can have a service aspect for our young people that will help them and our country. This aspect of service differentiates it from today's internship programs which serve individual companies or entities rather than our country as a whole. This plan would serve and be paid for by the United States of America.

How would this service mission make us better as a country? What, in fact, is the definition of "better"? For me, it has nothing to do with this expanding our borders or subjugating other people's. Instead it is teaching each of us that a country is a collection of individuals – as with a family – and that each of us should have a role in making our nation more productive, more sensitive to those of us in need of service, more responsive to variety of needs a country requires and more cognizant of the diverse population we house within our borders. Service, in turn, would provide a wealth of hands-on experience that one could not find without a program such as this. It would improve our sense of national identity while also addressing basic needs that a commercialized society – based on supply and demand – might not find room for.

In today's America, students generally march from high school into college or into the workplace based on opportunity, necessity or perhaps the lack of opportunity. Disparities and inequalities are baked into the system, providing greater options to those with greater access. Let us, alternatively, even the playing field by getting every eighteen-year-old to leave the traditional life-path and serve their country instead. It is a win for the country and a win for the individual. Of course, the process would need to be carefully designed to ensure that all people have equal access to all opportunities. If it is assumed that every participant is equal – with little or no experience – and that violations of this equity clause would be dealt with the highest level of appropriate severity then a fair program could be created. Revisions would naturally have to be made, loopholes filled, but the result would be exciting to witness.

Once the participant has completed the program, he or she can leverage this experience to do whatever is desired – but now he or she has a greater knowledge of the "real world" and how to function within it. Even if the activity performed was not the desired career path, there would be a keener awareness of what one did or did not want to pursue going forward. How many of us, after all, ended up in a completely different profession than the one we thought we wanted when we were eighteen?

And while it is a topic better handled separately (in deference to the dystopians among us), I would like to take this program and expand it to all Americans - voluntarily rather than as a required coming-of-age event. Two years of voluntary service for any of us would be a great experience and a great help to our nation.

As with most topics I discuss, the concept of service is fairly straightforward but there would be a great deal of work needed to create such a program. The plan must be thoroughly conceived then defined and communicated clearly – particularly the advantages and potential pitfalls – and finally deployed in a way that benefits as many young people as possible. It is a simple concept with very deep implications but one that I feel would be worth pursuing in support of making our country and our fellow citizens better in many ways.

Let's get started.