

# How Service Changes Lives...

Service; the most simple yet complex concept I have yet to encounter in my young life. Before entering PSL, when I heard the term service and I thought it was better not to over think what it meant, and to just always assume when you're helping someone you're serving them. However, throughout my experiences this year I have learned there is far more to serving and, in fact, helping is not even an aspect of serving at all. I've come to this realization by means of my personal service experience and the numerous resources made available to me that analyze the topic of service. After discovering what it means to truly serve and feeling the potential behind it, I feel like I have gained so much wisdom and as a result, have become the person I am meant to be. My service has certainly changed my life, and has the potential to change anyone else's just so long as they are willing to admit their imperfections, release any prior inhibitions and be open to forming relationships with those they serve.

One of the key reasons I believe I have been able to have such rewarding experiences with my service is because I finally understood the connection with your service cannot be forced. It must be intentionally nurtured. This is the problem many people encounter when trying to serve another. We get so caught up in our own heads, thinking we know what is best for those we serve, that we never take the time to sit back and observe what others really need. In order for service to be successful, the process needs to be natural and inspired by the combined abilities of you and the ones you serve. When you do not approach service with the right mindset, you risk creating more harm than good for both parties involved.

Unfortunately, this year I have also learned the fallout of not fully opening yourself to your service experiences. In my case, I was unable to fully connect with those I served and therefore struggled to find a home within my service placement at a local assisted living facility. I was unable to see past the differences I had between those I served and make a true connection with them. Specifically, I saw the people I served as unable to form a meaningful relationship with me because of either their short term memory or apparent disinterest. Looking back now, I feel slightly disappointed in myself for thinking with such arrogant thoughts. However, I also learned an extremely important lesson; when you realize you are doing more harm than good in a situation, no matter how many times you've tried to make it better, you owe it to yourself and the other party involved to honor your feelings and do what you think is best. After making the decision to leave my service placement, I felt as if I had grown immensely from the experience because I then knew how not to feel and act when serving others. Although I wish I could of had a more positive experience with my service placement, I am happy to have had the experience that I did because it has only made me that much more aware of myself and my service.

Luckily, my experiences with service have not all been bad. Mahatma Gandhi once said, "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others" and I cannot think of a more relevant quote to describe my second service placement and the closing moments of my senior year (Gandhi). Throughout the first half of my senior year, I was extremely unsure where exactly I saw myself within the upcoming years. Nonetheless, no matter how stressed I was trying to find the answers to these never ending questions, I would always know I could find peace while volunteering at the special needs unit at Perry Elementary School. My volunteer time became my time to let go of any negative energy I had building around me and simply live in the moment. One day, I came to the sudden realization that I had developed a true passion for serving those with disabilities; I knew that I was meant to serve those with disabilities and

physical needs for the rest of my life. From that point I had decided to pursue a career in Biomedical Engineering as a Rehabilitation Engineer, which is a newly developed area working to strengthen the abilities and overall quality of life for those with unique physical and psychological disability. Had it not been for my service experience, there is no telling how long it would have taken me to reach the point I am at today. I am eternally grateful for my service experience because through losing myself in my service and developing such a home within my service placement, I have, without a doubt, discovered who I am meant to be. Service has the potential to change one's life and show them all they are meant to be in this world. In service lies the potential to disconnect someone from the habitual routine of life and allow them to gain a new perspective on life. This new perspective contains the power to change the world and further connect mankind in ways unimaginable. Service enables us to humble ourselves and learn how to see those we serve as equals. By serving, we learn the value of respect and passion; respect for one another and our lifestyles and passion for what we believe in as individuals. I feel as if now I can fully stand by the belief that service is more than simply helping another and absolutely has the potential to change our lives forever.

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