

Impromptu Essay

Preparation, action, and reflection are important steps to any successful project. On different scales, taking an exam and pitching a new business to investors both require those three steps. Service is a unique opportunity to take those steps, and apply them not only to my personal growth but the growth and success of my community. By completing a split service project, I have the opportunity to compare how I planned, acted, and reflected while working with Hopes Landing and with the Salvation Army.

In my initial planning, I hoped that my service could be a project related to the environment; that was my area of comfort because I had done cleanups and sorting projects before. However, I also wanted to choose a service site that I could be closely connected to. I chose Hope's Landing because I knew several people who had served there before, and all had had a great experience. I researched some about the company, but really my preparation for serving at Hope's Landing was speaking with my peers who had worked there before and preparing myself mentally for the work. I did not prepare thoroughly for this class, however, because Hope's Landing could not guarantee me the hours I needed. I quickly adapted my plan and chose a second service site that I knew had consistent volunteer hours: the Salvation Army. I have enjoyed learning about the mission and operations of the Salvation Army while on the job. If I begin community service again post-graduation, I will do more preparation so I feel more comfortable diving right into the project.

The actions I completed were quite opposite for the two companies I worked for. Hopes Landing required me to be front-facing. I worked several tables and events, often alone, selling products. I would sometimes get questions about the company that I didn't know the answer to, and had to think quickly about my response. I also worked a few days in the Hope's Landing headquarters, cleaning out old bottles and assisting my mentor.

For the Salvation Army, my primary position has been sorting donated items as they arrive on donation day. It is less solitary than Hope's Landing, because the Salvation Army employs a staff along with their volunteers. The clothes sorting room is just one of many projects that happen in that building. It is a unique action, because I get to assist donors as they complete their own act of service. One memorable interaction I had was with two brothers, who were donating items owned by their late father. Their father was a Vietnam vet and a clothing store owner, and many of his clothes were fashionable, high quality, and new. I spoke to the brothers about their father's memory and thanked them for making it possible for people in need to have these items.

In completing my actions, I also accidentally achieved my goal of sustainability in both projects. I assisted Hope's Landing with their bottle buy-back program, which washes and refills all their product jars so they can be reused. The clothes donation of the Salvation Army makes it so good, usable items aren't going to waste in landfills, and can get a new life with someone who needs it. I am proud that I get to make the world a better place along with my community.

In reflecting on these two projects, I am grateful for the experience I have had. I expected that I would feel accomplished and proud of the service that I had done. I do feel accomplished and very proud, but I had an unexpected side effect. I feel exceptionally close to the city of Tiffin now and feel more like a part of the community than I ever have. I recognize some customers who come to every Hopes Landing event, and seeing them motivates me to keep serving. Adding my work with the Salvation Army, I feel pride in my community knowing that the items donated come from local people and will stay local. The help that Hope's Landing and the Salvation Army give the community is very different, but both help Tiffin to be a self-sustaining place.

There is a common conversation I have while working at Hopes Landing. It occurs when customers read that all of our products are made by survivors of human trafficking and domestic violence. Customers ask, "Are they local?" and I explain yes. It's a shocking revelation, that one's neighbors and coworkers in Seneca County are just as likely to experience violence as people in big cities. Perhaps Hope's Landing's greatest impact is not only employing survivors but raising awareness so that the community as a whole feels empowered to stop it.

Completing my service and civic engagement project has absolutely helped me achieve the goal of the Honors Program, reaching my potential as a whole person. I no longer feel like just a student at a university, isolated from "real life." I feel like I have grown roots in Tiffin while completing this project. The only thing I would change about this project is that I would have accomplished it sooner, so that I felt this connected to my community during my sophomore or junior year, rather than right as I was about to leave it.