

Ideas for Those Wishing to Do Greater Good

by *Tim Cimino*

1. Develop a support system to remind and encourage you to do good. It may just be one person who expects and encourages you to “make the best, most loving use of your time” and who regularly asks you what specific thing you’ve done and how it turned out. Perhaps a weekly check-in by phone or email is enough support. Or it could be a journal or notebook that you put somewhere where you see it daily. In my opinion, if you are really serious about doing more good, you will develop some support system. Note that when you think about how your efforts turned out, you are evaluating yourself; thinking about what worked and what didn’t work will allow you to learn to do better in the future.

2. Imagine that there is an Olympic gold medal for doing good, and that your goal is to win the medal this year. But also imagine that allowances are made for people’s abilities. So a rich person or a brilliant person would have to do a lot more than the average person to win. Thus, everyone has a shot at the gold. What kinds of projects or skills would you work on to earn the gold? Maybe discuss this question with others to get even better ideas!

3. In general, move up the Ladder of Empowerment. (Read it from the bottom rung up.)



Teach people to teach others
and the world is transformed.

Teach people to learn, and
their whole lives are changed.

Teach people to fish, and
you feed them for a lifetime.

Give people to fish, and
you feed them for a day.

Sometimes it’s appropriate to operate on the lower rungs. For instance, if someone is hungry or sick or cold they’re not going to be interested in learning how to learn. But in general, you can do more good if you are teaching others things that empower them and/or things that empower others.

4. Think about how people actually learn to be good or better people. In your personal experience, how has real change occurred?

5. Work on your own lifestyle, relentlessly doing capacity-building. This can mean doing time management so you can have more time to give, or doing money management so you have more money to give, or learning communication or counseling skills so you can be a better listener or helper. In general, figure out your greatest obstacle to doing more good—and then remove it, and then figure out the next greatest obstacle, and then the next... This gives you more *capacity* to do good.

6. Make a study of what goodness is. There are many radically different views on what is good, ethical and moral. Examine your assumptions through reason and thinking, and put the product of your thinking to the test through small “field-test” experiences. Otherwise, you might actually doing harm by empowering the wrong person, at the wrong time, in the wrong way. If you suddenly realize that some of the things you thought were obviously good, may not be so obvious, you are beginning to understand.

Don't let this understanding paralyze you, or make you cynical. A dog doesn't need to know to Plato to nurse her puppies. A plum tree does not need an advanced degree to produce fruit. You may never arrive at an understanding of the perfect good, but you can still do better or worse.

You can save yourself much time and avoid much confusion by studying those who *live* it, rather than those who just talk or write about it, or study it theoretically.

7. Beware of giving power to people who are too selfish or too immature to use it wisely. This is why it's strongly recommended that significant empowerment take place in the context of an ongoing relationship. Observe people carefully for clues to their inner nature. How do they spend their free time, their spare money, and what do they commonly think about? If they spend their energy selfishly or use their energy to harm or oppress others, don't give them more power. It would be better to empower people who will tend to help others.

8. In a world such as ours, it's urgent that more good be done—but don't be in a rush to do it! In other words, don't do some action just because it presents itself to you. With some reflection you might come up with a better, more effective action. For instance, you may see homeless people and be inspired to work in a homeless shelter. While that may be good, you might do more even more good by teaching job skills, or doing political advocacy to leverage money for jobs education or for better health care, so there will be fewer homeless.

9. Identify your motives for wanting to do more good. They will affect the kind and quality of good you do. Some people might do good out of guilt. Some because they don't like to see others suffer. They feel compassion or empathy. Some want to feel better about themselves, or feel better about the world. (The more good that's done, the

more beautiful the world becomes.) Some may want do it for religious or spiritual motives. Some may want to be respected or have a better reputation. People who do good just to relieve personal guilt may give \$25 or a token amount to the first organization that asks. But someone with a deeper desire to do good would probably research several organizations before given money.

It's interesting that someone who does good for a superficial reason, say reputation, may actually save many more lives or alleviate more suffering than someone who has what most people would consider to be purer motives. It's also often true that someone with the best intentions may unwittingly do great harm in their attempts to do good.

10. Other materials and ideas about goodness and doing more good can be found at groupgenie.org in the "Goodness" and "World Changing" sections.

11. These suggestions represent my best understanding, but I believe that they are far from adequate. If you have any substantial suggestions, let me know, because I want to learn how to do greater good. (See the "Contact Us" page at GroupGenie.Org)

12. I will repeat my first suggestion because I think it's the most powerful. If you don't have some ongoing support structure to encourage you to keep doing good, you are unlikely to do much good. You would be unlikely to remember or apply most of the suggestions mentioned here. Maybe just send this to some friends who might be interested, and invite them to consider a regular once a week phone call or email check-in. (Passing this on to friends and family might eventually cause them to pass it on to others, and even more people might learn to do greater good!)