

Being of service  
February 7, 2021

Dear Students,

My letter this week is inspired by Noanah's post in the All group yesterday, reporting that the students she tutored last year got their results, and did well. First of all - congratulations to those students for their results, and to Noanah for her service.

It also made me think back to the L6 applications that I read last year, and in particular one theme thing that came up very frequently in those applications. It was in response to the question on the application that asked 'what do you imagine yourself doing 10 years after graduating university?'

The answers usually went like this...

"10 years after graduating university I will be a world-famous surgeon. When I make enough money with my successful medical practice, I will build a children's home in my neighborhood to care for the young people who don't have parents."

"10 years after graduating university I will be owning a company that will be built on the new computer science breakthrough that I made. After my company makes lots of profits, I will use some of them to build a primary school in my hometown so that the children there can be educated."

I think you can see the pattern here: I will be successful, and then I will help others.

This isn't a terrible way of thinking - success and then helping. There are some good role models for this kind of a life, and it is possible for personal success or enrichment to go along with contributions to the world. Using those two examples above, there are many surgeons who do good for others, and new computer science apps or technologies can certainly improve the world.

But I don't think it's the right way of thinking about service. Here are a few problems that I see.

What happens if you wait your whole life, telling yourself that you'll do it after you've accomplished your own goals, and then you never quite accomplish your own goals? What if you don't make enough money to do the kind of service that you were planning to do?

Or here's another problem. If everyone was focused on serving only after building their own success, then who would teach at the school you open in 20 years? Who would your children's home employ as the caretakers or cooks or nurses? These people are serving as well, and their service is just as deserving of respect, perhaps even more. Your teachers here at school are examples of our value of service. And none of them waited until they were rich or successful first, before coming to teach here. Yet where would the school be if they had waited?

So I propose to you that instead of waiting to serve, you can *be of service*.

You can embody the value of service from the very beginning of your career, or even before. You can serve as your primary goal or activity, not as a side project that is conditional on other accomplishments. Be a teacher or a nurse or a social worker, open a surgery that works primarily with low-income patients, or design an app that helps people who don't have jobs use their skills to make money. Find some way of using your passions and talents to help both yourself and others, at the same

time. Or just look around you and see what needs to be done in your community. Is there trash on the ground that needs to be picked up, or a garden to be planted, or something else that you can help with?

You've all done this in some way. The Research Methods projects that you did during lockdown last year were an example. I hope you came away with the realization that service isn't something you have to wait until you're well-educated or wealthy in order to do. Sure, education and money can help, but they aren't required. There will always be ways that you can be of service, if you look for them.

So I urge you to think about where these opportunities to serve are, and build them into your life and career, finding ways that you can embody our school value of service, both while you're at home, while you're at school or in university, and after.

Sincerely,  
James