

# Ten Commandments for Volunteers

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1. **Be purposeful.** Know what skills you have to contribute before you arrive on the scene.
2. **Be flexible.** This includes being prepared to do administrative grunt work. (Sorry, not all aid work involves washing babies and hugging orphaned children.)
3. **Be reflective.** Constantly question your motives. Ask yourself why you are helping, think of your motivation, and keep that at the forefront of your mind.
4. **Be receptive.** Learn as much as you can. That said, be wary of engaging for too long with NGO veterans who have become hardened and cynical from their work. Instead, find long-termers with hope still gleaming in their eyes. Then, latch on with open ears.
5. **Be positive.** Take pride in your idealism—it's the only thing that can ward off the inevitability of cynicism's approach in your difficult environment.
6. **Be realistic.** Your idealism can be balanced only by the knowledge that you are not here to save the world, but to play one specific role and that you may never witness the effects of your efforts.
7. **Be independent.** Much of your work will depend on your personal initiative. Be a team player, but do not rely on others to guide you every step of the way.
8. **Be empathetic.** Your ability to succeed will depend entirely on your connection to and understanding of the people you work with.
9. **Be humble.** Don't speak much. Listen. Avoid grandiose conclusions about a problem, community, or philosophy that you were recently introduced to. Act. Think. Feel. But don't come to too many conclusions—they will only halt your experiential learning process.
10. **Have a ball.** Just be sure you've earned it.

Article by Adam Finck, a true humanitarian, who dedicates his life to the fight against violence, poverty, and injustice—he recently returned from two years in Africa, where he worked with the organization [Invisible Children](#).

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