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America in Midst of ‘Compassion Boom’

New York, NY, March 7, 2010 – “What America Cares About,” an exclusive new PARADE poll reported in part in this Sunday’s issue, identifies a “compassion boom” of Americans who are working to improve our communities and the world.

“Public service” has become more than a phrase or a school requirement in our country -- it’s now a way of life. Over the course of their lifetimes, nearly every respondent (98%) has engaged in at least one activity to make a difference, and an inspiring 91% have done so in the past 18 months. Respondents were almost unanimous in the belief that it is “important to be personally involved in supporting a cause we believe in” in our communities (94%) and in the world at large (91%). More than three out of four (78%) think that the actions of one person can improve the world, and 78% also believe they’re more involved in making a difference than their parents.

“This research really shows that Americans care deeply about making a difference in our world,” says the article’s author, Michael Berland who, as president of the polling firm Penn Schoen and Berland, conducted the PARADE poll. “It also underscores what motivates Americans to act, what doesn’t and what keeps them, at times, from doing even more. It’s one of the most uplifting polls I’ve done.”

The Americans surveyed by PARADE are particularly proud of one very personal way that they’re contributing to the greater good: 90% said that they are working hard to teach their children the importance of activism. They’re imparting these lessons in a variety of ways, including leading by example (64%); talking to their kids about important issues and causes (51%); discussing their own charitable contributions or efforts with their children (35%); taking them to meetings or when they volunteer (32%); urging them to follow role models who are working for positive changes (31%); and encouraging them to donate their own money to deserving causes (25%).

So just why are Americans “doing good?” Most of the poll respondents are motivated toward public service by simple altruism—60% want to help other people, and 57% want to make the world a better place. However, many people are specifically moved to act on behalf of their own communities. Nearly half of respondents (49%) want to improve their neighborhoods.

What motivates Americans to actually act upon their good intentions? More than two-thirds (68%) say personal experience has been a major impetus. Of those respondents, 40% say their motivating experience was a positive one, as in, “Someone did something good for me,

and I want to give back.” A family member or friend’s request is another big catalyst (33%), as is learning about an issue from the news (28%).

Berland used data from the poll to identify three new types of people who emerge as major groups, each with specific traits, attitudes, and beliefs about making a difference in the world:

“YEPIES” (Young, Engaged Problem-Solvers)

This is a group of committed younger people, about two-thirds of whom are women, whose very nature is to be very civically engaged, who actively look for ways to contribute and make a difference and who use and engage in social activity both in the real world and online in order to do so.

Rapid Responders

This is a group of people whose civic engagement is very focused and personal. It tends to be born of a specific problem (often a health issue or a local community issue) that has come to their attention very directly, often through the experience of a family member or a close friend going through something difficult, a negative experience.

The Mission-Minded

Older than the other types identified, religion largely drives the civic engagement of the Mission-Minded. They see supporting basic needs as a religious mission, and see their religious mission as supporting basic human needs. They prioritize food, shelter and humanitarian aid but may also rally to a cause that they have been tipped off to by their religious community or leader. Like YEPIES, they actively seek opportunities for civic engagement.

PARADE also asked Americans what they’d do if given **\$100,000** to donate to charity. Here is how they would allocate the funds:

Food and shelter for the needy	\$15,953.21
Research to cure disease	\$14,311.54
Disaster relief	\$9308.97
Animal welfare	\$8783.46
Youth programs	\$6514.53
Poverty relief/job assistance	\$6234.83
Education	\$6069.00
My religion’s charity	\$5921.93
The global environment	\$5340.51
Public health	\$4924.82
Human rights	\$4422.10
My immediate environment	\$3628.49
Literacy	\$2952.55
Other religious charities	\$2262.90
Promoting world democracy	\$1732.32
Visual and/or performing arts	\$1638.83

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About “What America Cares About”

Michael J. Berland is the president of the polling and research firm Penn Schoen and Berland and the co-author of “What Makes You Tick?: How Successful People Do It – And What You Can Learn from Them.” Laura van Straaten also contributed to this article. The PARADE poll

was conducted by Penn Schoen and Berland with a national online panel of adults ages 18 and over. Surveys were completed by 1,008 respondents in an online questionnaire January, 23-27, 2010. Margin of error is +/- 3.1%.

About Penn Schoen Berland

Penn Schoen Berland is a global research-based consultancy that specializes in messaging and communications strategy for blue-chip political, corporate and entertainment clients. PSB has over 30 years of experience leveraging unique insights about public opinion to provide clients with a competitive advantage. PSB executes polling and message testing services for Fortune 100 corporations and have helped elect more than 30 presidents and prime ministers around the world. Penn Schoen Berland is a part of Young & Rubicam Brands, a subsidiary of WPP, one of the world's leading communications services networks. More information is available at www.psbresearch.com