



Being a Good Citizen

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Citizenship

Being a citizen and being a good citizen are far from the same thing. Being a good citizen and exhibiting signs of good citizenship is far removed from the legal distinction of being a citizen of one country or another. In fact, people who are technically not citizens of a country may exhibit all the signs of good citizenship not found in many of those who hold the country's passport.

Community

Communities are vital to a culture's and country's proper functioning. A much-lamented facet of modern society is the lessening of community ties – communities where everyone once knew each other are now becoming places where no one knows their neighbours and people go about their business without passing the time of day with each other. But in communities where good citizenship is evident, local ties flourish and people come together – both in bad times and in good. People who help out elderly neighbours, young people who wash cars in the neighbourhood, people who help to organise the local school's summer fete – these are people who exhibit signs of good citizenship.

Volunteering

Often called the third sector, volunteering is becoming increasingly important and is worth millions of pounds to the UK's economy. People who volunteer exhibit many signs of good citizenship. There are many different ways of volunteering – and everyone makes an impact. From the people who work an afternoon a week at a local charity shop to people who raise thousands of pounds for charity on epic challenges, volunteers are widely regarded to be of huge importance. Volunteers are good citizens for the simple reason that they give back to the community without taking anything away. Many people say that they enjoy the work they do – but it can still often be tough going. Think of people who answer the phone lines at organisations such as the Samaritans – it can be thankless and heart-rending work at times, but these people add an invaluable service to our community.

Public Sector

Of course, not all jobs which are for the greater good of the community can be carried out through volunteering. Many people who are employed in public service can also be described as good citizens for their hard and selfless work for the greater good of others. Doctors who perform delicate and virtually miraculous operations on a daily basis are good citizens, as are the nurses who tend their patients. But more than this - the people who truly have thankless jobs. The people who clean our schools and hospitals and those who cook food for elderly people – without whom, they would not see anyone else and would not eat properly. Of course, good citizenship cannot just be about the jobs we do – paid or unpaid. Good citizenship is more than this. Good citizenship should be evident in everything we do and say. We should all strive to be good citizens in our words and actions – smiling at people in the street and thanking the shopkeeper as he or she hands us our change are both small

examples of how we can be better citizens. Above all, good citizenship is about putting the needs of the community and the needs of others above one self's own preferences.

What Does It Mean To Be A Citizen?

The question of what does it mean to be a citizen has no simple answer. On a purely definition-based description, what it means to be a citizen is that a person is a legally recognised inhabitant of the country they live in – in the UK, this means they pay taxes and are entitled to the help of the benefits and NHS systems. However, in practice, answering the question what does it mean to be a citizen is far from easy. As new rules and tests for people wanting British citizenship show, being a citizen is about far more than a legal status. It is about understanding and accepting – and being a part of the culture, rather than an observer from the outside.

Understanding

Cultures are a complex thing to get a handle on. Depending on how different one person's home culture is to another, there may be huge gaps in understanding of each other's cultures. To truly be a citizen of a country, the person must fully understand its culture. This does not necessarily mean that person must blindly agree with the ways of doing things – but an understanding of how and why things happen is vital. In fact, the greater their understanding of a culture, the more people – citizens – may want to question it. But in many ways, this is human nature at work. And, if a deeper understanding of the culture leads to a deeper dissatisfaction of the way things are done, then so be it. A right to protest and the act of protesting are all signs that a person is a citizen in the truest sense of the word – because they understand the culture and, although they disagree with things, they are involved enough to want to make a change, hopefully, for what they believe to be the greater good.

Accepting

But protestors who have the country's best interests at heart – and moreover those of the people who live in it – must take care not to damage the culture or the country. And in that way, they must be accepting of the culture. For example, a person in the UK who was anti-monarchy may set up petitions and hold organised and peaceful protests calling for its abolition. This is their right, and one would hope that in line with their views, what they would like to see happen. However, a non-peaceful protest against the monarchy would not be a good citizen's way of doing things – as it does show an acceptance of the culture, and, moreover could be harmful to the people who live there.

Being A Part Of A Culture

To truly be able to answer the question of what does it mean to be a citizen, a person must become part of their culture and part of their community. This is why there is now an English language requirement for new citizens of the UK. Not speaking the same language as the other people in your community and culture speak is a major hindrance to becoming a

true citizen – with regards to being part of the culture. Being part of the culture though goes much further than this. It is about integration with others, about bringing your views and experiences to the table and sharing them to make the whole culture richer from the experience of everyone in it. It can be about having a public service job, about volunteering and about giving back. It is about working together for the greater good.

And therein lies the eternal answer to what does it mean to be a citizen. Legally, a citizen is someone who has the required passport, a piece of paper. But truly, a citizen is someone who shares with their communities and who gives back what they take out. Make no mistake, there are plenty of people in the UK who were born here but could not be said to be true citizens – it is about an emotional state and mindset just as much as a geographical and legal term.

Questionnaire: How Good A Citizen Are You?

People may well think they are a good citizen, but when all is said and done, what exactly is a good citizen? Is it somebody who helps out with local voluntary groups or someone who would intervene if a fight broke out?

Communities only function well when they are full of people who are good citizens, helping to build strong and cohesive societies.

We can all do our bit to make our communities stronger by being better citizens. The following short quiz will help you to determine if you are a good citizen or not and what you could do to be an even better citizen than you are already.

1. You often find yourself at a loose end on a Saturday morning. What do you decide to do?

- a) Head to the local volunteering centre and have a look at what kind of opportunities are available on Saturday mornings before choosing the one which you think would make the most difference and sign up.
- b) Call your football coach and offer to help out with the junior sector which trains and plays on a Saturday morning.
- c) Call some friends and make plans to meet up on Saturday mornings as you don't see each other very often.

2. You are a member of a local theatre group and enjoy taking part in shows and productions. The treasurer has to step down and a vacancy arises. What is your reaction?

- a) Put your name down immediately – after all, you reap the benefits of being in the group so you should put some work in as well.
- b) Ask for more information about quite how much work is involved before deciding whether to get involved or not.
- c) Ask around your friends in the group to see if any of them are willing to fill the gap.

3. You see a young girl being intimidated by a group of other girls. She looks scared and it is not clear how the situation will go. What do you do?

- a) Tell them to stop and try and help the girl as much as possible.
- b) Ask nearby people to help you to intervene – it may not be safe to do so alone.
- c) Nothing – reassure yourself that it's probably just a spat between friends.

4. You are walking to the sheltered accommodation where your grandma lives when you see a confused lady who lives in the same block, struggling back in a distressed state. Your mobile battery is flat so what do you do?

- a) Walk with her – your grandma might wonder why you are late but the lady clearly needs help.
- b) Ask her if she wants you to fetch anyone for her – you are worried you might confuse her

more as she doesn't recognise you.

c) Run on ahead to the block and tell the warden there that the lady is alone and confused.

5. You hear of a children's sports team which needs chaperones, even if they are not qualified coaches. It may fold if it does not find anyone but you hate sport. What do you do?

a) Volunteer – the children would be so disappointed if they could not play anymore, especially over something so trivial.

b) Ask around everyone you know – plenty of your friends love sport and would relish the chance to get involved.

c) Nothing – if it was music, you'd jump at the chance, but sport really isn't your thing.

Mostly As

You are a bona fide good citizen. This does not only mean that you give up your free time to help others, which you clearly do. But it also means that you care about your community and what happens within it. If there is anything you could do to improve your citizenship, it could be as simple as encouraging others around you to follow at least part of your example and be half as good a citizen as you clearly already are.

Mostly Bs

There can be no doubt that you care about your community and want to be a part of any differences made therein. If there is anything you could do to improve your citizenship, you should look at the wider community. You are already very good at helping out in your particular sector, be it in church, sport or helping out in schools. But you could widen your focus and look at helping the community in other areas as well.

Mostly Cs

While it would be unfair to say that you are not a good citizen on the basis of a short quiz, it is clear that you could do more in your community to be a good citizen. Why not think of giving up some free time to volunteer. There are plenty of volunteering opportunities in all sectors of life so there should be no excuse for not being able to find something to suit you. You may well find that you enjoy it so much you actually want to do more and more.

Being A Responsible Citizen

Everyone has a duty to be a responsible citizen. But unfortunately, not everyone takes this responsibility seriously. There are plenty of people the world over who do not know what being a responsible citizen means and these are the people who destroy our communities. For being a responsible citizen results in a happy and harmonious community – if everyone else does the same.

Being a responsible citizen covers many areas – some of them legal obligations, some social and some moral. So of course, because not all of them are legal obligations, being a responsible citizen is not as easy as staying within the law. In fact, to be a truly responsible citizen, we sometimes must go out of our way to do things which help our society – give a little of our time and effort for the greater good.

Legal Obligations

No one can be a responsible citizen without staying within the law. It is as simple as that. Criminals, by their very nature, are not behaving as responsible citizens. Laws exist to protect citizens, the communities they live in and their property. So to be a responsible citizen, we must respect these laws and abide by them. Harming others or others' property does not equate to being a good citizen.

Social Obligations

Social obligations really form the bulk of being a responsible citizen and what this means. To be a responsible citizen, we should help our communities and those who live in them. So, being a responsible citizen can encompass things such as volunteering.

Volunteering, the third sector, is worth billions to our economy and even more to those who are helped by volunteering. But in the interests of being a responsible citizen, this could include smaller things too. So, volunteering for the Samaritans is a noble job to do and one which is certainly needed. But the elderly lady who lives alone may need someone to do her shopping and this demonstrates responsible citizenship just as much as volunteering in an organisation.

Moral Obligations

Moral obligations of being a responsible citizen are harder to pin down because different people have different moral codes. But one place we can all start is in helping the environment.

The environmental problems society is facing are of our own making and we all have a moral obligation to do what we can to change this. So by living as environmentally friendly life as possible, we can help fulfil our moral obligations of being a responsible citizen. Taking recyclables to be recycled and using a compost bin are two easy ways, and there are many more.

And they can be linked in with other obligations. For example, if you have a compost bin but no plants to use the compost on, you could give it to people who have plants but live alone, making them less likely to generate a huge amount of compost themselves.

Being a responsible citizen should not be a hard thing but it should be something which occasionally requires a little extra effort. This is because being a responsible citizen is, at its core, about being a less selfish person, and putting the needs of society before your own needs. It does not mean you have to sacrifice all your free time to volunteer or help others, but it does mean taking a little time to think about the impact of your actions on others.

Participating in a community activity:

There are lots of things that you could do to be a part of the community from using the local shops, to supporting local trade, or volunteering at a bake sale!

Some simple ideas:

- Recycling your rubbish
- Taking the bus/train
- Joining a local club/team
- Keeping your community clean and tidy

Basically, it's anything that contributes to your community and makes it a nice place for everyone to live.

There will be a huge selection of groups/clubs available in your area, why not go online to see what you can find. Look within your local area and identify a few activities that you could do to work towards being a good citizen:

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Now choose an activity of your choice to complete so that you can reflect on your participation. Please take someone with you to your chosen activity so they can offer feedback.

My chosen activity is:

Reflect (Outcome 4)

Now that you have completed your activity, get some feedback from whoever went with you about how they think you interacted with others and detail below.

Describe what you thought your strengths were in interacting with others, (remember interacting can be smiling, where you stood – not just talking)

Do you think that this has improved from before? If so, in what ways

What areas of your behaviour/attitudes would you like to work on?
