



# Travel Industry TODAY



HOME

ABOUT VIDEOS COLUMNISTS CONTACT SEARCH



# HIGHER GROUND

Using your influence

Steve Gillick

SHARE ON FACEBOOK



14 SEP 2011: The untimely death of Jack Layton, the eulogies delivered at the State funeral, and the glimpses of his life and philosophy of living that emerged in the national newspapers, certainly gives us pause to reflect. Transcending any political considerations, we read about a man who had ideals and principles and followed them

throughout his life. We read about someone who sought to create a more caring and tolerant world and conveyed this to family, friends and associates through actions and deeds. Are there lessons that we can take out of this as travel professionals?



**Get TODAY  
Tomorrow**

- informative
- provocative
- opinionated
- infuriating
- revealing
- amusing

*... essential*

**SUBSCRIBE NOW!**

Probably one of the most unspoken aspects of the travel industry, is our ability to influence travellers and their perceptions, not only of the world, but of the place in which they live. This may be done subliminally, by including a destination in a catalogue or flyer, or through the very act of talking about a new destination and the cultural, historical attractions it provides.

Influencing travellers can also be more overt, by linking your agency or organization with global concerns that place you smack in the middle of supporting the product that you sell, which happens to be the planet earth.

Much is made of the niche market known as “voluntourism” for the benefit it brings to those in

need. While many travellers, young and old may be interested in volunteering, the effect on the traveller can be just as profound as the results of their volunteer activities on the local population. The idea of living in a multi-cultural society or city or neighbourhood takes on a whole new meaning once you have spent time in the home countries of those with whom you work with or pass by on the street every day. And while voluntourism has been mostly associated with adventure travel, it does not have to be, nor does it have to be a multi-day experience to be effective for either the local community or for the traveller. There are opportunities that could easily be accommodated within the framework of an FIT that can involve voluntourism and culture-relationship building activities and understanding.

One of the most popular activities on adventure trips is the 'school drop-in'.

The group passes by a school (or requests that the guide include one on the agenda) and then, with permission from the teacher, some members of the group join the kids at recess or enter the classroom and teach a few words in their own language.

I can think of occasions where we played soccer or basketball with students in Thailand and Nepal. I also recall with humour my attempt to teach some kids how to play "Red Light-Green Light" in a school outside of Kuching, Malaysia. So much laughter and fun.

The interaction becomes the highlight of the trip for the travellers, but also leaves a lasting impression (and a great diversion from classroom studies) for the children. Gifts of pencils or paper

for the students or something for the classroom (there is always someone who thinks to bring this) complement the visit. Everyone leaves, buzzing about the smiles and the experience in general.

Hard to believe it, but this is a type of voluntourism. Okay, you did not build a community centre or dig a well, but human interaction is a valuable part of any volunteer activity and you have just accomplished it.

Visiting an orphanage or an SOS Village or a farm, have voluntourism written all over them.

Again, from the FIT point of view, nothing stops you as a travel professional, from compiling a list of potential voluntour activities, as they relate to specific destinations, and offering these to your clients who are travelling on a package tour or a coach tour or as fully Independent travellers.

Every tour has some free time built into it. Every tour company has a selection of paid options for you to choose while on the trip. As a global-community-advisor (or coordinator) you can have your own list to hand to your clients who may be interested in an activity that is less touristy, less commercial but perhaps more fulfilling than the standard options offered elsewhere.

Travelling the higher ground, is a handle on which to hang your concern for the planet but it is something that also captures the imagination of those looking for a career that goes beyond the mundane aspects of customer service and detail, that many travel professionals choose to highlight when people ask them about getting into the travel industry.

While you may say that the reality of the situation is selling commissionable travel and travel packages to eke out a living; others would counter with a sales-positive pitch that 'selling' on its own can be routine unless you stir the pot a bit by adding in exciting components that get your own endorphins jumping up and down. Every component you add involves your time and expertise and that translates into a professional fee for service.

The so-called travel experts listed in glossy and expensive travel magazines do this on a regular basis and they charge big bucks for suggesting simple ideas that YOU could arrange with a simple letter to the tour operator.

Example: You can pay a SouthEast Asia specialist \$250.00 to arrange a visit to a rice paddy and a ride on a water buffalo. But you can arrange this on your own – either beforehand with the SE Asian tour operator or if you happen to be escorting the trip yourself, on the spot, with a small donation to the farmer and his/her family. By mentioning this on your list of "Get Involved Activities" you have elevated your status from sales person to global travel counsellor. And by having travellers partake of the activity you have opened their eyes to another world and how people live or struggle to make a living.

You are helping to define standards of living and that the terms 'rich' and 'poor' reflect a North American value judgment and not a categorization for the world as a whole.

You are educating travellers to the thought that happiness is based on security and family and shelter, even in a tumble-down shack near a rice

paddy in Cambodia or along the road to Negril in Jamaica or in a goat-hide tent in the Sinai desert.

The higher ground is another 'destination' for your clientele to 'visit' but also for your staff to take the lead in showing the way to clients. It injects another purpose or reason into the big picture of what the job is all about, and helps turn job-thoughts into career-thoughts. It is another way to excite the imagination of a younger cohort, just graduating from a travel and tourism program, and considering whether to take that job as a front desk clerk at the hotel, or enter the world as a travel professional.

When we consider the legacy of people, such as Jack Layton, we relate to those aspects of his actions and deeds that touch our own lives. Some will treat this as a passing fancy and for a few moments will feel good about their own activities. Nothing wrong with that, whatsoever.

However others will see these kinds of actions as an influence, a justification and even a path to the future, and it may very well affect their thinking from here on in. Travel professionalism lends itself to thinking about 'what else' and those who seek the higher ground shall inevitably, find it.





Steve Gillick

A tireless promoter of "infectious enthusiasm about travel", Steve delivers his wisdom once a month in his column *The Travel Coach*.

[Read more from Steve Gillick](#)

Comments for this thread are now closed

### Important Update

When you log in with Disqus, we process personal data to facilitate your authentication and posting of comments. We also store the comments you post and those comments are immediately viewable and searchable by anyone around the world.

- I agree to Disqus' Terms of Service
- I agree to Disqus' processing of email and IP address, and the use of cookies, to facilitate my authentication and posting of comments, explained further in the Privacy Policy

Proceed



Jen Savedra EDITOR  
[CONTACT](#)