

An excerpt from *Saving The World At Work* by Tim Sanders

In December 2006, footwear maker Timberland held its wholesale account reps sales rally in New Orleans, fifteen months after the city had been ravaged by Hurricane Katrina. Timberland's event planners always inject a local community service component into the agenda, so on the conference's first evening, local leaders were asked to talk to the group about the battle to rebuild the city. On the second day, two hundred sales reps were taken by bus to New Orleans' historic Central City district to work on a neighborhood restoration program.

The specific project they were assigned to was renowned chef Dukey Chase's restaurant, a Central City neighborhood anchor, whose reopening meant a great deal to the area. So Timberlanders performed demolition, planted trees, hauled trash, and cleaned up a nearby playground, all working side by side with local volunteers.

In just a few hours, the Timberlanders made a difference in the restaurant and Central City's restoration. But feeling the reps needed to understand more about New Orleans' dismal situation, meeting planners decided to give them a tour of the Ninth Ward, one of the city's most devastated areas. Jubilant while working so well at the Central City work site, the Timberlanders now became somber, realizing that even though one eatery had been spruced up, many parts of the city remained utterly uninhabitable.

At the end of the tour, the buses parked to allow the reps to get out and walk around the neighborhood. As they did, one rep noticed a makeshift community gathering spot constructed of tarps and rotted wood where a middle-aged man in a baseball cap was taking notes on a clipboard. The sales rep started a conversation with the man and soon discovered that he was a volunteer community organizer who had lived in the Ninth Ward pre-Katrina.

Moved by the moment, the rep asked the volunteer what the community center most needed. "Shoes," the volunteer replied, pointing to a chalkboard that listed shoes at the top of the Please Drop Off list. "Used ones, new ones—we need shoes." He then explained that many of the community service volunteers were working in flip-flops and soleless shoes in an area littered with rusty nails and splintered boards.

The Timberland employee immediately bent down, unlaced his boots, and handed them to the volunteer. He then walked barefoot back to the buses, where employees were loading up for the ride back to the hotel.

A coworker, who noticed the sales rep wasn't wearing his boots, asked why. "That man there told me that they needed shoes," the sales rep replied, pointing to the community center. "I gave him mine." The coworker stood up, left the bus, and gave the volunteer his shoes, too. The others watched, and acted: In the next ten minutes, the buses emptied out as all two hundred sales reps walked to the community center and donated their shoes or boots to the Ninth Ward, even though, for many of them, these Timberland boots were prized possessions.

The volunteer, overwhelmed, scrambled to keep pairs matched together, tucking laces into boots and organizing them by size. All he could muster was a repetitive "Thank you, thank you" to every Timberlander. The trip back to the hotel was silent, as employees reflected on what they'd seen that day. A senior meeting planner later recalled, "It was the quietest twenty-minute bus ride I've ever been on."

Do you want to know what happened next? The conclusion to this story is inspiring, but you'll need to read the book to find out what happened.

Go buy a copy of *Saving The World At Work* by Tim Sanders today! Visit: www.TimSanders.com