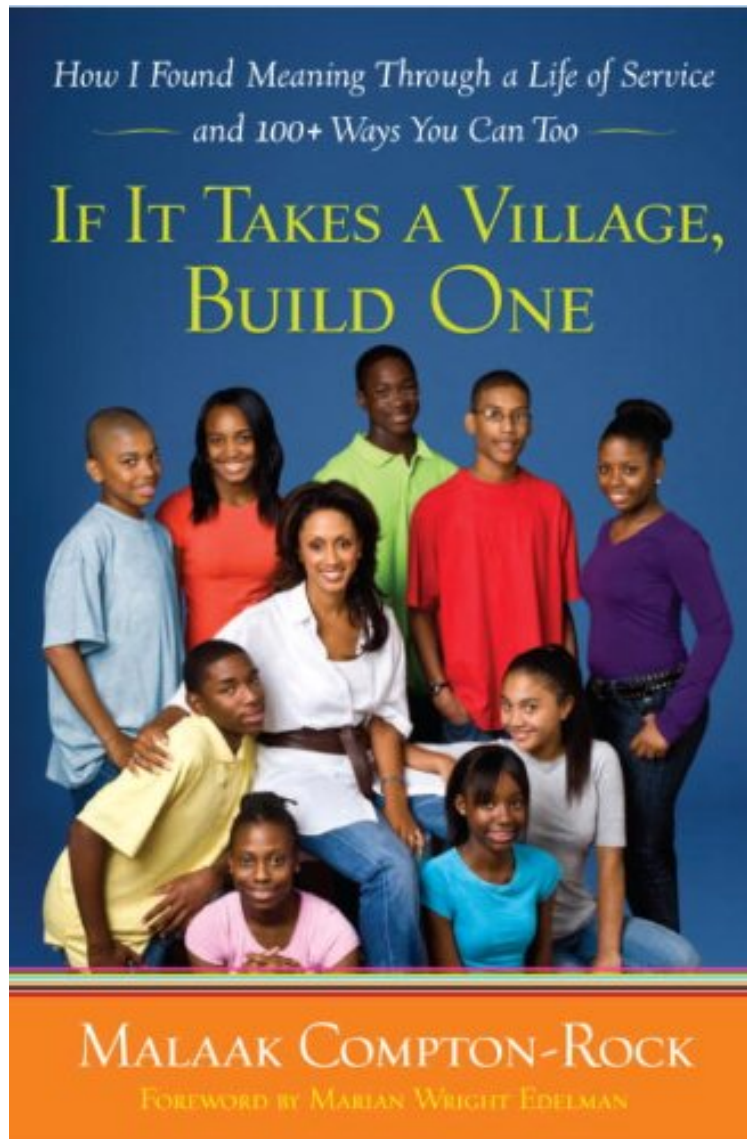


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If It Takes a Village, Build One: How I Found Meaning Through a Life of Service and 100+ Ways You Can Too

Malaak Compton-Rock

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A must have book for anyone has ever wanted to make a difference in the world.

"Service is the rent we pay for living" says preeminent children's advocate Marian Wright Edelman and this is the motto by which Malaak Compton Rock, dedicated humanitarian and wife of comedian Chris Rock, lives her life. From a childhood grounded in the importance of giving back to her work in public relations at The U.S. Fund for UNICEF to becoming a full-time mother and humanitarian, Malaak's life has fully embodied this sentiment. Part memoir, part practical guide, *If It Takes a Village, Build One* offers readers insightful advice on everything from how to find just the right volunteer opportunity, how to get kids involved in a life of service, how to research charities, and even how to start a nonprofit, as Malaak did several years ago. All of this practical wisdom is grounded in inspirational anecdotes about her own experience with service, including her work with Katrina rebuilding and her recent brainchild, *Journey for Change: Empowering Youth Through Global Service*, a program for at-risk kids from Bushwick, Brooklyn, which takes teens on a two week service mission to South Africa to volunteer and experience the world. The book also features interviews with other well known humanitarians, like PR powerhouse Terrie M. Williams, activist Bobby Shriver, and journalist Soledad O'Brien and engaging sidebars with interesting facts about service and nuggets of advice. At the end of the narrative readers will find a compendium of information including Malaak's favorite charities, unique service ideas, and suggested reading and web resources, which will make this a book to be revisited time and time again. Far from being preachy or sanctimonious, Malaak's warm voice reminds us all that giving back is ultimately easier and infinitely more fulfilling than we thought it could be. Warm, honest, and accessible, *If It Takes a Village, Build One* will be the must-have book (and perfect gift!) for aspiring do-gooders. From the Hardcover edition.

"Malaak Compton-Rock is changing the world! Her focus on helping young people become all that they can be is a stunningly simple blueprint for what all of us can do. *If It Takes a Village, Build One* is a must read if you want to make real change in your world." --Soledad O'Brien, CNN anchor and special correspondent
"Malaak has taken her own life experiences with service, community and family and penned an important how-to for taking action and giving back. I've been fortunate to know her and to work with her, witnessing first-hand her dedication to helping others. *If It Takes a Village, Build One* is an empowering must-read for all of us working to make our communities, our country and our world a better place." - Congresswoman Maxine Waters
"Millions of people around the world have been inspired by watching Malaak Compton-Rock work her extraordinary magic. Now she's written a moving and absorbing guide to how you, too, can easily tap into your inner humanitarian." --Jon Klein, President of CNN/US
From the Hardcover edition.
About the Author
Malaak Compton-Rock lives in the New Jersey suburbs with her husband, Chris Rock, and two daughters. She holds a BFA in arts/production management from Howard University, sits on the board of directors for the Children's Defense Fund, and is a member of New York Women in Communications and the Cause Marketing Forum. In 2008, she was a cojudge on the Harpo/ABC-TV reality show *Oprah's Big Give*. She recently founded the Angelrock Project--an online e-village that promotes volunteerism, social responsibility, and sustainable change. The organization can be found at www.angelrockproject.com. This is her first book.
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Introduction
The Glorious Adventure of a Life in Service
Dedicate your life to a cause greater than yourself and your life will become a glorious romance and adventure. —MACK R. DOUGLAS
I stood in front of the crowded room at the Bushwick Salvation Army Community Center in Bushwick, Brooklyn, readying myself to speak to the seventy children who had gathered in front of me. The kids looked up at me with a wide array of expressions, some with broad smiles and eager eyes, some with curious, watchful stares, and even a few with bored faces. We were meeting in the cafeteria of the community center that regularly feeds the homeless and elderly during the day, along with the throngs of elementary, middle school, and high school students who arrive in the afternoon after school. After serving the evening meal, the staff hurriedly cleaned up to ensure that the space was ready for the students and their families, who would soon arrive. Some of the youths were seated at tables and others were sitting on

folding chairs that had been brought in from other rooms to handle the overflow of kids, parents, grandmothers, godparents, friends, and staff who had assembled to hear me speak. I was at once excited but also very nervous. I knew what I had to offer these kids could very well change their lives. I had a sense that we were all about to embark on something very special. This was the first meeting I was having with these middle school children from Bushwick, Brooklyn, an inner-city neighborhood that consistently struggles with drug abuse, child neglect, gang violence, and poverty, and I was there to invite them to be part of a program I had recently dreamed up, the seeds of which were sown in a shack in the shantytown of Diepsloot in Johannesburg, South Africa, as I sat telling a grandmother who was raising her five grandchildren about the youths in Bushwick and my desire to impact their lives in a significant way. This program, which came to be called Journey for Change: Empowering Youth Through Global Service, was a journey for all of us in every sense of the word. By the time we were done, it would take us to South Africa; to the halls of the Capitol building in Washington, DC; to the Ninth Ward of New Orleans, Louisiana; back to Brooklyn; and to many places in between. But now we were just beginning. I was working with the Bushwick chapter of the Salvation Army, in the very community center where my husband, Chris, came throughout his childhood for afterschool care and summer school. He even received his baptism certificate from the church here. He and I had been supporting the extraordinary work of the Salvation Army in this neighborhood, hoping to ensure that these kids got the same opportunities he had been lucky enough to get. With the support of Target, (RED), and Dell, we were in the process of establishing a new computer lab and library, and this work allowed me to spend time with the kids and get to know them; as a result, I became determined to do even more to help them overcome the many challenges they faced in their young lives. So there I was, standing in front of everyone, telling the children that I would be selecting thirty kids to take to South Africa to meet the grannies and orphaned and vulnerable children I had come to know and love, to serve people who needed their help, to experience the world beyond their own community, and maybe come to understand some of the blessings they had at home. I wanted them to understand that it was going to be a fun, inspiring trip that would change their lives for the better. I told them about my love of South Africa, how it had changed me from the first time I went, and how I'd felt instantly connected to that extraordinary country, so deeply that I had to keep coming back. Some of the children jumped up with joy, whooping and hollering at the thought of the trip. Some asked nervous questions, wondering whether Africa was just a big jungle, full of lions and tigers and people waving spears, not realizing that South Africa had modern and developed cities like Johannesburg, where we would be spending virtually all of our time, and even very wealthy metro-politan areas. Some were anxious about the trip itself—the thought of taking an eighteen-hour plane trip when most of them had never flown anywhere, the idea of being away from home for two weeks. All of these concerns I completely understood. This is why I had wanted to have this meeting, so I could carefully answer all of their questions and those of their parents and family members who had come with them. One of the children at that first meeting was LaToya Massie. LaToya is just a little firecracker—there's no other way to describe her. She weighs maybe two pounds wet, but her spirit is huge and so is her heart. Although she didn't say much at that first meeting, she was determined to make it through the application and interview process we had set up. And when we asked her why she wanted to go on this trip, she had her answer all ready. "I just know this trip is going to make me a better person," she told us. "This is really a big chance for me, and I don't want to miss it." She really understood the significance of traveling, and she was excited, too, about the opportunity to serve. LaToya's mother was so supportive of her daughter. She was extremely open with us about the fact that she and her family had had a very difficult life, one that had been wracked with poverty, affected by drugs, and marred by violence. LaToya's life had been impacted negatively because of her mother's many problems, yet her mother had survived and in many cases triumphed over them and had come out stronger on the other side. Most important, she was the type of mother that we all hope to be, one who wanted her child's life to be better than her own. She told us that LaToya really deserved this trip because even after all she had been through, she was still such a positive, vibrant, and kind girl. I appreciated her mother's honesty, and I must admit that once I finished interviewing LaToya, I had pretty much made up my mind that I wanted to take her on this trip. In fact, kids like her are why I created the program in the first place: to offer special opportunities to kids who had faced many struggles but who wanted to take a chance at something different in order to succeed in life. I thought she would make the most of it—and she turned out to get even more out of the experience than I ever imagined. I can still see her standing in the shantytown of Diepsloot, staring at the shacks that had been cobbled together from wood and scrap metal and watching the children playing in the muddy runoff from the single water spout. Despite the bright South African sun, the crowded rooms were almost completely dark, due to the lack of electricity and the fact that the shacks were often built with no windows. People depended on candles and kerosene lamps for both heat and light—though many families didn't have either. Despite the chilly weather, most had decided to wait until nighttime before using these precious and expensive commodities. LaToya watched school-age children spending the day playing in the dust. The Brooklyn public school LaToya attended was not the best of the best, and she might not have always had the finest teachers or been in classes that had the greatest and newest materials. She did attend school regularly, and she did pretty well, though she knew she could do better. In South Africa, there is no public education, so now she was seeing children whose families couldn't afford to pay

for their kids's school fees, let alone their books, pencils, notepads, backpacks, and uniforms. She was seeing children with no toys or very used and broken toys, some children barely dressed and others with no shoes, children struggling with a level of poverty she had never even imagined. LaToya had started the day joking and laughing with her friends. After all, we were in Africa, and the journey across the ocean had been exciting and fun. But as our visit through the shantytown continued, she, like the other Brooklyn children, became quieter and quieter. And as we left the crowded warren of shacks to reach the broad, sunlit street, she began to cry. "They don't have anything," she kept repeating. "They just don't have anything." As she took a big breath, she told me that all she wanted to do was help them. "I want to help them and bring them some happiness," she told me through her tears. "But whatever I do will not be enough. I feel so bad and feel as if I have been selfish. I feel bad about the things that I complained about, the material things that I felt I deserved and got mad because I did not get. I am so sad." Though my heart broke for LaToya as she tried to take in the sights of extreme third-world poverty, I knew this was the beginning of one of the biggest learning curves of her young life. And I was so glad that we had incorporated time at the end of the day to debrief one another and that I was able to take this walk with her. The personal time we had together allowed her to purge, letting all the thoughts that were jumbled up in her head pour out to me in a much-needed emotional release. And it allowed me the opportunity to speak with LaToya about the great strength of the South African people, about how proud a people they are and how they do not want our pity. But I explained that they appreciated our help and would take advantage of every blessing we bestowed upon them. It was also important for me to tell her to pay special attention to how polite the South African people are, how sincere they are when they speak to you, how they look you directly in the eyes and give you all of their attention, and how much joy they have in their lives even though many have few material p...