Audio
Turn on speakers

Designing Work for Today's Volunteers

Online Seminar - Part 1 of 3

With Steve McCurley

Designing Work for Today's Volunteers

Previous
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Trainer

Steve McCurley

- Writer
- Trainer & Consultant
- With Rick Lynch, author of *Volunteer Management: Mobilizing All the Resources of the Community*

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What We'll Cover

Part 1:

- Why volunteer work design is important
- Which elements of work matter most to volunteers
- Options for how to create volunteer work

Part 2:

- How to create meaningful roles
- What volunteers can contribute

Part 3:

- How to turn ideas into concrete work assignments

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Let's Start with Terminology

- Volunteer job
- Volunteer position
- Volunteer role
- Volunteer assignment
- Volunteer task
- Volunteer responsibility

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Why Work Design Matters

In the short run:

- Most volunteers will agree to do anything that needs doing

In the long run:

- Most volunteers prefer to do work that they find ***satisfying***

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One Volunteer's Story….

After a successful business career, he had a lot to offer

But organizations didn't know what to do with him

- Fundraising
- Office manager (2 days per week)
- Take minutes at community meetings
- Etc., etc., etc.

Two Perspectives

Volunteer Manager

- Legitimate positions
- Met organization's needs
- Other volunteers were willing to do this work in the past

Retired Businessman

Positions didn't match:

- His interests
- His experience
- His capabilities

Revenge Can Be Sweet….

CNNMoney.com

FORTUNE

Home Fortune 500 Technology Investing Management Rankings

Candy Striper, My Ass! A culture clash is looming as a high-powered wave of retiring executives meets the genteel world of volunteerism.

By Jason Tanz with Theodore Spencer

August 14, 2000

(FORTUNE Magazine) – Don Spieler, 64, had a good run. After 33 years at Kodak, where he had become president of the company's Mexico operations, it was time to retire and return to his hometown of Rochester, N.Y. Spieler was excited by the idea. Like many executives his age, he saw retirement as a chance to give something back, to volunteer. In Mexico he had served on the national boards of Junior Achievement and the Special Olympics. He was a two-term president of the American Chamber of Commerce of Mexico. He figured nonprofit agencies in Rochester would be thrilled to get his combination of business acumen and volunteer experience.

FORTUNE Magazine, August 14, 2000,

http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/fortune_archive/2000/08/14/285558/index.htm

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Mismatched Expectations

Mismatched expectations lead to dissatisfied volunteers

- Teens who feel disrespected
- Those who feel "pushed" into positions that don't match their interests
- Peer-pressured volunteers

If you want volunteers to stay, you must design work that they find significant and rewarding

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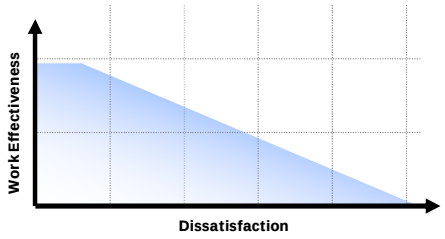
Corollary #1

The longer a person does unsatisfying work, the less likely he or she will perform enthusiastically or well



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Corollary #2

Volunteers who continue to do unsatisfying work tend to be difficult to work with

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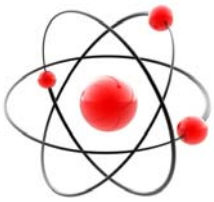
The Key Element

Determining what a volunteer will do:

- Not just a building block
- It's the key element
- Affects both quality and longevity



Organizations that don't provide "good" work have difficulty in recruiting and retaining volunteers

Organizational Impact

Designing volunteer work appropriately allows you to:

- Better meet organizational needs
- Make the best use of resources
- Manage potential risks

What Do Volunteers Want?

Which elements of work are most important to volunteers?

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Volunteers Want….

In every organization, volunteers want these three things from their work

Our Volunteers Want…

1. Meaning and significance
2. Opportunity to succeed
3. Fun and interesting experience

1. Meaning and Significance

Seeing how the work contributes:

- To the organization or client
- To the world at large

People volunteer to make a difference!

Applying the Desire to Contribute

The "desire to contribute" is fundamental to every aspect of volunteering – and applies to every aspect of managing volunteers

- When assigning tasks
- When evaluating performance

Help volunteers to achieve a feeling of significance, no matter what their role!

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Every Job Has Impact

Is filing significant?

- Absolutely!
- Why? Because it ultimately impacts your ability to assist clients!

Key concept:

- Position each assignment in terms of its impact on your organization's clients

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2. Opportunity to Succeed

Assignments should be:

- Within the volunteer's perceived knowledge and ability
- Manageable within the volunteer's overall commitments

Nobody volunteers to be a failure!

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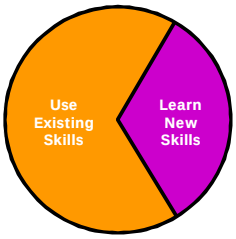
Creating Expectations of Success

Develop assignments that build upon existing skills

- Professional, occupational or avocational skills
- Consider asking volunteers to use their experience in new ways



VolunteerMatch, 2007: Preferences of Adults 55+

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Training Volunteers for New Roles

Preparation is the key to success for volunteers taking on new roles:

- Pre-work training
- On-the-job support
- Assigned mentors

3. Fun and Interest

Volunteers want to enjoy:

- Excitement, novelty, teamwork
- Work that is intrinsically interesting

Enjoyment also comes from satisfaction at:

- Making a difference
- Sense of companionship
- Feeling needed

The 3F Approach

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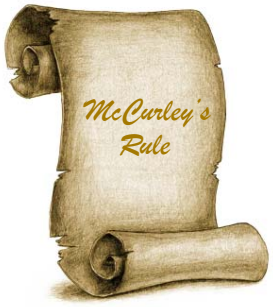
McCurley's Rule



Nobody volunteers to have a bad time.

Which Is Most Important?

Balance will differ for each volunteer, based on:

- Personality factors
- Situational factors

Implication

Some volunteers may not know what kind of work they would like to do

- Especially those who are less experienced with volunteering, with paid work, or with your organization

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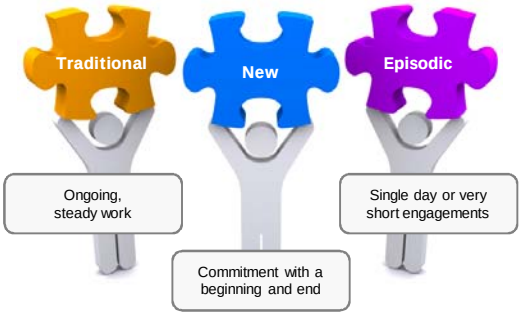
Solution

Consider providing ways to:

- "Test drive" different positions
- Easily transfer to other positions that might be more suitable

Today's Volunteers



Styles of Volunteering

	Youth	Adults
Regular:	39%	55%
Occasional:	35%	23%
Episodic:	27%	22%

Corporation for National & Community Service, November 2005

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Other Potential Variables

- Individuals, pairs/couples, teams
- Off-site, in the field, at home
- Virtual volunteering
- Intergenerational or family projects
- Service-learning
- Mandated service
- Consultancies
- Community group projects
- On-call volunteering

Summary

Part 1:
- ☒ Why volunteer work design is important
- ☒ Which elements of work matter most to volunteers
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Part 2:
- ☐ How to create meaningful roles
- ☐ What volunteers can contribute

Part 3:
- ☐ How to turn ideas into concrete work assignments

End of Part 1

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An All-too-familiar Scenario

Memo to paid staff asks: What roles might volunteers fill?

MEMO

To: Paid Staff

From: Volunteer Program Manager

Results:

- Most don't respond at all
- A few make strange suggestions
- Others can't think beyond clerical help

What went wrong?

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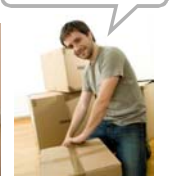
Paid Staff's Perspectives

I'm too busy to think about volunteer roles

We don't know much about volunteers

I don't want to risk making an inappropriate suggestion



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Which Is Fully Using Volunteers?

Ye Olde Benevolent Society

Established: 1826

Association for Change by 2050

Established: 2008

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Age Isn't the Determining Factor

Most organizations don't think much about how best to involve volunteers

- Often, volunteer roles exist only because they have always existed
- This doesn't lead to innovation or effective involvement of volunteers
- It does lead to a waste of time and talent – for both the organization and the volunteers

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Thinking about Volunteer Roles

Linking work to the organizational mission

- Tie the tasks of volunteers to:
  - The ongoing activities performed by the organization
  - How successful the organization is in achieving its mission

Creating Meaningful Volunteer Experiences

Three Informative Questions

- Where do we have the greatest difficulty in delivering effective services?
- What are the biggest unmet needs of our clients?
- Where do we have problems reaching new populations?

Implementing the Discussion

- As part of an annual strategic planning process
- As part of a consultation with an individual staff person
- As part of the start-up planning for a new project or activity
- Through consultation with experienced volunteers who will bring a different perspective

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The Theory Behind This....

Involving volunteers requires an investment by the organization:

- Staff time
- Budget
- Support

Maximizing the return from that investment requires involving volunteers in tasks that create the greatest return benefit

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"Spending" Issues

Volunteer time is an organizational asset

- We need to think carefully about how to "spend" this asset to get the greatest return
- And we need to exercise care to avoid spending this asset foolishly

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An Interesting Note

This approach is most likely to produce "high end" volunteer assignments

- Tasks that involve leadership, professional skills, etc.

The approach is also most likely to result in volunteer assignments that are highly visible

- Tasks involved will often directly address concerns of top management

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McCurley's Rule

The respect accorded volunteers in an organization is directly proportional to the respect accorded the work being done by the volunteers

Thinking about Volunteer Roles

Tactics for helping staff create roles for volunteers in their own work arenas

Creating Motivating Volunteer Positions

Thinking about Volunteer Roles

Linking work of volunteers directly to assisting individual staff members

- On what tasks do you currently spend time?
- Which of these are best suited to you?
- Which are not so well suited?
- What would you like to offer clients – if you had the time?
- What new skill would you like to learn?

Ask the Staff!

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More Questions to Ask the Staff

Follow up with control questions to ensure "implementable" ideas:

- Which of these tasks could be given to volunteers?
- What skills or characteristics would a prospective volunteer need to be right for the assignment?
- What would need to be done to train and support a volunteer for this assignment?

Implementation Methods

- Individual interview with staff members
- Planning exercise for team or work unit
- Idea/example sheet distributed to staff

Get Their Ideas Flowing

One approach to getting staff started thinking about ideas for volunteer assignments:

- In advance, give staff a list of some of the kinds of work volunteers are doing in similar situations
- This will help the staff person feel comfortable with possible model assignments

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Benefit: Gaining Staff Buy-In

Consultative approach helps staff get comfortable, while respecting their input

- Deal with concerns, reassure if doubts appear
- Steer staff away from assignments that will be difficult to recruit for
- Remind staff that they will need to plan to train and support volunteers in new positions

Tip: Try starting with an "easy success" that is well within the staffer's comfort zone!

Go for the Upgrade!

Encourage staffers to progressively upgrade the way they involve volunteers:

- Raise the level of activity assigned to volunteers
- Engage volunteers with new perspectives (age, background, culture, etc.)
- "Pushing the envelope" may feel uncomfortable at first, but it benefits the organization over the long term

Sound Familiar?

Does this approach sound familiar?

You probably do it already, although possibly in a different context

- Interviewing volunteers about possible placements involves asking exactly the same kinds of questions
- And, it is itself a way of coming up with new volunteer assignments

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Thinking about Volunteer Roles

Linking volunteer work to staff wishes and dreams

- What have you always wanted to do but never had enough time or help to accomplish?
- What more would you have to do here to be recognized for giving really excellent service?
- Are there any things that our clients/consumers/public need that would be helpful but are not in any employee's job description?

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Look at Your Responses

- Are there tasks that volunteers could perform directly?
- How about tasks that paid staff could do, if their time was freed up by delegating other tasks to volunteers?

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Avoiding Union Problems

This is a desirable approach in organizations with concerns about volunteers replacing paid staff

- Focuses on the creation of new areas for volunteer engagement
- Often creates positions in which the volunteer may be teaching staff new skills or taking on responsibilities outside of the staff's skill set

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More on Avoiding Union Problems

If you want to move work from paid staff to volunteers, this approach may help

- Decision will be controlled by the paid staff person
- Approach may allow the paid staff to focus on professional work, rather than ancillary tasks

Volunteers may allow highly-trained professional staff to have the careers they had hoped they could have!

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From the Client's Perspective…

Approaching volunteer work design from the client's perspective promotes creative thinking – and avoids staff or union conflict

Consider these examples:

- Family counseling agencies
- Neighborhood outreach
- Performing arts

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Being a Role Model

Volunteer managers must lead by example!

- Before you talk to others, look at your own work area
- Have you found innovative ways to involve volunteers in volunteer management activities?

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Where to Involve Volunteers

In the Volunteer Management area, you can involve volunteers in:

- Recruitment
- Interviewing prospective volunteers
- Training
- Supervising volunteers
- Managing events
- Other tasks, such as research and planning, dealing with paperwork, etc.

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Summary

Part 1:

- [x] Why volunteer work design is important
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Part 2:

- [x] How to create meaningful roles
- [x] What volunteers can contribute

Part 3:

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End of Part 2

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Formatting Volunteer Work

- Variety in types of work
  - Doing, thinking, writing, assisting
- Variety in focus of work
  - Staff, clients, public
- Variety in responsibility
  - Alone or part of a team
- Variety in size and shape
  - Quick project, ongoing position, periodic
- Variety in schedule
  - Fixed/flexible; days/evenings/ weekends; on-site/home/online

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Application Tip!

Trying to recruit new populations?

- Size, shape and scheduling are particularly important
- Especially for "time-poor" groups or people who don't have much experience with your cause

Each of these groups will be more receptive, at first, to assignments that don't require big up-front commitments

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Baby Boomer Preferences

Taproot Foundation 2007 Survey Respondents:

- Prefer volunteer assignments with a fixed ending point
- Were less concerned about the length of the commitment than about knowing from the start what the length would be

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Traditional "Shape"

"Shape" of volunteer positions seems to be growing in importance

- Runs counter to what has been common practice
- Current positions are designed in the "shape" of paid jobs
  - One person assigned to one position
  - Same person continues in job for some time

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Today's Shape is Shifting

"Shape" of today's volunteer positions is changing:

- Multiple persons in a single job
  - Teams
  - Job-sharing
  - Employee work units
  - Clubs
  - Churches
  - Families
- Work formatted as "projects"

Two Volunteer Position "Shapes"

Sam

Sarah

What Today's Volunteers Want…

Assignments that:

- Have a positive impact on their careers
- Provide opportunity to develop business skills
- Enhance leadership abilities

-- *Survey of Corporate Volunteers*, Deloitte & Touche

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Preparing for a Range

Varied roles will attract a wider range of people

- Consider whom you want to recruit
- Structure volunteer opportunities accordingly
- Ask yourself:
  - How much physical activity is involved? What sorts of people would or would not want to be that active?
  - What degree of technological comfort is required?
  - How about literacy level?
  - What might someone in a student internship need to learn?

Describing Assignments

You can inform volunteers about the parameters of their assignment through:

- Written position description
- Interview
- Web recruitment announcement
- Project description

Key Elements

Whatever the format, include these elements:

- Purpose of the work
  - How it helps the organization and its clients
- Type of work and activities involved
- Fun and interesting aspects of the work
- Any boundaries or parameters
- To whom the volunteer will report or with whom they will team
  - Include any reporting requirements

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Reinforcing and Gaining Agreement

Reinforce and provide further illustration:

- During training
- During on-the-job support or mentoring

Take time to reach a common vision and agreement on the work to be done

Be prepared to negotiate:

- As long as your concessions do not outweigh the benefits or basic requirements of the work

In the Longer Run

Jobs that motivate – over the long-term – have these characteristics:

- Ownership
- Authority to think
- Responsibility for results
- A way to keep score

Updating Work Assignments

Research on volunteer retention tells us:

- Volunteers who are involved in "shaping" their own work assignments are more likely to continue volunteering for more than two years

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Application Tip!

Does involving volunteers in "shaping" sound difficult? It's easier than it sounds!

- Build it into your normal evaluation process
  - How do you feel about your current volunteer assignment?
  - Would you be interesting in modifying or changing the assignment in any way?

While We're on the Topic of Evaluation…

Use evaluation discussions to compare your position description with reality

- *Is this actually what you did?*

Remember:

- The goal of volunteer work design is to find something that matches the *motivational needs and life situation* of the volunteer
- Since these change, you may need to adjust the assignment periodically

Two Final Observations

Most people will not continue doing work that is unsuited to their interests

- Therefore, we need to help volunteers find work that is both useful to us and meets their needs

This is a great advantage of our situation

- We have far more opportunities to create interesting and flexible work for volunteers than for employees

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Let's Talk....

Steve will be on the board September 19 through October 15

End of Part 3

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