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An online volunteer management staff development plan

FROM ENERGIZE

Online Seminar Trainer's Handouts

The Power of Integrating Volunteers Throughout the Organization

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Definition of "Integrating Volunteers Throughout the Organization"

1. Blending the work of paid and volunteer staff in a seamless and collaborative way so that the best possible service is provided.
2. Assuring that volunteers are deployed everywhere in the organization and included as a matter of course in all planning and activities.

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How Widely Is Volunteer Involvement Integrated in Our Organization?

WORKSHEET 1

What is the current situation at your organization? Where are volunteers "allowed" to be involved in your organization and where are they not allowed?

Seminar Exercise Part 1:

1. List all of the units and departments in your organization, including your executive team.

2. Place a check mark in the column that best describes that area's overall attitude to volunteers. (If there are one or two individuals who are utilizing more volunteers than the rest, consider the overall departmental reaction.)

3. Then consider the highest executive level in your organization: Who does and doesn't work with volunteers on a regular basis?

Seminar Exercise Part 2:
(*Comes later in the seminar*) Identify each area's "View of Volunteering."

Unit or Department	Heavily involving volunteers	Involving only small number of volunteers	Not been asked about involving volunteers	Resisting volunteers	**Hold which of the 6 "Views of Volunteering"?**
Executive Level					
CEO/Top Executive Officer					

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How Widely Is Volunteer Involvement Integrated in Our Organization?

WORKSHEET 2

What is holding back integration of volunteers throughout the organization? Are some areas of the organization making assumptions that limit the way they are involving volunteers?

Seminar Exercise:

1. From Worksheet 1, select one or more areas that involve volunteers in limited ways or not at all. Write these areas in the left column.

2. For each area, write in the answer to this question in the center column: What "assumptions" or "limiting statements" are being made in this area about how volunteers can or should be utilized? (You may want to interview a few people in the area to get a true picture of why they are under-utilizing volunteers.)

3. Then consider whether the statement(s) in the center column are valid or "departmental myths." Write your answer in the right column.

4. Circle any area where you have found false or invalid assumptions. These are the areas to concentrate on in the next Worksheet.

Organizational Area	"Limiting Statements" or Assumptions about Role of Volunteers	Is the Statement Valid or Mythical?

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How Widely Is Volunteer Involvement Integrated in Our Organization?

WORKSHEET 3

How can you demonstrate the value of volunteers to managers and staff who historically have been reluctant to develop a range of assignments for them?

Seminar Exercise:

1. From Worksheet 2, select one to three areas that are underutilizing volunteers due to invalid assumptions or "limiting statements." Write the name of each "Organizational Area" in the top left field of each table below.

2. For managers in that area, write in your answers to the questions in each column.

3. For paid staff in that area, write in your answers to the questions in each column.

Organizational Area:			
	What do they need? What would they like to accomplish, but can't?	How can volunteers help meet the need(s)?	What can you measure to prove it?
Management Needs			
Staff Needs			

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WORKSHEET 4

What actions do you need to take to implement your strategy?

Seminar Exercise:

1. At the top of each worksheet, write the goal that you want to accomplish.
2. In the "What" column, list the actions you need to take to reach your goal.
3. For each action in the "What" column, list the date by when you'd like to accomplish it, who must do it, and what resources will be required to get the job done.

Goal:_____

What	By When	By Whom	Resources Needed

Goal:_____

What	By When	By Whom	Resources Needed

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Six Views of Volunteering

There are universally six views that individuals, governments and organizations have of volunteering and volunteer programs.

1. **The Abyss**
   An abyss is a bottomless gulf or pit. Most people see an abyss as an unfathomable (or apparently unfathomable) cavity or chasm or void extending below the earth or below the ocean – drop something in and chances are it will never be seen again. If your board, management team, paid staff or even volunteers themselves see the volunteer program in your organization as an abyss, then they see it as unknowable, a little scary, and sometimes as a bottomless pit taking in money and people but no one quite knows what goes on in there.

2. **Babysitting Service**
   Volunteering is seen as a social service provided by the organization with the satisfaction of the volunteers as an end unto itself. Volunteers are not considered particularly useful to meeting the organization's mission. In some cases the volunteer program already has individuals or groups of individuals who do not actually contribute anything of value but no one believes that it's acceptable to change the situation.

3. **Cuddly Toy**
   Cuddly toys look cute, provide some level of comfort to children, and collect dust! What real conceivable use does a cuddly toy have to an adult? Many organizations see their volunteer program in the same way. The volunteers are seen as "nice," the program is "nice."

4. **"The Dangerous Force"**
   In this view, the organization, society or individual never knows what the volunteers are going to do next or where they are going to turn up. You do not know which newspaper you might find them quoted in. You definitely do not rely on them, do not trust them and do not utilize them in anything more than basic work

5. **The Model of Efficiency**
   This is the program where the t's are crossed and the i's are dotted. Volunteers are oriented properly. The systems work. Isn't this what we aspire towards? There are many managers of volunteers who are striving to be as efficient as possible.

But this is not enough. There are many volunteer programs that bear little connection to the output and work of the rest of the organization. Sometimes the volunteer department or section appears to be its own little empire running things for the benefit of itself. To those near the department it might look effective, for others in the organization it can look like an abyss or a cuddly toy!

6. **Foundational**
   The view in which volunteers are completely necessary to all the work of an organization – it cannot exist without the involvement of volunteers. This is what organizations and managers of volunteers need to be striving for. That their board, CEO, paid staff, volunteers themselves, and clients all see volunteering as *fundamental*.

Obstacles to Volunteer Involvement

Here are some obstacles people often express to block volunteer involvement.

"It's the policy or rule."

People will express a rule that volunteers are not allowed to do a certain role. For example, some organizations will authoritatively say, "Volunteers are not allowed to handle money." So this precludes volunteers from financial roles, accounting roles, bookkeeping roles. This of course ignores the fact that board members – and specifically the treasurer – are usually volunteers and they are responsible for handling money.

When such statements are made, they need to be tested against these three rules:

- Is it truly a legal limitation?
- Is it really a policy of your organization?
- Is it a myth?

"We must protect our clients' confidentiality."

"Volunteers may not be given access to confidential information." This invalidates volunteers as authorized agents of the organization who are part of its service delivery. It immediately disqualifies them from a range of roles.

It does not matter whether it comes from concern about confidentiality and clients' well-being or whether it is an excuse to not have volunteers in some roles. The point is it is possible to train volunteers to maintain privacy and to limit access to information only to those volunteers with a specific need to know.

"Volunteers must only work in ancillary or secondary roles."

The concern of employees and union leaders is that volunteer labor will be used as a substitute for paid work. It comes from both a protection of jobs point of view but also, in some cases, a social justice view that says all needed work should be compensated – a fair day's pay for a fair day's labor. Organizations with this belief will make all volunteers junior park rangers, hospital trolley pushers, or any role at a low level.

The view that volunteers can only do lowly work, of course again ignores the fact that Board members of those organizations are volunteers and therefore hold positions that are far from ancillary!

Of course, some organizations do, in fact, think of volunteers as a cost-saving device, and that's wrong. But to respond to that fear by restricting volunteers to the lowest of assignments means the organization will never benefit from the enormous range of talents and skills people are willing to donate.

"Executive management do not work with volunteers."

Unfortunately, the actual practice in many not for profits is not to allow or include volunteers in working in the executive levels of the organization – unless again, of course, they are board members.

Reasons for Fully Integrating Volunteers

- The organization achieves *more*, both in existing programs and new programs, so the services of the organization can be significantly expanded.
- Volunteers develop new ideas, new solutions and new sources of finances.
- Stress on paid staff can be reduced with more hands on deck. Plus volunteers can be a sounding board for ideas and sympathetic partners in a pressured environment.
- An inclusive culture is developed and promoted throughout the organization.
- Volunteers are connected with the organization for longer.
- The organization gains a larger number of supporters – the volunteers themselves, their family members and others in the community with whom they have contact.
- The organization develops a reputation for being responsive to community members.
- In our financially tight environments, not utilizing skilled volunteers in areas where we could use assistance means we potentially are squandering resources that are available in the community.
- Not integrating volunteers across the organization could be costing the organization a new generation of volunteers.

When Might It Be Wrong to Involve Volunteers?

There are some circumstances where you would not involve volunteers, though very few in which the decision should be carved in stone:

- When there are legitimate, clear, legal reasons why it cannot be a volunteer role.
- When the volunteer is not qualified.
- When there is not meaningful work for the volunteer to undertake.
- When the volunteer contribution is deemed not worth the time expended to engage and train.
- Where the number of hours required to accomplish the work morally suggests the organization should ensure that payment is provided with the role.

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Four Key Strategies for Integrating Volunteers Throughout the Organization

1. **Develop effective leadership of the volunteer program.**
   a. Manager of volunteers seen as a leader by themselves and by their organization.
   b. Executives of the entire organization need to be fully committed to an integrated volunteering program.
   c. The volunteer services function needs to take a lead in problem solving.

2. **Make your organization more welcoming and open.**
   a. Seek out a group of committed and experienced volunteers to become a volunteer leadership or management team within the volunteer department.
   b. Hold a series of discussions or workshops with all relevant paid and unpaid staff to identify where and how volunteers can be utilized in the organization.
   c. Focus on one or two departments and build from there.

3. **Engage all departments and staff specialists in responsibility for volunteer success.**
   a. Find synergies between sections of the organization.
   b. Ensure that volunteer engagement permeates everything.
   c. Volunteering included on the organization's Web site.

4. **Develop world-class volunteer management systems.**
   a. Develop the necessary processes prior to making changes.
   b. Ensure everyone is informed and has the opportunity to discuss positives and negatives from their perspectives.
   c. Review and/or develop a volunteer management handbook.
   d. Evaluate everything.

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Additional Resources

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About the Trainer

Martin J Cowling has been CEO of People First - Total Solutions (http://www.pfts.com.au) since October 2003, following 20 years of leadership roles within the not-for-profit sector with key Australian charities (The Smith Family and Victorian Relief, AIDS Council of NSW) and international organizations (AFS Intercultural Programs and UNICEF).

Martin has gained practical experience and key ideas through the mobilization of both volunteers and paid staff. He has also conducted one of Australia's largest studies on volunteer management. Martin believes that people are the key to success or the very reason for failure of a project, strategy or company. He is passionate about ensuring that both organizations and their staff (employees or volunteers) have mutually beneficial relationships.

Martin has conducted workshops in New Zealand, the United States, Canada, Singapore and Europe. He authored the "How Volunteer Managers Sabotage Their Programs" article series in *e-Volunteerism*.

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