Recharging The Individual

Keeping volunteers and yourself going and growing is tough. How do you get started? It begins with an individual, an individual like YOU! And it begins with the *competency skills* related to specific tasks of the role to perform. Without an understanding and demonstration of the specific skills to perform the prescribed role, the volunteer won't be satisfied for long.

But competency alone is not enough. For most volunteer roles, interactions with people and difficult situations are very likely. You must be capable of demonstrating *coping* skills which enable the volunteer to work with and through people. Most volunteers need skills in group work, attitude, conflict management, and stress management to minimize frustration.

Contributory skills are the very essence of why many people volunteer. They want to make contributions and be able to demonstrate some form of leadership within their role. Learning how to lead, and helping others lead and teach are essential skills for helping a system thrive.

Expertise in all three of these skill dimensions will enable you to be successful. Growth in all three skill dimensions ensures a satisfied, motivated, and capable volunteer. A satisfied, motivated, capable volunteer ensures healthy growth in the quality of the volunteer delivery system. No wonder we want you and your colleagues to be satisfied, motivated, and capable!

The fourth attribute of individual renewal is **personal empowerment**. The volunteers who are encouraged to reach out and grow are the same ones who will be able to ensure the continued growth of the program.

Individual renewal focuses on ways to help a volunteer develop skills for both his/her volunteer role and for personal development. The enhancement of performance or competence is defined by Jay Hall (1988) as the *sustained capacity of people to respond in a committed and creative fashion to the demands placed on them by their environments*. In other words, it's what makes us do our best in a given situation.

People are driven by a competence motive. They want and need to behave in a competent manner, not just for survival, but for continued growth and self enhancement. A volunteer delivery system with an established renewal program for its volunteers is more likely to retain volunteers and have a competent program staff. Creating a sense of self-worth in individual volunteers should be a major goal for any volunteer delivery system.

The primary objective of a volunteer delivery system is performance. Overall performance is based on the general abilities or competencies of the volunteers. But where does competence originate? Two primary factors of competent behavior, **committed** and **creative,** come from the previous definition of competence. **If the individual volunteer is committed to the volunteer role, wants to perform well in that role, and creative opportunity is permitted, the volunteer should be able to learn the skills necessary to perform competently.**

Collaboration between volunteers, other agencies, and managers can uncover needed resources and set the stage for commitment and creativity. Collaboration implies future action and is a preparation for doing something.

So, are you . . .

- collaborating with groups who complement your group's strengths?

- finding new resources, approaches, and ideas, by collaborating with others?

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Create the conditions under which collaboration can take place! The appropriate values of managers, the support structure, and the credibility of the managers can make it happen. Collaboration can then serve as a **trigger** for commitment and creativity.

So, are you . . .

- fostering a climate for collaboration with your values, structure, and credibility?

Commitment creates the energy for competence, especially if there is apparent impact, if the effort appears to be relevant to the volunteer, and if the effort reinforces a sense of unity within the volunteer organization or community.

So, are you . . .

- showing impact?
- making effort relevant?
- linking effort to the group mission?

Creativity can increase the **capacity** of the volunteer delivery system. A volunteer manager can improve the creativity of the total group through attention to the task environment, the social context, and problem-solving opportunities. Creativity of a system grows when the volunteers are given the opportunity to be creative.

So, are you . . .

- allowing flexibility in work and problem solving?
- paying attention to the work setting, the social setting, and problem-solving?
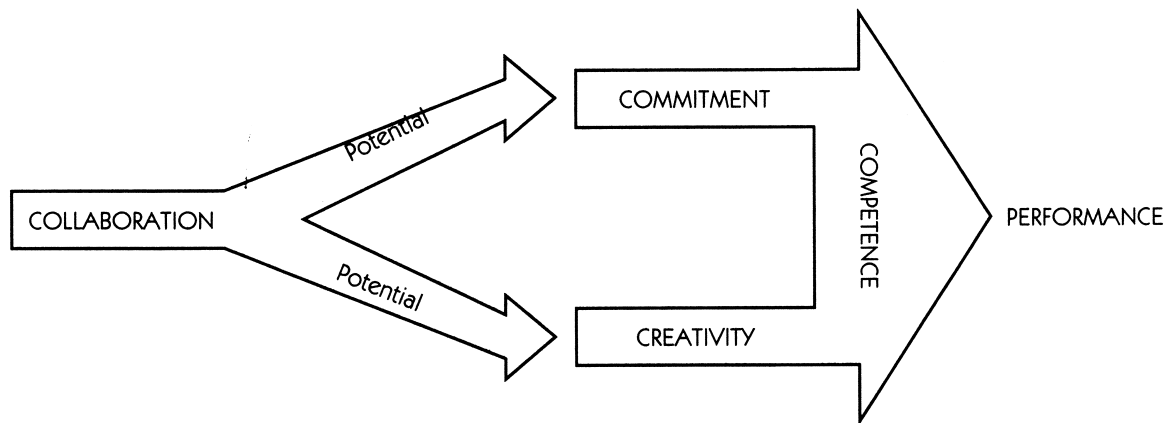
Competency model comes from
The Competence Connection: A Blueprint for Excellence
by Jay Hall (1983)

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Developing Competencies

The manager who allows volunteers to develop competencies on a continual basis will help the system keep going.

Your primary role as volunteer manager should be: Creating opportunities for volunteers to develop role competencies and enhance both coping and contributory competencies.

Role competency skills are those skills which help the volunteer perform the role defined by the role description. The volunteer is usually recruited because he/she already has these competencies.

Give each volunteer an initial assessment of competencies needed for the role description. Reassess them later to measure progress.

Modify this sample worksheet for your own use as you determine existing competence and plot learning opportunities. Use this with each volunteer.

Developing Role Competencies			
Name of Volunteer: _____ Volunteer Position: _____			
Tasks	Competencies or Skills	Opportunities to Learn or Develop Those Skills	When Completed

WHEN ASSESSING COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT:

1. Group volunteers by tenure or role function.
2. One group of volunteers reviews another group on an annual or other regular basis.
3. Communicate the calendar of review to everyone.

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Developing Coping Skills
Many times the volunteer's role will mean working with people under some time pressure. Stress and frustration may result in a volunteer who will soon leave the program. Coping skills or skills which enable people to work together, manage the crisis situations, and handle stress often need to be developed in both the beginning and the more tenured volunteer.

Be alert to sources of role frustration. Give appropriate opportunities for enhancement of coping skills.
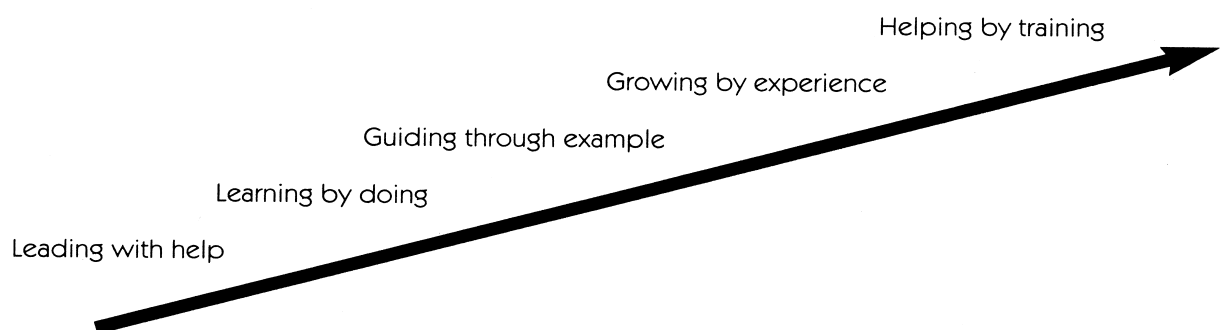
WORKING TOGETHER: THE COPING SKILLS
In nearly all roles, volunteers will be working with other people. Learning to work together in cooperation and toleration of individual differences is a primary task for volunteers to learn for the volunteer delivery system to remain renewable. These coping skills are varied and never fully developed within any individual. A healthy, renewable volunteer delivery system continuously encourages the development of such skills as dealing with anger, managing conflict, playing team roles, and handling stress.

Developing Contributory Skills
Volunteers have many reasons for volunteering. Three major motivating forces are for achievement, for influence or power, and for affiliation. But to stimulate these motivational forces, there first has to be a **reason to participate.** For many people just helping others grow is the reason. The volunteer delivery system which encourages a volunteer to grow **from a perspective of leading to one of helping** will build the personal power of its individuals.

Every volunteer delivery system should strive to build upon the natural desires of people to contribute something back to their communities or life in general. To enhance this desire, **managers should design opportunities for leadership development.** Helping

Stages of Contribution

Helping by training

Growing by experience

Guiding through example

Learning by doing

Leading with help

volunteers learn to lead and teach others should be a primary focus for these opportunities.

Helping People Practice their Contributory Skills

People gain satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment when they feel as if they have contributed to another person's development. One of the ways they can do this is by helping others move through the stages of contribution. For example, these steps suggest how this can be done.

I do – you watch.
I do – you help.
We do.
You do – I help.
You do – I watch.

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Developing Personal Empowerment

The fourth attribute of individual renewal is personal empowerment. Volunteers need to assess their own needs and determine options to enhance their own abilities related to competency, coping and contributory skill development. Managers need to give the freedom, the climate, and the opportunity for people to assess and develop their own abilities. This approach to competency development allows the development to be personal, timely, ongoing, and relevant.

EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment is defined as the process by which people learn through involvement and participation in the relationships, activities, and events affecting their lives. This is accomplished by developing and applying personal capacity to transform them and affect the world in which we live.

Empowerment entails:

- a willingness to delegate, and to assign responsibility and authority on the part of the manager, and

- a recognition of expectations, and

- the responsibility for meeting them by the volunteer.

Personal empowerment reinforces system empowerment but not all volunteers come with a high degree of personal empowerment. Cultural differences or mores, past experiences, or lack of experience may hinder early self initiation for some volunteers.

Personal empowerment is an important factor in helping volunteers feel successful, confident, respected, and in control of self. It's a vital element in keeping the volunteer delivery system on the road!

A volunteer delivery system whose manager's challenge and support personal initiative will discover unknown resources. Recognize and provide incentives for people to demonstrate initiative.

What are barriers to personal empowerment?

How can you create an empowering climate for your system?

What incentives would you provide to support initiative?

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