

The New Frontier: Volunteer Management Training

Volunteer, nonprofit organizations play a bigger role than ever before, and trainers today are beginning to ply their craft—and work in causes they care about—in this huge market.

By MARLENE
WILSON

The voluntary or nonprofit sector of our society is too often overlooked and misunderstood by Americans, trainers included. It comprises nonprofit agencies, museums, churches, libraries, universities, orchestras, chambers of commerce, trade associations, public interest lobbies, neighborhood associations, self-help groups, many hospitals and nursing homes, and professional associations.

According to Peter Drucker, "Service institutions have grown so big that they may now employ more than federal, state, and local government put together. Yet so far we have paid little attention to the Third Sector and its economics, management, performance, and impact."

Commenting that this sector's explosive growth was fairly recent, he adds that "yesterday's way of doing things has become inappropriate, if not counter-productive . . . yet few service institutions attempt to think through the changed circumstances in which they operate. Most believe that all that is required is to run harder and raise more money.¹

These expanding organizations frequently have not considered how they need to change because they are most often managed by people who were trained in the helping professions (i.e., social work, education, counseling, theology) or the arts, and have little administrative or management training. Their backgrounds have equipped them to deal with helping people, not managing organizations. This is an enormous frontier for trainers.

The Third Sector could not exist without unpaid volunteers. A 1983 Gallup survey on volunteering found that 92 million Americans—55 percent of the

adult population—volunteered in the previous year.

Three big training challenges in the voluntary sector are:

- training agency executives, staff and directors of volunteers in sound management principles;
- training paid staff how to work effectively with volunteers;
- training volunteers (i.e., board training, skills development, leadership development).

Vast changes in the makeup of the volunteer world have escalated the need for training. Traditionally, the bulk of volunteers were married women who did not work outside the home. Today, more than two-thirds of the women between 25 and 44 are employed. Fifty-seven percent of married women with children work outside the home.² So there are far fewer traditional volunteers available.

Working people are now the fastest growing segment of the volunteer work force. Forty-one percent of volunteers are male; many more retired persons are volunteering. Consequently, volunteers are often professionals with paying jobs elsewhere and with extremely busy, complex personal lives. These volunteers are unwilling to tolerate poorly managed, ineffective programs. They have a smorgasbord of options, since everyone needs their help, and they tend to go where their time and contribution is well used and appreciated. Agencies know this and are more open to training than ever before.

The problem is finding people who are able to provide it. Those with managerial training and practical, real-world experience can translate management principles from the corporate world into terms and settings familiar to the nonprofit.

Leadership

An organization's philosophy and style of leadership have a tremendous impact

Management by persuasion rather than coercion is essential.

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on employees, and they are especially important when working with volunteers. Management by persuasion rather than coercion is essential—or volunteers leave. The autocratic order-giver is less able to marshal and keep loyal volunteers than is a participative leader.

Rewards must come from something other than a paycheck. Other rewards are crucial because even the salaries of paid staff are far lower than in industry.

One of the greatest shortcomings of both volunteer and paid leaders in nonprofit work is their tendency to be "doers" instead of delegators. Too often, they are forced into crisis management. They find it easier and quicker to do things themselves, instead of planning how to share their work. As a result, in times of increasing needs and decreasing resources, burnout and turnover are endemic. To deal with this, such skills as planning, job design, delegation, accountability and decision making are badly needed.

Motivation

Motivation is often referred to as a pair of scissors, one blade being what the organization brings to the person (clearly defined job descriptions, persuasive leadership, clear expectations, training, etc.) and the other blade being what the person brings to the organization (needs, motives and attitudes).

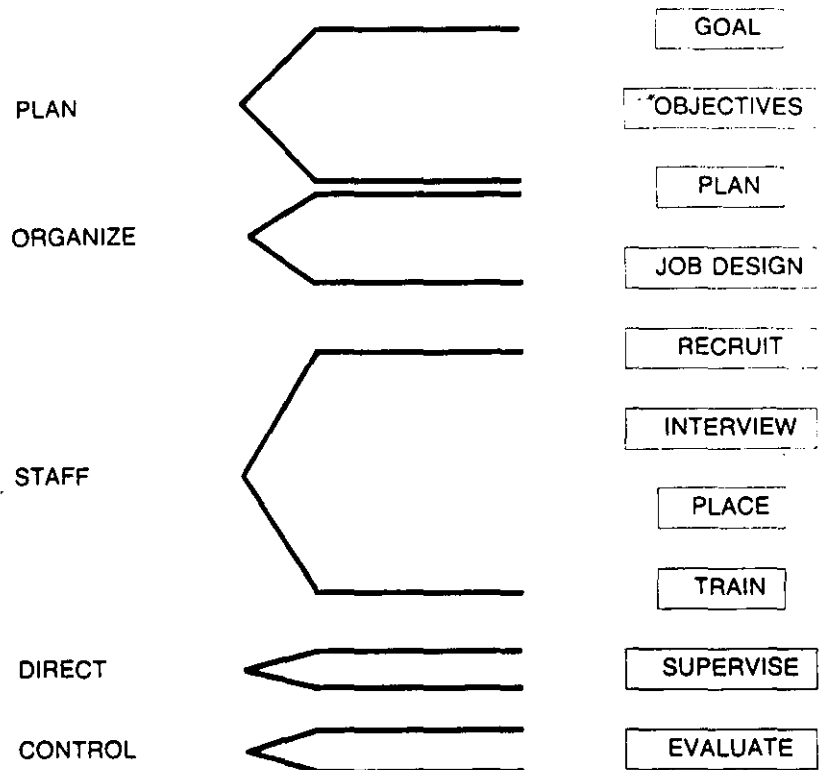
The key to sound volunteer management (just as it is with paid staff) is placing the right person with the right job. When working with nonprofit organizations and volunteer staffs, consider volunteers as non-paid staff, but never lower standards for them. This creates a spirit of teamwork and trust that is extremely motivating for all. This approach is useful even for people who have a high level of managerial competency in their paid work, but are having trouble in leading a volunteer group. Thinking of volunteers as non-paid staff puts the task in perspective and helps managers tap their skills.

Organizational climate

Organizational climate is the emotional atmosphere of any work community. Climate has a distinct effect on the motivation, absenteeism and turnover of both paid and non-paid staff. Why should an unpaid volunteer go to work in a situation that feels bad? The reality is that they won't.

Litwin and Stringer have identified nine

Figure 1—Management Functions in Nonprofit Organizations



dimensions or factors that determine and define climate:³

- **Structure**—the feeling that employees and volunteers have about the constraints in the group. (How many rules, regulations and procedures are there? Is there an emphasis on "red tape" and going through channels? Or is the atmosphere loose and informal?)
- **Responsibility**—the feeling of being your own boss; not having to double-check all your decisions. (When you have a job to do, you know that it is *your* job.)
- **Reward**—the feeling of being rewarded appropriately for a job well done; emphasizing positive rewards rather than punishment; the perceived fairness of the pay and promotion policies.
- **Risk**—the sense of risk and challenge in the job and in the organization. Is there an emphasis on taking calculated risks, or is playing it safe the best way to operate? (Does only paid staff get to take risks or are volunteers allowed that privilege?)
- **Warmth**—the feeling of general good fellowship in the work group atmosphere; the emphasis on being well liked; the

prevalence of friendly and informal social groups. (Warmth is the cooperation and good feeling between paid staff and volunteers and the absence of cliques.)

■ **Support**—the perceived helpfulness of the managers and others in the group; emphasis on mutual support from above and below (and between staff and volunteers).

■ **Standards**—the perceived importance of implicit and explicit goals and performance standards; the emphasis on doing a good job; the challenge represented in personal and group goals. (Standards for volunteers are set as high as they are for staff.)

■ **Conflict**—the feeling that managers and other workers want to hear different opinions; an emphasis on getting problems out in the open, rather than smoothing them over or ignoring them.

■ **Identity**—the feeling that you belong to a group and are a valuable member of a working team; the importance placed on this kind of spirit.

Management functions

Managing service institutions and agen-

cies probably will be the frontier of management for the rest of the century.⁴ Many paid staff in the voluntary sector have minimal management training. Figure 1 translates the classic functions of a manager into terms used more frequently in nonprofits. It is vital that all the steps be taken in order, whether the group is planning the organization's entire program for the year or if they are doing an event, such as a symphony fundraiser.

By following a logical sequence of sound management practice, the probability of having well organized and productive programs increases greatly. Managers then can avoid the all-too-common problems of recruiting before needs and jobs have been defined, placing volunteers inappropriately by failing to interview and repeating past mistakes by never evaluating programs.

How to get involved

One of the biggest differences between profit and nonprofit training is money.

Unless they are large, national groups, voluntary organizations or agencies don't have large enough training budgets to hire consultants. The most common solution is a workshop or conference sponsored by a consortium of neighboring voluntary organizations. Speakers at these meetings discuss such topics as trends; marketing; conflict, stress and time management; power and negotiations; creativity; problem solving and decision making; advocacy; fund raising; budgeting; and public relations and communications.

Because of scarce training dollars, the fees that experienced consultants and trainers receive most frequently range from \$300 to \$500 per day. Some trainers volunteer their services, either when they are new to this audience or when they are involved in a corporate volunteer program. It is a great way to make a difference in their own communities.

Trainers interested in exploring this expanding opportunity can begin in their own community by contacting a volunteer center, the United Way or the

local DOVA (Directors of Volunteers in Agencies). These organizations are aware of both training needs and opportunities in the community. Let them know of your interest and areas of expertise.

The rewards for training in the voluntary sector are not just monetary. They include the opportunity to work with committed and caring people and to help them help others more effectively.

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