

The Practice of Excellence in the Volunteer World

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Taken from comments made by Eva Schindler-Rainman the opening evening of the AVA National Conference on Volunteerism in Milwaukee, October 1983.

My chief commitment is to voluntary citizen-human participation in causes, efforts and activities, which are voluntarily chosen, and to improve the quality of human, animal, and other organic or inorganic life in some way.

I feel that volunteerism is the thermometer by which the temperature, indeed the health, of our democracy can be measured.

Volunteerism for me includes beliefs in:

- human dignity and diversity;
- humaneness;
- equality of opportunity;
- respect for and appreciation of the beauty of difference.

Volunteerism offers opportunities:

- for life long learning
- to give and share ideas, skills, knowledge and services
- to act
- to help change to happen
- to extend and enrich a large variety of services to others
- to strike all chords (from Rock to Mozart)

"Excellence" for the volunteer and the professional leader includes:

- Caring about the job and all the people connected with it, as well as the mission of the particular system.
- Personal and professional growth involvements.
- Interacting and sharing with other administrators and persons in and out of the Volunteer World.
- Being challenged by change.
- Acting as leader, enabler, connector, communicator, and as a positive, optimistic, forward looking, enthusiastic, productive example.
- Being able to share rewards and awards.
- The ability to give credit to others.
- Doing things that need doing, whether these are required by a given job description or are the favorite-or not-of the doer.
- Encouraging feedback and acting on it, and then giving feedback to those who risk giving us ideas and criticism.
- Initiating contact with disparate systems.
- Creativity.
- Risk taking.
- Communicating caring.

"Excellence" for leading edge workers in the field includes:

- Being comfortable with their jobs, but not too comfortable so as to get into a rut.
- Enjoying the art of their work.
- Rehearsing for coming events either in their minds or with others.
- Learning from their own mistakes.
- Examining the worst consequences of an action before taking the risk.
- Always taking time for planning and not merely swinging from crisis to crisis.
- Being adept in communicating their ideas.
- Seeking responsibility rather than artfully dodging it.
- Being inclined to champion new ideas and projects rather than letting them die untried or depend on the familiar at all times.
- The ability to reject perfectionism and act when necessary.
- Creating a balance between autonomy and direction.
- Being good team builders.
- Seeing the importance of quality training for themselves and those with whom they work on an ongoing developmental basis.

Yes, volunteerism is what my life is all about. Let us hope excellence is a part of it for all of us working in the volunteer world.