

# Change is Perfection

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An Old Chinese proverb states "May you be cursed to live in interesting times." By this saying, people who work with volunteers are cursed. These are interesting times and changes are occurring in numerous aspects of society, including volunteering. A way to think about change positively is to note the quote by Bach in *Illusions* where he states: "Change is perfection; the sea and sky are changing every second, but they are always a perfect sea and sky."

The purpose of this paper is to describe three trends which exemplify the changes occurring in volunteering. While some drawbacks to these changes may exist, it is the author's contention that each of these trends is leading volunteer coordinators closer to perfection in understanding volunteer motivations and how volunteers can be most effectively utilized. These three trends include the following:

1. New definitions of volunteering are emerging.
2. Concepts of marketing are being applied to volunteering.
3. More potential volunteers exist today than ever before.

This is a time of changing values, a time of moving from conformity to pluralism, from quantity to quality, rootedness to mobility, from long-term to short-term (Schindler-Rainman, 1982). Threats exist to volunteerism. On many fronts, human service agencies are being called upon to do more with less. Hard economic times place a burden on everyone, volunteers and agencies alike. Human service providers wonder where money will come from and if, in fact, money can solve the problems that confront society. The private sector is called upon to play a bigger role. It appears that there are fewer traditional volunteers; volunteer motivations seem to have changed.

Volunteers are neither the scourges nor the saviors of agencies. Volunteers can be the best allies and most effective

workers and they can be terrible headaches and dreadful disappointments—they are often a mixture of these qualities. Scheier (1978) has proposed that volunteering integrates the best and most powerful values in our society—pride in the dignity of work, the opportunity to participate in what affects us, the freedom of choice and expression of it, the actualizing of an ethic of care, and the underlying belief in the worth and power of individuals with the notion that one person can make a difference. The underlying assumption of this paper is that the changes occurring in volunteering will enable volunteer coordinators and volunteers to move to greater perfection.

## NEW DEFINITIONS OF VOLUNTEERING ARE EMERGING

Two common quotes about volunteering suggest that "when people volunteer, they call on themselves to see if anyone is home" and "volunteerism involves doing what you can with everyone welcome to try". These notions are as true today as they were ten years ago, but our perceptions of what it means to be a volunteer are expanding. Volunteers continue to believe that individual action can make a difference as they give of their resources, time, and energy.

Changes in the traditional volunteer definition include a new understanding of volunteering as more than the "Lady Bountiful" phenomenon. Volunteers are now seen in a variety of roles including direct helpers as well as decision makers, connectors or linkers, social action cause agents and monitors and supervisors of other volunteers. Volunteers are oriented toward service, issues (citizen advocacy), community/self-interest, occupational/self-interest, and philanthropic/fund raising.

Volunteers are seen in both formal and informal settings. Some have specific job descriptions while others might be classified as "lend-a-hand" volunteers. Organizations are moving toward both short-term (single event) as well as long-term

(commitment over a period of time) position descriptions. The days of volunteering in the same position year after year have been replaced by expecting opportunities for short-term volunteering. Volunteers participating in "self-help" groups are also a growing phenomena where people are taking responsibility for their own work and involvement on behalf of themselves and others.

Scheier (1980) has proposed 10 major participation styles of volunteers. These styles offer important insights to the changing nature of volunteers; the dichotomies suggest ways that volunteers may function within each participation style. For example, traditionally volunteers may have served *continuously as individuals* in direct service. Today a volunteer may be a part of a *group* that volunteers *occasionally* from outside the system. Many possibilities exist as illustrated by the dimensions which Scheier identifies:

continuous	occasional
as individuals	as a group
direct	indirect
participation action	observation
organized, formal	informal,
	unstructured
via work	via gift-giving
for others	self-interest
accept system	address system
rules	rules
from inside the	from outside the
system	system
lose-money	break-even

One of the major changes exhibited by volunteers includes a more self-oriented versus service-oriented motivation for volunteering. The notion of "enlightened self-interest" offers a broadened approach to understanding volunteer motivation. Some people are looking for the self-actualizing possibilities as opposed to the "repayment of debt". This translates into self-actualizing outcomes being sought such as learning, excitement, and growth; volunteers do not have totally overflowing altruistic motives but are seeking self-growth, work experience, self-esteem, enjoyment, relationships and affiliations with others, and contributions to their goals (Briggs, 1982). Most volunteer activity is a result of multiple

causations, with altruism as a very minor factor (Gidron, 1983).

Broadened definitions of what volunteers do and emerging motivations for involvement are changes that are evident in today's volunteer world. These changes will provide more opportunities for people to become involved in volunteering if they are "marketed" in an appropriate way.

#### CONCEPTS OF MARKETING ARE BEING APPLIED TO VOLUNTEERING

Local volunteers and volunteer groups are in a buyer's market (Ray, 1982). It is becoming more important to determine what volunteer organizations are trying to "sell" and what people are willing to buy.

The concept of "marketing" may have negative connotations to some people. In this case, the term is used in a generic way to include the process of planning, making contacts, and getting people to help. Using the marketing approach to get volunteers is superior to digging up volunteers anywhere or waiting for them to call.

The success of volunteer recruitment depends on 1) having something worthwhile for volunteers to do, 2) identifying sources of volunteers, and 3) getting the message across by asking (Ellis, 1985). The term marketing refers to what is offered volunteers in exchange for their gifts of energy, resources, and time (Vineyard, 1984). Drucker stated,

The aim of marketing is to make selling superfluous . . . to know and understand the customer so well that the product or service fits the person and sells itself. Ideally marketing should result in a customer who is ready to buy.

The "marketing mix" refers to four aspects: product, pricing, distribution (place), and promotion. The product is what volunteer positions are available—the jobs or tasks. The pricing refers to the value of the service provided. Distribution or place addresses where the volunteer opportunity is offered. Promotion relates to the advertising or the actual communication of the product, price, and place. When applying the marketing mix it is necessary to know something about the potential "buyers," the volunteers—

how many will be needed; where they live; what they do; their attitudes, values, and feelings; the way they govern themselves; the importance placed on volunteering; the social and human problems the potential volunteers face; and the societal, organizational and technological forces impacting on them (Allen, McCurley, & Mosel, 1981).

The volunteer coordinator must be user-oriented with an understanding of the exchange relationship that will mutually benefit the volunteer as well as the organization. The coordinator must also be aware of the barriers which will impede the volunteer such as lack of transportation, child care, parking, training materials, physical disabilities and the like.

Emphasizing the marketing mix offers a way to access and increase volunteer resources. Most of the mix is common sense, but it provides a basis for further legitimizing the value of volunteering and the need for careful management. This leads to the recruitment of potential volunteers.

#### MORE POTENTIAL VOLUNTEERS EXIST TODAY THAN EVER BEFORE

Some volunteer coordinators think that not enough volunteers exist. Enough volunteers may not exist but there certainly are enough potential volunteers. Recruiting volunteers is a form of public relations and reflects the philosophy and character of the agency. No easy answers exist to seeking new volunteers. There are no easy alternatives to maintaining an active, ongoing, recruitment plan.

Despite all the techniques suggested for recruiting volunteers, the best way to get them is to ASK. No amount of new technology is going to make recruiting any easier. However, it is easy to get into habits of asking the same people time after time to be involved with volunteer activities. Volunteering becomes habit-forming to some people, but volunteer coordinators, as the askers, can become habit bound. The diversity of people who are potential volunteers must be continually addressed.

The apparent decline in the number of volunteers is often blamed on women, the traditional volunteers. As women

have become employed outside the home, they have been less available. Rather than to decry this aspect, this change can open a new area of potential volunteers. Because there are fewer traditional volunteers and more agencies competing for the volunteers, volunteer coordinators may need to look at restructuring tasks to accommodate a variety of potential volunteers. Tasks may need to be made more relevant and job descriptions may need to be rewritten.

A number of groups might be considered in looking for the new volunteers.

- The elderly—twenty years ago we heard nothing about the elderly volunteering and today older persons commonly volunteer. Retirees may be anxious to help. Talking to people going through pre-retirement counseling/training might be a useful first step in recruiting good older volunteers.

- Former clients or participants—many studies show that the majority of 4-H volunteers are former members (Henderson, 1979).

- Non-joiners—How do we know someone is not just waiting to be asked to become involved? These are the volunteers who need to be specifically ASKED.

- Men—women may have traditionally had the "corner" on volunteering, but that is no longer true.

- Minorities—since many volunteer coordinators are of the majority race of an area, it is easy to focus on the majority race as a source of volunteers. Intercultural volunteering may offer many possibilities within an organization but it will require a targeted effort.

- Persons lacking formal education—organizations may rely on traditional ways of recruiting which appeal to those who are educated. For many volunteer tasks where a high level of education is probably not necessary, a non-traditional recruitment approach which is geared to the less educated may be effective.

- Low-income persons

- Unemployed—volunteering can be a way to gain new skills, not to mention fill time.

- The young—youth (individuals, students and in groups) have a lot to give

but they need to learn how they can contribute to society.

- The handicapped
- Institutionalized
- People on alternative work schedules such as those on shift work, evening schedules, split shifts—a volunteer coordinator may need to actually go to those work places to do the recruiting (Ellis, 1985).

- Working people—every study and poll of the last 20 years shows that volunteers are likely to be working for pay as well as volunteering (Ellis, 1985). Those who are working should not be discounted as potential volunteers. Many people who are dissatisfied with their employment would love to find a volunteer activity to give them additional satisfaction and meaning. On-the-job recruiting may be another technique that has not been completely tapped.

- Mothers—perhaps child care could be provided while a mother volunteers her time or perhaps the mother and child could volunteer together. A volunteer family might be an important new "group."

- Transitional persons—those who are recovering from illnesses or rehabilitation programs may have a lot to offer a volunteer program.

- Those in community service or alternative sentencing programs

- Religious service groups

- Self-help groups—groups can be a tremendous asset for volunteering and tend to be a phenomenon of the present. Getting a club or organization to take responsibility for specific volunteer duties may be very beneficial.

- Corporate volunteers—a major new trend is to encourage corporations to provide volunteers and to be responsible for various volunteer activities. These corporations are frequently interested in making many contributions to the community and employee volunteering is a way that is not necessarily a direct expense.

Attracting the new volunteers will not be easy. There is no "quick fix" and recruitment can not be isolated from the rest of volunteer management (Vineyard, 1984). The use of recruitment teams, appropriate training, and the marketing mix will all help identify potential volunteers.

## CONCLUSIONS

Other examples of changes and challenges which will lead volunteerism into perfection could be cited. None of these changes will result in perfection overnight. However, it appears to this author that redefinitions of volunteering, marketing approaches, and potential volunteers will provide some expanding possibilities within the field of volunteerism.

If those of us who work with and through volunteers remain open to new ideas about the phenomenon of volunteering, use marketing and planning techniques, and see all people as possible volunteers, we may find that the changes will lead us to better programs and ultimately to perfection. "Change is perfection; the sea and sky are changing every second, but they are always a perfect sea and sky."

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