A Guide
To Managing
Student Volunteer
Programs

An Objective-Centered Approach

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MANY OF US are working with programs that have contracted bad cases of Dead-Dragon. Frustration has set in. We are doing too many things and we are doing them poorly. We can't explain what we are trying to accomplish, and we can't tell if we are accomplishing anything. We can't set priorities. Every day brings a new crisis. We have difficulty figuring out who is supposed to do what. And those who are supposed to usually don't do it anyway. It just seems as if, somehow, things got off the track.

Management by Objectives is one way to give new life to an organization that seems to be suffering from these Dead-Dragon symptoms. MBO is a method of planning and management that focuses on defining and articulating clear directions and objectives. It turns attentions away from a preoccupation with activities, procedures, and processes, and focuses on results, objectives, goals, and impacts. MBO is especially useful for organizations that have priority-setting problems, limited human and material resources, conflict among workers over vaguely-defined responsibilities, and one administrative "brushfire" after another, i.e. volunteer groups.

The business world uses MBO to focus employees' energies on desired results. This amounts to a negotiated contract between employer and employee, stating in measurable terms what the employee is expected to accomplish, in what amount of time, and under what circumstances. It emphasizes negotiation and consultation between worker and supervisor and gives the worker a greater degree of input and responsibility. This traditional use of MBO is explained in several excellent books (see reference list at the end of this article).

In government, management by objectives systems are being used on both Federal and state levels as means for planning and budgeting for measurable results. Increasingly, public education institutions are using these systems to ask hard questions about what colleges and universities are producing, how well, and at what cost. Since most of our student volunteer programs are affiliated with institutions that will eventually be affected by such systems, we, too, need to ask questions about what we are producing.

Funding sources, notably the Federal and state governments and the United Way, are asking for proposals that articulate objectives as well as activities. Moreover, they are asking not only what the program will do but what it will produce and how much it will cost.

All of these results-oriented movements reflect a shift from process/activity/procedure/programs, as ends in themselves, toward a greater emphasis on results/outputs/objectives/products of those activities.

Historically, the social and human service agencies have been reluctant to accept attempts to measure the results of their work, insisting that since they are qualitative rather than quantitative, they defy measurement. Only recently, as funding sources have forced human service agencies to account for results, have they begun to ask themselves what they are producing. University student volunteer programs have been especially free of questions about the results of their work. The universities, happy with the good public relations that the programs produce, are not particularly concerned about other results.

Nobody wants to ask tough-minded questions about noble causes. But for the sake of both students and clients, we need to ask them. Service to the client and a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment on the part of the volunteer are largely dependent upon our ability to focus upon the results of volunteer work.

The elements of MBO are the tools that enable us to focus our

A Fairy Tale For

Once upon a time, at a campus not too far away, lived a frustrated, unhappy group of student volunteer project leaders. Their Student Volunteer Corps (SVC) was several years old, but in its youth it had slain great and fearsome local dragons and won the heart of fair community damsels and university administrators.

Alas, the SVC had grown morose, sluggish, and melancholy. Day after day it languished on a mossy rock in the forest. Everyone reassured the project leaders that the SVC was in fine health, but they knew that all was not well. One day the students heard of a gnome who fixed things. So they called him in.

The gnome perched on a file cabinet in the volunteer office, tucked his red leather curled-toe shoes underneath him, and said, "Now what is the matter with this famous and goodly volunteer program?" And the students told him *all* their woes.

"Oh, gnome," they said, "we can't get new project leaders, and we can't keep the ones we have. Some of our best projects are failing. We work ourselves to death for the first three weeks of every semester and after that nothing gets done. Nobody seems willing to do the necessary jobs. Students aren't volunteering for our projects any more. What shall we do?"

The gnome sat for a moment with his hands in the pockets of

attention on results. These elements are written statements of: (1) Purpose (2) Goals (3) Objectives (4) Activities (or strategies).

The purpose is a written statement of what an organization is about; why it exists.

Goals are long-term accomplishments toward which one is working and which are consistent with the purpose.

Objectives are short-term accomplishments that move us part-way toward the goals.
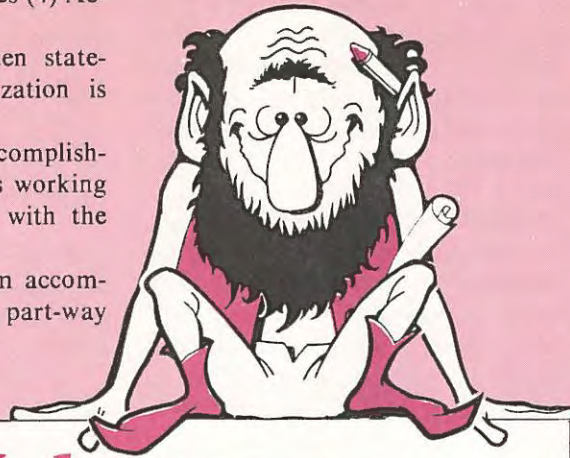
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his green velvet jerkin, frowned slightly, and then he said:

"Very serious, very serious indeed. This is clearly a bad case of Dead-Dragon. Your Student Volunteer Corps is dead and morose and unmoving because it has slain all its dragons and there are no new adventures. I will show you how to cure your SVC, but you must follow my directions closely. Otherwise your SVC may die of melancholy."

And he drew from his pocket a tattered sheet of paper about the size of a road map and unfolded it very carefully. "This," he said, "is a magic paper that tells your future. You must draw a road showing where it will take you and which dragons will be slain."

The students went to work. Initially there was much argument and disagreement about the nature of dragons and how to find them; but after much discussion, the students completed their map. When they looked up, the fix-it gnome had disappeared.

But the Student Volunteer Corps, hearing a rumor that there were indeed dragons left to slay and that someone had found a map leading to those dragons, roused itself from the mossy rock upon which it had been languishing, shook itself all over, and lumbered off in search of the dragons. Just like the good old days. And the student project leaders—and the SVC—lived happily ever after.

Activities or strategies are the actual means for accomplishing the objectives. They are what we do to get where we want to be.

The purpose is the most general statement about your organization. It defines what we do and for whom without reference to time. We jokingly refer to the purpose of our organization as being stated, "for the next milleneum," and perhaps this is a good conceptualization.

For instance, the purpose of the Community Services Office of the University of Maryland is "to provide educationally valuable community service opportunities for University of Maryland students." Very general. Yet it tells what we provide and for whom. It suggests our relationship to the academic purposes of the university; it does not eliminate credit-granting community service work. It focuses on

service to the community rather than on involvement in the community. It does not suggest that our office must place the students, but it does suggest that we are responsible for developing service opportunities. It focuses on educationally valuable community service work rather than on strictly volunteer work. It leaves open the definition of "community." The purpose sets broad parameters for activities.

Each word of this statement of purpose needs to be hammered out by your organization. You might expect that you and the others in your organization are completely agreed on your raison d'etre. Not so. Often everyone within a group has a different view of why the group exists.

Goals and objectives have the same basic characteristics. Each exists within a time-frame, measurable and attainable. The difference between the two is that goals are long-term and point toward your purpose, while objectives are short-term and contribute to specific aims. A long-term goal might be: "By June, 1976, our volunteer population will reflect the sex, academic discipline, race, age, class-level, and commuter-resident student proportion of the undergraduate population." This is a goal. It reflects your purpose of serving all university students. It is long-term, measurable, and probably attainable.

Like your goal, the objectives also are measurable and attainable within a time-frame and will lead to that goal. For instance, you may not be attracting minority students and commuters. One of your objectives might then be that by January 1, 1975, you will have developed three programs specifically for commuter students in their home communities and will have 50 students involved in those programs. Another objective might be that by June 5, 1974, you will have co-sponsored at least one community service project with the Black Student Union. These objectives relate to your goals and reflect the realities of your

campus. Each is measurable and attainable within a time-frame. Usually a good goal or objective will contain its own means of measurement. For instance:

"By June 15, 1975, 50 percent of our volunteers will have been with us for at least one year," or "By March 15, 1974, we will have placed 50 pre-med majors in health agencies."

Activity or Strategy

The final element of MBO is activity or strategy. Some people call this implementation. These are the things you must do in order to get where you want to be when you want to be there. They are also the elements of the system with which we are likely to be most familiar. We can usually list all the things we must do to get something done.

For instance, if your objective is to have a commuter student project operating by January 1, your strategy might establish the following deadlines:

October 1 — Project community selected.

October 20 — Three priority community agencies located that would like to use student volunteers.

November 1 — One student project leader designated for each agency.

November 15 — All recruiting posters designed and printed.

December 1 — Letter about the project mailed to all students.

January 1 — Recruitment meeting held.

Activities are fairly obvious, but potentially dangerous. They tend to rise to the level of an objective or goal. The newsletter that began as a strategy for communicating community needs to the student body takes on a life of its own and becomes an objective. Long after you discover that the newsletter really doesn't communicate community needs to the student, it still exists because the medium, *a la* McLuhan, has become the objective. Tbus, the activity of "recruiting 100 students by October 1," becomes an end in itself, rather than a means of "build-

ing a volunteer population that reflects the university population." So, make sure that your strategies stay where they belong — as activities that contribute to your goals and objectives. Don't let them become deified processes that resist elimination.

Writing Objectives

Learning to write a clear objective is the key to using the system effectively. Perhaps the best way to learn is to begin writing objectives and testing them for their measurability, attainability, and time orientation.

Objectives can be used at all levels of a volunteer program. For instance, objectives for your volunteer organization might be:

To have raised funds for and purchased a 10-passenger van by June 1.

or

To have named and met with an advisory board of at least 10 members representing both the community and university by Sept. 19.

or

To provide all students who come into your office with written information on all volunteer opportunities on campus by January 1, 1974.

An individual volunteer project may have objectives. The volunteer project at a hospital might have as an objective:

To develop four new volunteer roles in the children's clinic by June 1.

or

Double the number of friendly visitors by June 15, 1975.

or

Provide an orientation for 50 percent of all incoming patients by June 15, 1974.

Individual staff members (paid or volunteer) may have objectives indicating what they are expecting to accomplish by a given time, i.e.:

Beginning with fall semester, publish two newsletters a semester,

or

Develop and implement a system for maintaining records on volunteer placements by January 1, 1975.

Individual volunteers may have objectives (both for themselves and for clients). An objective for a volunteer in a court companionship program might be:

To meet and talk with five of the most important people (as defined by the probationer) in his probationer's life by January 1.

or

To be able to list by June 10 the steps that a probationer in the court goes through between the time of referral until the case is closed.

An objective for the volunteer's client might be:

After six months of working with the volunteer, the client will verbally indicate that he looks forward to seeing him.

or

After having been assigned to the volunteer for one year, the client will play truant 25 percent less frequently.

Objectives can also be written for various work elements such as recruitment, training, publicity, and transportation. For instance a training objective might be:

At the end of the two-hour orientation program, 80 percent of those attending will be able to write a list of their responsibilities as volunteers, the name of the person to whom they will report, and the basic rules for volunteers at a specified agency.

A public relations campaign objective might be to increase unsolicited donations to the volunteer program by 10 percent. A recruitment objective might be to increase the number of pre-med students active in the volunteer program by 50 percent.

No matter what level, the basic purpose of the objective is to indicate what we want to accomplish before we select the means to accomplish it. It focuses our attention on results rather than processes.

Some people in the social services object to MBO, saying that it is inhuman and looks only at items you can count. They insist that there are certain aspects of our work that are

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not quantitative. However, there are many areas, which seem at first to defy measurement, that can be measured indirectly.

For instance, we think it is important to recruit committed volunteers—not just quantity, but quality. But whom do we consider a committed volunteer? Perhaps he is one who is willing to be trained, shows up regularly at the agency, and is willing to be involved over a long period of time. Now we are approaching something quantifiable. We might then write an objective like this:

By January 1, 1976, 50 percent of our volunteers will have been active volunteers for at least two years.
or
By January 1, 1975, 75 percent of our volunteers will have received at least two hours of training from the agency in which they are placed.
or
By June 1, 1974, 90 percent of our volunteers will have missed no more than two of their assigned sessions at the agency over a three-month period.

We have quantified an attitude, or at least some good indicators of one. We can really discover whether or not our volunteers are committed. And if they are not, we can devise strategies for attracting and keeping the kind of volunteers we want.

Let's say that we want our students to have volunteer experiences that they perceive as educationally valuable. This is difficult to measure. We might write an objective which indicates that by June 1, 1974, 75 percent of our volunteers will choose (b) or (c) when asked the question:

"My volunteer work is:"
(a) Less educational than my classroom work.
(b) Equally educational to my classroom work.
(c) More educational than my classroom work.

We now have an indicator of the educational value (subjectively defined) of the volunteer experience,

and if we find that students do not consider their work educational, we can develop strategies for programs that are. Too often we hide behind the argument that what we do is human and thus not measurable, and all too often this is only a way to avoid admitting that we aren't accomplishing anything.

An MBO Program

If you are convinced that MBO can help your volunteer program, how do you get started?

"Get away from it all." Set aside a block of time—perhaps two or three days—and get away from the ringing phones and the daily hassle. Take along anyone in your organization who is concerned about its direction and its inertia and wants to see it become more vital. Try to collect all the data you have on where you are now—how many volunteers, what they are doing, who they are. Draw up a list of everything your organization does; every detail of activity, no matter how minute.

Set aside all this and mentally try to stand some distance from reality. Try explaining what you wish your organization could be and what it could do. Use analogies: I wish our volunteer program were like a _____. Or I wish our volunteer program could _____. Another useful exercise is to have your work group do something silly that requires a concerted effort—perhaps have half the group make a checkerboard with scissors, paper, and paste while the other half supervises. In the process you will note the importance of people defining a checkerboard, of indicating the minimal qualifications of a checkerboard, of assigning tasks, of involving the entire group.

Hammer out a purpose for your organization. Work on every word. Argue. Yell. Produce a statement about your group that you can all live with and work toward. Take as much time as you need, because this step is absolutely essential to the

organization's vitality. Make sure that it defines who you serve. Once this is done, write out and display it where everyone can see the results of this effort.

Translating Purpose to Goals

Turn back to the things your organization does. Ask why it does these things. What is the reason behind the activity? Why do you recruit? Why do you put out a newsletter? Why do you place students in community agencies? In the answers to these questions lies the raw material for goals. The answers can be translated into goals; long-term targets, which, if reached, would indicate that your organization is what you want it to be:

"Our volunteer population will reflect our student population."

"Seventy-five percent of our students will consider their volunteer experience as important as their classroom experience."

"Eighty percent of the agencies using our volunteers will rate the effectiveness of their service as 4 or 5 on a 1-5 scale."

These goals indicate broad areas of concern, targets to be met perhaps a year or five years from now. Do your goals mesh with your statement of purpose? If they don't, then rework one or the other or both.

Setting Objectives

If you've chosen the goal, "By June 1, 1976, 50 percent of the students in our programs will have been involved for at least two years," you must set objectives for that goal. You hypothesize that volunteers who receive training stay longer. Moreover, volunteers who have a chance to assume increasing responsibility stay longer. Volunteers who work in projects that have clear goals and objectives tend to stay longer. Volunteers who can see a relationship between their volunteer work and a possible career stay longer. The resulting objectives will look like these:

By January, 1975, 100 percent of your programs will offer at least two

hours of training for all volunteers.

By January, 1974, each of your projects will provide at least three varied roles for volunteers and will have defined three leadership roles for which there will be written job descriptions.

By February 1, 1974, you will provide a one-day workshop for all project leaders in MBO, enabling them to write clear objectives for their projects.

By June 1, 1974, you will have written descriptions of your volunteer projects that indicate the program objectives and what the volunteer can expect to accomplish by his efforts.

Now that you have outlined your purpose, goals, and objectives, check your goals and objectives to make sure they are realistic and can be measured. Are they set within a time frame? Do they relate to your purpose? Does each goal have four or five objectives that will logically lead to its accomplishment?

Planning Strategies

What must you do in order to meet each of your objectives? List every activity needed to meet each objective. If your objective is to provide an MBO workshop by February 1, your strategies might include the following:

• Select a date by October 1.

• Put together a team to plan the curriculum for the day by October 15.

• Send out letters about the workshop by December 1, and sign up all participants by December 20.

• Have all handouts and printed materials ready by January 15.

Each objective will generate a list of similar strategies that indicate your thinking as to the best way to meet the objective. However, if you hit upon a better way to meet the objective, toss out the original strategies and devise another set. It is not the strategies that are important, it is the objective. And incidently, you may decide that your objective was not a good one, was unreasonable, not the best way to

reach a goal, or does not allow enough time. Rewrite it. Change it. There is nothing sacred about it.

Check your strategies for roadblocks—is it likely that you will run into problems? If so, set up alternatives or change the strategy.

Go back to the list of activities that you made at the beginning of all this; the one that listed everything your office did. Note how the activities fall into strategies that now relate to objectives. The newsletter you've been putting out becomes a strategy for increasing the participation of certain groups. Recruitment sessions are redesigned to bring different results (more career-oriented volunteers, more men, more upper-classmen). The volunteer application is revised so that it only asks for a bare minimum of necessary information.

Unrelated Goals

You may find that you have listed many activities that have nothing to do with your organization's direction. Ask yourself why you should do these things that do not relate to your goals and objectives. Perhaps, because it makes your prime funding source (the university) very happy. Or perhaps because you have already committed yourself to the activity and you cannot evade it. Or perhaps it is one of your best leaders' pet projects. Continue it, but when the first opportunity presents itself, start disengaging. Go to the appropriate university administrator and explain that the activity does not make much sense to you. Offer something else that will meet the needs of the university as well as those of your organization. If you move along these lines, you will find that you are no longer locked into extraneous activities. By being able to articulate which things you would rather do, why, and how they contribute to your program, you will be able to persuade others that changes are appropriate.

There will always be some activities that are superfluous in your

organization. They may be concerned with objectives that others have for you (but which you do not share). There is not much you can do about these, except to figure out what they are, and meet them.

Scheduling

Now that you have plotted your purpose, goals, objectives, and strategies, you will have collected a list of completion dates. Draw yourself a calendar for the following year (and maybe longer). Mark off each month. Indicate your objectives in varied colors, drawing a line through the span of time that you will be working on the objective. A roll of white shelving paper works well. Specify each target date for strategies, goals, and objectives. The final product will show at a glance when your busy times are; where your deadline dates are clumped. At this point you may want to revamp some of your target dates. Maybe you can put that MBO workshop off until March, when things are a little slower. Perhaps the newsletter publication date can be moved back two weeks to a slack period. Suddenly, instead of the usual early semester madhouse and late-semester inactivity, you will have a more balanced pattern of activity in which less urgent events are scheduled into slack seasons, and one timely project-completion contributes to another further along.

Assignments

You now have a purpose, goals, objectives, and strategies. You have mapped out a calendar for the year. And you have assigned target dates for all your activities, goals and objectives. But who is going to do everything?

You might begin by asking people what their activity-interests are. This will get you some volunteers. Jot down their names next to the activity they are willing to do. Among the items remaining, try to suggest assignments that are related to things people are already doing. If your organization director must

make all agency contacts, perhaps he should also handle the Community Services Expo, which requires dealing with the agencies. If your coordinator is going to handle all placement, perhaps he should design information systems for maintaining personnel data and obtaining volunteer feedback.

Personal Objectives

At this point, each staff member works out a written set of objectives for his or her work, indicating when each objective will be completed. In addition to objectives that relate to office objectives, staff members may have individual development objectives. For example, the secretary might like to improve her typing skills or to learn bookkeeping. Other people might want to finish a master's degree during the year, learn about MBO, or receive special training in group dynamics. These should be included in the individual objectives.

Volunteer project leaders may set objectives that relate solely to their projects. Perhaps they wish to designate project leaders to take their places at the end of the year. They may wish to write a handbook for their volunteers or receive special training as volunteer coordinators. All of these aims should be written into a staff-member's objectives and agreed to by the staff member in negotiation with his superior. Each receives a copy. Set dates for evaluation of individual progress toward objectives.

Reproduce your written purpose, goals, objectives, and strategies and give everyone a copy. Set dates for evaluation of the office's progress toward objectives and strategies so that other people understand what each person is trying to accomplish and can help. This also cuts down on petty grumbling about unequal work-loads.

Everyone should be able to see your calendar of the year's activities in the office, and send a copy of the whole package to your immediate superior. This will indicate that you know what you are about and it will cut down on suggestions of other things you might do.

Review and Revision

If MBO is to work, you cannot simply write objectives and forget about them. They need constant review and revision. And you must be open to new ways of working with MBO. It is imperative that on the dates set aside for evaluation — both office and personal objectives — that evaluation take place. It is important that everyone feels comfortable revising and revamping the objectives and goals whenever necessary. The beauty of this system is not that you have a hard and fast statement of where you are going and what you are about, but that you are tuned into this question of purposes and objectives and are willing to order your activities around your purposes.

Vacuum at the Top

We often assume that those about us in the campus structure know what we are supposed to do, have a purpose for us, have something in mind. Often they do not. This is the phenomena that I call the "vacuum at the top." Everybody assumes the guy above him knows what the operation is about. The truth may be that the first guy who takes the opportunity to define what the project is about and to set objectives for it is the one who will determine its direction. Make sure it's you. If you set objectives for the organization, others will thank you. If you don't, someone will hand you a set you won't like.

MBO enables us to live with change and incorporate it into our organizations to revitalize them. It allows us to follow our own agendas rather than others, if we will only take the responsibility for setting those agenda and meeting the expectations that we have set.

MBO brings about greater understanding among the people who make up an organization — of its purpose, its direction, their roles and responsibilities, and the roles and responsibilities of others. MBO enables us to set priorities, to choose among the unending list of worthwhile things we can do. It enables us to break the frenzied activity cycle and pace our activities over a year's time. It enables us to use our off-seasons, and to live through the rush seasons. MBO can enable us to survive, to revitalize our organization when it is sluggish. And when the lean years come and resources are slim, those of us who know what we are about and can articulate our purpose and objectives have a much better chance of obtaining some of those slim resources.

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