

CURING TERMINAL NICENESS...



**A PRACTICAL
GUIDE TO
HEALTHY
VOLUNTEER / STAFF
RELATIONSHIPS**

MARILYN MACKENZIE

**CURING
TERMINAL NICENESS:**

**BUILDING HEALTHY
VOLUNTEER - STAFF
RELATIONSHIPS**

**BY
MARILYN
MACKENZIE**

ISBN #0-911029-28-1
© Marilyn MacKenzie, 1990

Graphics and Design by Andrew Moore
Published through VMSystems - Heritage Arts Publishing,
1807 Prairie Avenue, Downers Grove, IL 60515.
PHONE (708) 964-1194

CURING TERMINAL NICENESS: Building Healthy Volunteer - Staff Relationships

Contents

Chapter 1

UNDERSTANDING THE CURRENT CLIMATE..... 5

Chapter 2

CREATING A MOTIVATING CLIMATE..... 9

What Do Volunteers Really Want?

Windows of Work

Creating A Motivating Climate

Understanding Staff Concerns about Volunteers

Chapter 3

BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS..... 17

Creating Productive Partnerships

Orienting A Chairperson or Committee Member

Preparing to Team in the Voluntary Sector

Enhancing Productive Partnerships

The Executive Director's Role

Chapter 4

WHEN PROBLEMS ARISE..... 23

Terminal Niceness, Case 1

Common Trouble Spots - When Volunteer-Staff Conflicts Occur

The Brand New Staff Person - Terminal Niceness, Case 2

The Personality Conflict - Terminal Niceness, Case 3

A Period of Great Uncertainty - Terminal Niceness, Case 4

BIBLIOGRAPHY..... 31

Chapter 1

UNDERSTANDING THE CURRENT CLIMATE

There is a persistent myth that voluntary agencies are always happy. Why, there are no fights in the voluntary sector! There are only opportunities or challenges and we will march into the sunset to face them, even if they destroy us. Everyone smiles - a lot. In fact, our jaws ache from the forced congeniality. We may be smiling on the outside but that's not really how we feel. We're feeling angry, used, resentful and perhaps even abused. Still, it's not nice to feel angry or frustrated in the voluntary sector. We're supposed to care for humanity, value human effort and celebrate personal sacrifice. So both staff and volunteers must grin and bear it. I call this climate of painful pleasantries, "Terminal Niceness".

Terminal Niceness brings with it a whole constellation of conditions that erode effective volunteer-staff relationships. Because staff and volunteers must always be seen to agree, communication is guarded. Many topics simply can't be addressed because they border on discussions that may become critical or confrontational. Every conversation is filtered through a safety net - Is it safe to mention this? Will it lead to CONFLICT? Am I approaching dangerous ground? Conflict is to be avoided at all costs. It simply isn't nice to fight.

When volunteers or staff fail to deliver on promises, their failure is ignored on the surface. Remember, it's not polite to point out the shortcomings of another. Internally,

however, such behaviour confirms the pre-established notion that you just can't trust volunteers (or staff, depending on who is doing the mistrusting). "I knew it. Just as I expected. She messed up". No one inquires why or how this happened. Nor is any attention directed to preventing this failure in the future. To the outside observer it appears as if it never happened. You can be sure that given this climate, this will happen again and again. Under these circumstances, volunteers and staff tolerate one another, hoping that one will move to Northern Rubberboot, or one will be transferred to East Orangeville. Both genuinely want things to get better but neither is willing to change. They are waiting for the relationship to end. No problem solving is ever mutually undertaken concerning the volunteer-staff relationship, although it may be lavished on programs or other services. (After all, this anger that is so often submerged, must find its expression somewhere). Each member of the partnership feels discouraged and frustrated. Work isn't fun any more. You wonder "What am I doing here"?

The situation reminds me of the Bible story of King Solomon and the two women, both claiming to be the mother of the one baby. So it is in voluntary agencies afflicted by Terminal Niceness. Both staff and volunteers claim, "this organization is mine!" The volunteer says she has given fifteen years of her life to guide and direct the organization's growth. This has been her life. The staff says

she gives fifteen hours a day, tending the day to day operation. This is her life. Both worry about what they might lose if the other were to gain control. Trust is low, communication is limited and guarded on issues relating to their own relationship. Problems are ignored. Volunteer and staff crave personal power. They know what's best for this baby (I mean organization) and are the only ones who can be trusted to act in its best interest. After all, who really cares about the organization? Both say, "Only I do!". Solomon's suggestion to split the baby down the middle seems the only workable solution.

Is There No Other Solution?

Faced with Terminal Niceness I think there are three common responses:

1. Because you feel you can't trust your partner and you pride yourself on work well done, you take total control. You don't share information or tasks. You feel that you are surrounded by incompetents with whom you must work. You become exhausted and suspicious. You burn out. As the hero-martyr, you claim "I'm the only member of the organization who really cares".
2. Because you feel blocked whenever you attempt work of quality, you give up. You become a victim of the organization. "I can't do anything. My volunteer partner won't let me." You absent yourself from responsibility. "I'd like to make changes, initiate new programs, make things better but I can't". You continue to come to work but there's no joy, no investment in what you do. You are going

through the motions, waiting forgee, I don't know what! Retirement, death, disease, an excuse to leave.

3. You can try to make it better. You face the issue head on looking for support and affirmation. The volunteer-staff relationship can be one of pleasure, growth, even joy.

Rather than a climate of Terminal Niceness, I think staff and volunteer should join forces to achieve a "Productive Partnership". In this situation, the organization belongs to both partners. Instead of worrying about what I personally can lose, both parties focus their concerns on what can enhance the health of the organization - "How can we make it better"? There is mutual respect here. It is real and genuine, not forced and controlled. There is realization that both partners bring different gifts to the interaction. Both bring commitment and caring to the enterprise. Each is expected to contribute to the limit of her ability. Each has different tasks to perform that when brought together are more than the sum of their separate activities.

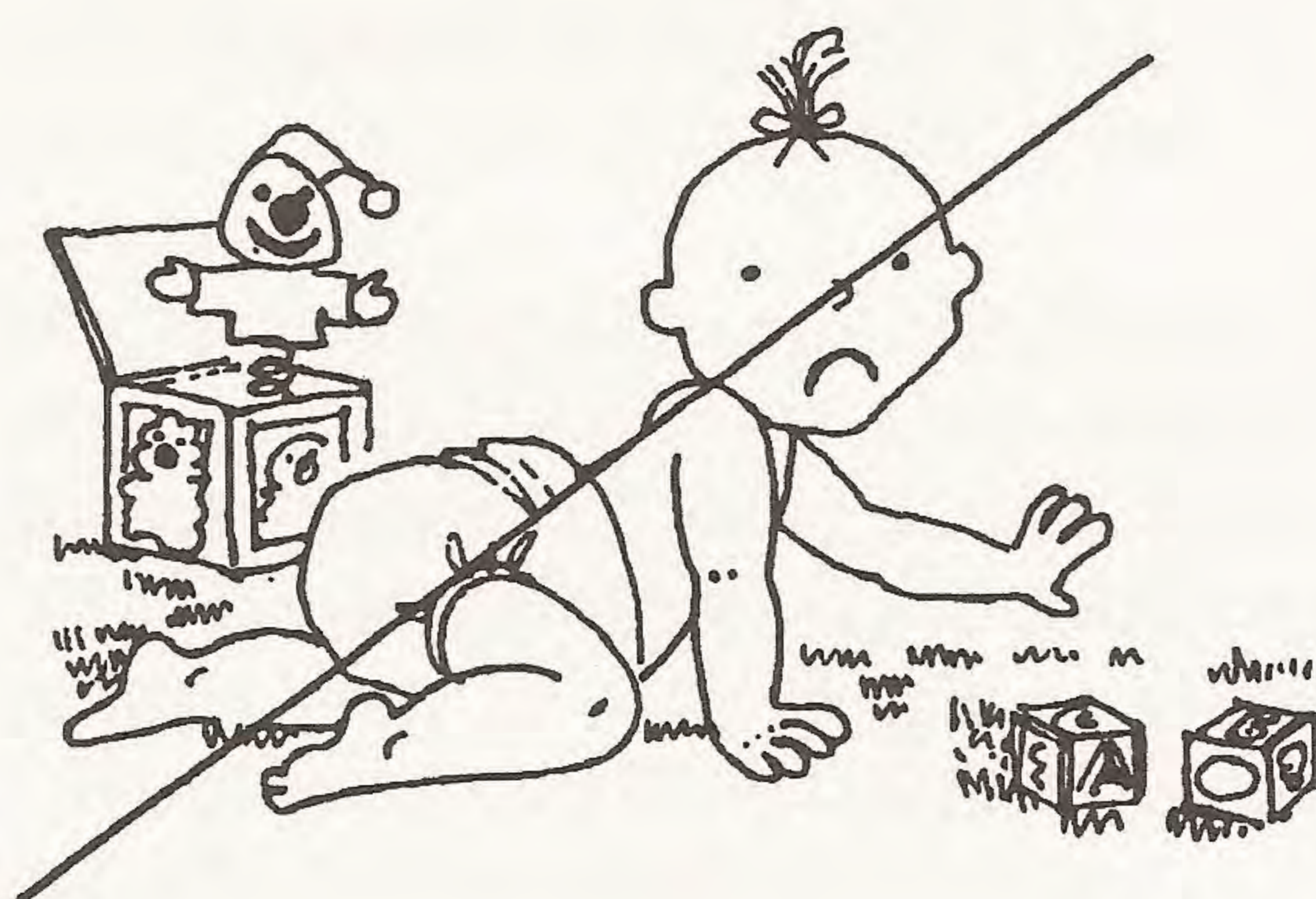
Because both care, there are bound to be disagreements. There may be serious conflicts on methods or even purpose but the foundation of trust allows the communication to be candid and critical. The ideas may be challenged but the individual always feels valued and safe. Problems are faced head on with both people prepared to find creative and mutually satisfying solutions. No pulling of rank here. No "but you're just the staff" nor its cousin, "the volunteer is always right". Neither does the staff listen to volunteer opinion, only to do precisely as was intended in the first place.

Power is balanced, sometimes with staff, sometimes with the volunteer taking the lead role. Staff is given authority to do what is needed. The volunteer is involved and consulted, feeling part of decision making. When her skills are needed, the volunteer is fully prepared to participate. This is indeed a partnership, a pairing of equals.

When time, effort and energy are directed towards maintaining the sham of Terminal Niceness, the attention to the organization is severely diminished. The opportunity for creative problem solving is blocked by the unwillingness of either party to face real issues and to resolve them. When the level of trust is low between staff and volunteers,

surely clients must sense the tension that pervades the organization. Productive Partnerships offer relief from all these symptoms. At last, staff and volunteers can claim, "This baby is ours"!

It is the ambitious task of this monograph to make Productive Partnerships a reality in your organization. Together we will explore what both volunteers and staff want, need and fear. We will identify the opportunities available to build better relationships. We will acknowledge common trouble spots and suggest ways to reduce tension. Finally, we will suggest a role for the Executive Director to ensure Productive Partnerships now and in the future!



Climate: Terminal Niceness

Ownership: This is mine!

Outcome: What can I lose?

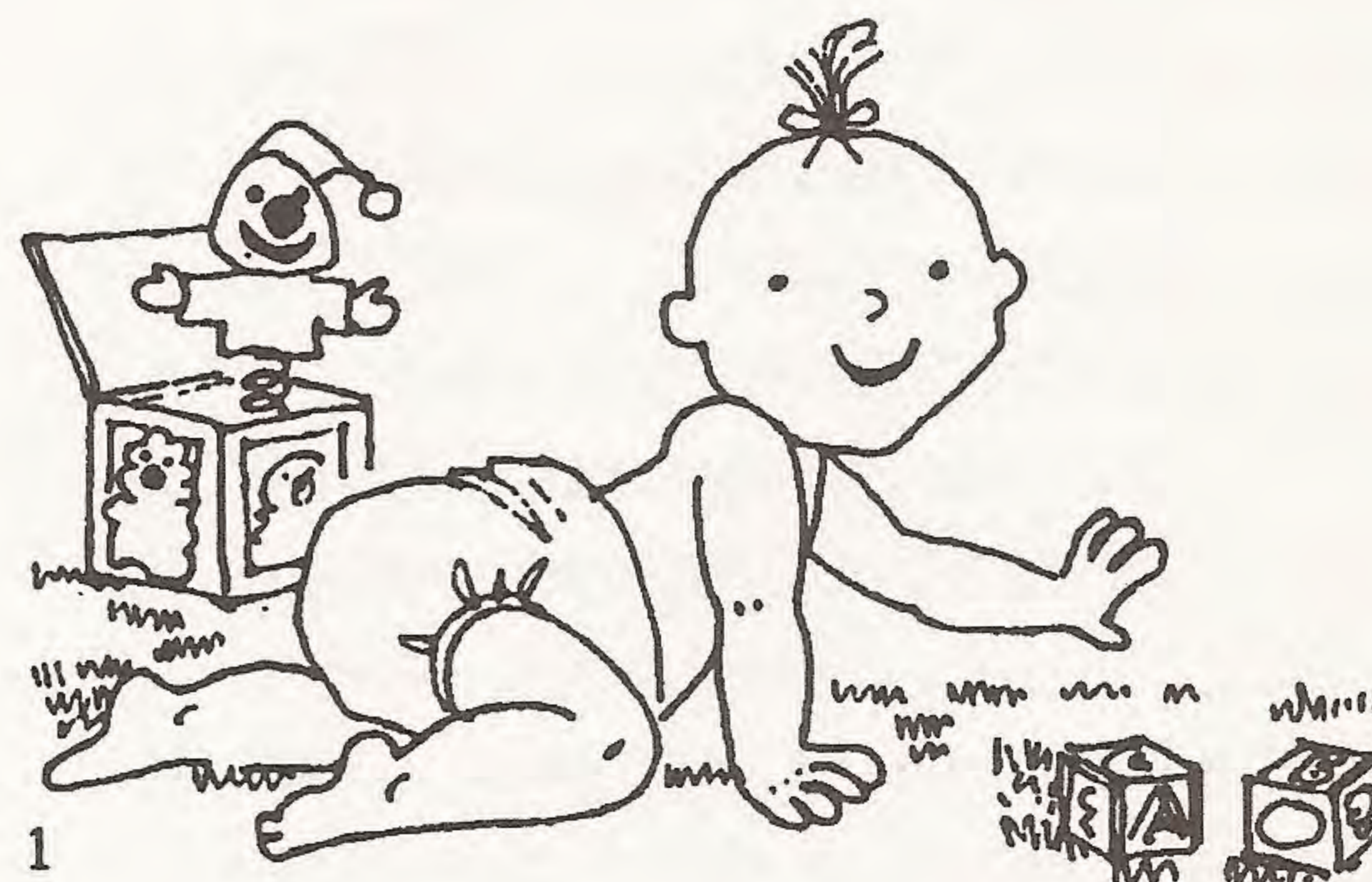
Trust: Low

Communication: Guarded, Pleasant, Forced

Problem solving: Ignored

Power: Personally controlled

THIS BABY IS MINE!



Climate: Productive Partnership

Ownership: This is ours!

Outcome: How can we make it better?

Trust: High, mutual respect

Communication: Open, Honest, Candid

Problem solving: Shared commitment to solutions

Power: Balanced, appropriately delegated

THIS BABY IS OURS!

Footnote

1. Clip 'N Copy Chapter 4: Volunteers in Action, Association for Volunteer Administration, 1989.
-

Chapter 2

CREATING A MOTIVATING CLIMATE

What Do They Want?

To understand how to create Productive Partnerships and to lessen volunteer-staff conflict, we have suggested that both partners must achieve their goals. But what is it that today's volunteers and staff of voluntary agencies want? What are their goals? These exceptional people seem to be motivated less by money than a sense of commitment to the mission of the organizations they serve. If money or financial security were their primary goal, we would more likely find them in the corporate sector, pursuing single-mindedly their paths to fame and fortune.

Despite a commitment to the organization's mission, there is a shift away from unquestioning servitude of either staff or volunteers. The era of Florence Nightingale, Lady with the Lamp, is over. People are asking "What's in it for me?" and agencies that fail to explicitly identify the fair value exchange for their staff and volunteers are finding it difficult to recruit and retain personnel. People are motivated when they understand and value the payoffs a job or assignment offers - whatever those may be. It may be tempting to suggest that altruism is dead and that this approach encourages people to focus only on taking care of "number one". Not so! Volunteers and staff are not looking for easy assignments. They are ready and willing to work hard for long hours but they want to lay down at least some of the conditions under which they will work. Groups

and organizations must recognize the changes in people's expectations and understand that they want to:

- be involved in the decision making process that affects their work.
- be viewed as part of a team that has input into how work is done.
- have ownership of their volunteer job - when you delegate, you give them as well the freedom to do the job their way. Rick Lynch talks about freedom to "think". This is revolutionary stuff because the conventional wisdom is that only managers can think.
- control their project from beginning to end. Rick Lynch calls it "turf"¹. Folks long for a sense of unity - involvement in every aspect of the job - not just one small discrete phase. This explains why people are asking for assignments that have a recognizable product at the end. For example, people will help you arrange a special event that happens in April but they are reluctant to sit on your Special Events Standing Committee, whose mandate extends over two years, with many varied tasks to accomplish over the period.
- have an opportunity for personal growth and accomplishment.
- enjoy their work.

I believe these expectations are valid for both staff and volunteers. Staff may tolerate deviations from these expectations because they seek job security and/or prestige. Volunteers may be so passionately committed to the organization's mission that they will tolerate an incredible amount of abuse and will not demand better treatment. However, our culture places high value on work that challenges, is personally satisfying and is meaningful. If these conditions are not met, people will go elsewhere. This is especially true for volunteers.

What do Volunteers Really Want?

In selecting volunteer work, what are you really looking for? Rank in order from 1 to 10, where one is the most important feature to you and ten is the least important.

- _____ Good working conditions
- _____ A sense that I am valued
- _____ An opportunity for personal growth
- _____ A challenging task
- _____ A chance to use my special skills
- _____ Fellowship and friendship
- _____ Recognition for work well done
- _____ A caring and compassionate supervisor
- _____ A chance to make decisions about factors that affect me
- _____ A feeling of being involved in an issue important to me

If you offer this exercise to a group of volunteers and/or staff you will find a wide variety of responses. The learning here is "different strokes for different folks". In fact, "different strokes for the same folks at different times." A stressed-out executive may seek out simple repetitive work as a volunteer instead of the challenging activities offered. The same executive, newly retired, may crave the action and drama of high level management decision making and crisis in his volunteer life.

Despite many individual differences, patterns do emerge. When asked what they want, many people respond that their top priorities are a:

- sense that I am valued
- chance to use my special skills
- feeling of being involved in an issue of importance to me.

Before trying to shape a volunteer or staff experience, it is essential that the supervisor understand what the person values and wants. Using the worksheet and a thoughtful interview the supervisor can begin to identify individual motivations. Much time and attention has been spent discussing the work of motivational theorists. Some of the popular names you will recognize include Maslow, Herzberg, and McClelland. Each provides a model that tries to categorize human motivation. The skilful coordinator of volunteers is then asked to determine precisely where the volunteer fits. I have two concerns with this approach. Firstly, people rarely fit neatly in one category or another, and as we have seen with our example of the executive mentioned above, people insist on moving from one category to another with alarming regularity (often forgetting to let their coordinator of volunteers know of the switch). Secondly, my

experience suggests that we aren't very good at guessing correctly or investigating other people's motivations. A more helpful construct is described in Ivan Scheier's *Windows of Work!*² Scheier suggests that you needn't devise trick questions to discover the volunteer's motivation - you ask them. He goes on to say:

What motivates volunteers MOST?

- the WORK itself is by far the most powerful motivator
- we don't create motivation, we discover it.
- best way to know what a person is looking for is to ask him

When a new recruit initially expresses an interest in your organization, send out a welcoming note and schedule an interview. Before the recruit comes, ask her to complete the Window of Work, with this explanation and tips.

Glad gifts - things a person likes to do.

Quests - Yearn to learn is something a person would like to do, an area of growth. The organization agrees to help the volunteer develop this skill.

No - No's - something a person doesn't want to do

Tips to Make It Work

Take your time. Take a break and come back to it.

Draw from your life at large - all phases.

Talk out your listing with others. Ask for their suggestions.

Now Build a Challenging Job that:

- taps into one or two Glad Gifts
- provides growth opportunities in one Quest area
- shuns No-No's

Scheier steadfastly believes that giving people jobs they want to do is the best motivational tool you have available. **In support of this notion, I urge you to look at your favourite hobby.**

Why do you do your favourite hobby? List the reasons. _____

Identify times when your enthusiasm for the hobby is low. _____

What "tricks" or techniques do you use to get going on your hobby again? _____

What are the implications of this for managers? _____

Glad Gifts	Quests	No - No's

Clearly if people are engaged in work they enjoy they do not have to be urged or cajoled to do it. They may need encouragement when they are tired or discouraged. They may appreciate new techniques that make difficult components of their work easier but they don't need someone standing over them criticizing their work or finding fault with their methods.

Not all aspects of any job are loveable. Some are darned hard, boring, and repetitive. Both volunteers and staff will be assigned these kinds of tasks. How does a supervisor of volunteers or a volunteer leader keep spirits high in these circumstances?

Let me share a little story. At a recruiting workshop I attended, one earnest young lady voiced a serious problem. She was looking for nit-pickers. Not those folks who are sticklers for detail, but volunteers who would pick nits out of children's hair. The school board desperately needed help in handling an epidemic of lice. How could she get people to volunteer to do such an unpleasant task?

Well, the workshop participants were full of suggestions that might help. What she needed was team spirit. She needed to create an elite squad of nit-pickers. Suggestions included ideas such as:

team slogan - "we nit pick in our spare time"

team button - Fluorescent pink with a giant bug on it and the slogan

team song

membership only by invitation - you had to be asked to nit-pick

lots of social time, get together and fun

nit picking in pairs

bumper sticker

sweat shirt reward for those who "did" the most heads.

Because the problem was such a unique one, I kept in touch with this gal. She implemented many of the suggestions and reported a waiting list to join the Nit Pickers Group.

The point of this story - even loathsome work can be made enjoyable. The more onerous the task, the more important that:

- you make it fun
- you integrate social support and camaraderie
- you recognize accomplishments no matter how small. Be ready to celebrate
- you provide enthusiastic leadership

Creating a Motivating Climate

Although I believe strongly that motivation is an internal mechanism, there are things that a volunteer leader or staff person can do to trigger or encourage an individual's motivation.

Recruit thoughtfully - matching volunteer-staff skills and interests to the assignment to be done.

Place people in jobs they want to do.

Create jobs that encourage those engaged in them to think, that challenge but don't overwhelm, that provide indicators of success.

Link people with sources of help (both human and print) and urge them to freely use these resources as gifts.

Recognize accomplishments year round, saying thank you often.

Help people set realistic goals.

Don't impose your own solutions on people's problems but trust that they can develop their own solutions. Tell them of your trust.

Encourage people to seek out alternate strategies for getting work done.

Listen to suggestions, compliments and concerns without defensiveness.

Demonstrate your respect for the individual, his values and views. Try not to impose your own.

Provide opportunities for folks to learn new skills, to stretch and risk without fear of failure or ridicule.

Why have we spent so much time talking about motivation in a book about volunteer - staff relationships? The answer is simple. Folks are often "difficult" because they are engaged in work they don't want to do or work they are not well equipped to handle. No amount of smiling or well meaning conversations can fully eliminate this problem. When both volunteers and staff recognize the need for thoughtful recruitment and placement, the "difficult" volunteer and the "cranky" staff person disappear, replaced by people who can feel good about themselves and the work they do.

Understanding Staff Concerns About Volunteers

When volunteers are initially introduced into a program that has been exclusively staff driven or when a new staff member joins an agency that uses volunteers, there may be some real reluctance to get involved. The wise leader does not impose the edict - "Thou shalt work with volunteers whether you want to or not." Time and attention

should be spent identifying and acknowledging staff concerns and having the group develop strategies that address these concerns.

Susan Ellis, in her book From The Top Down³, describes a fantasy exercise where a wealthy widow leaves an enormous fortune to your agency. There is enough money to fund all current and proposed services in the future. You and the board members are asked to decide if you would continue to use volunteers. At the same time, have a group responding to a mythical staff committee who has come to the Board with a long list of complaints explaining why they don't want to use volunteers. What might appear as reasons on their list? How can you minimize or reduce their concerns?

Staff need to explore the value of working with volunteers and have their concerns and questions heard. These exercises promote frank, thoughtful and often passionate discussion. They will also provide practical strategies for dealing with staff concerns.

One exercise that I have found useful in working with reluctant or sceptical staff is the following: the staff, working in small groups of six to eight, are asked to assume the role of the Board of a mythical agency - perhaps the Blushing Meadows Recreation Centre.

The Board has been approached by their staff who have brought forward a long list of complaints explaining why they don't want to work with volunteers any more. The small groups are asked to guess what might appear as reasons on the list. After fifteen minutes, the groups exchange lists and try to develop strategies that will minimize or eliminate the staff's concerns.

Typical responses to the second exercise:

Our Concerns About Volunteers

Volunteers take too much time to supervise

Professional standards of client service are compromised because these people aren't trained. Clients are at risk when volunteers deliver service.

Volunteers don't respect confidentiality

Volunteers are unreliable

Strategies to Resolve

- Recruit, select carefully
- Provide good orientation
- Work with a buddy
- Assign a staff partner
- Clarify job description
- Create good procedures
- Establish checkpoints
- Delegate more

- Select assignments carefully
- Role play situations that suggest need for referral
- Supervise adequately to assure assignment is appropriate
- Provide inservice training appropriate to case assignments
- Make sure volunteers know when they are under-qualified for an assignment
- Provide other human/print resources
- Provide a help phone number to report urgent concerns
- Schedule regular meetings between staff and volunteers

- Staff may not either. Apply same standard to staff
- Make pledge of confidentiality a part of orientation
- Role play situations that illustrate breaches of confidentiality
- Enforce the rules
- Fire as warranted
- Be a role model for others

- Establish clear guidelines and expectations for attendance and cancellation
- Enforce rules when broken
- Do not accept unacceptable behaviour
- Speak to the person immediately. Fire if a pattern emerges
- Apply same standards with staff

Our Concerns About Volunteers

You can't fire volunteers

Volunteers will replace paid employees

Volunteers aren't as committed to the client's welfare as I am - they just drop in at their own convenience

Strategies to Resolve

- Yes you can, if all other methods fail
 - Try
 - conversation
 - redirection
 - clarification of expectations
- Establish a policy that volunteers will not replace paid positions.
- Be sure volunteers are used ethically.
- Volunteers enhance service and do not replace existing services delivered by staff
- Involve staff in planning for how and when volunteers will be used
- Give them opportunity for input on job design
- Involve them in orientation and training
- Introduce to successful committed volunteers
- Clarify volunteer roles/expectations
- Assign well-established volunteers to affirm the value of the program
- Acknowledge work done well with volunteers
- Allow staff the right to refuse a volunteer

To Reduce Staff Reluctance to Use Volunteers

1. Acknowledge potential sources of reluctance and encourage staff to identify solutions for these problems

2. Involve staff in all aspects of planning for and implementation of the volunteer program, giving the staff a sense of ownership in it.

3. Clearly define the role of staff in working

with volunteers. Determine who supervises them, who trains and evaluates, who reprimands or fires them.

4. Train staff in effective volunteer management and supervision.

5. Recognize staff who are working well with volunteers. Describe their successful efforts in your newsletter.

Effective volunteer management practises can eliminate most of the concerns raised by staff when they are asked to work closely with volunteers. If these concerns are not addressed, the opportunity for warm supportive relationships is lost in a sea of doubt, discouragement and potential danger for the staff person.

The lack of an ethical agency policy which clearly outlines the role of volunteers is the other major source of tension. Suspicion is to be expected when volunteers are placed in order to supplement staff. No positive relationships can exist in such circumstances - murder and mayhem, perhaps. Terminal Niceness in this situation may be a desirable outcome.

Footnotes

1. Rick Lynch, *Precision Management*, Abbot Press, 1988

2. Ivan Scheier, "Windows of Work", Yellowfire Press, 1981

3. Susan Ellis, *From the Top Down*, Energize Press, 1986

Chapter 3

WINDOWS OF OPPORTUNITY BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

There are no magic prescriptions that can be dispensed to ensure healthy relationships between staff and volunteers. Successful partnerships are hard work. You have to want the relationship to succeed, in order to invest the time, effort and energy required to make it work. Once developed, a relationship needs tending and nurturing to sustain its growth. Even when the surroundings, climate and conditions all conspire against success, the ultimate responsibility is a shared one between the volunteer and staff partners.

Both staff and volunteer have been known to complain that "You've got to work with what you've got." Despite this negative notion, there are many opportunities for volunteers and staff to forge healthy relationships even when a volunteer has been recruited, interviewed, screened and placed by somebody else.

In the ideal world, the staff person in the partnership has had some input about the job or position available in her department. They have identified a genuine need and responded to it. They have outlined the skills, attitudes and knowledge they felt was required to do the job successfully, perhaps as part of a team that wrote the final position description.

Prewrite

Violet Volunteer, bright eyed and enthusiastic, appears at your door step, ready and willing to do the job. What next? How can you begin to develop a healthy volunteer - staff relationship?

As a first step, it may be helpful to think of the volunteer as a visitor in a strange land. For her, the sights, sounds, and smells may be exaggerated, unfamiliar and frightening. Incidents that you take for granted may cause distress. For example, when I worked as a staff nurse with children receiving cancer treatment, I viewed bald headed children with fond affection. Volunteers were uncomfortable, uneasy and full of questions. It depends on your perspective.

Take some time to welcome the new volunteer even if an "official" orientation has been done on behalf of the agency. Consider what makes your service or program unique. You or a designate will want to provide a tour, being sure to include these very practical pointers

- here's where you can keep your purse
- here's the light switch for the bathroom
- there are great donuts across the street at Joe's
- you can keep your lunch in this fridge but be sure it's labelled.

A tour should include introductions to key people the volunteer must know, staff at all levels of the organization from maintenance to senior management, and current volunteers. Don't be surprised if names and titles are forgotten. A written list of who's who is very helpful.

Help the volunteer become familiar with rules, customs and procedures that are specific to your service. Schedules that are important to know should be shared: staff meetings (are volunteers included?), rest hours (no visitors or loud noise), treatment times and office hours. Even the volunteer who comes to you with experience in other programs within your agency will welcome this refresher and re-orientation.

Most new volunteers will arrive without documentation. No registration information, no interview form and no contract agreement will accompany them. Your first step may be to initiate a friendly chat. This begins the process that builds trust, respect and confidence. You will want to tailor questions to satisfy the needs of your particular program (for example, tell me about your experiences working with seniors or what age groups have you taught in your swimming classes?) and include some general questions as well.

- Tell me a little bit about yourself.
- I'd like to hear more about your experiences as a volunteer.
- What kind of volunteer jobs do you especially enjoy?
- What are you currently looking for in your experience here at the Centre?
- What kind of supervision (supervisory relationship) do you find most helpful?

Being interested and prepared to listen is as important as having the "right" questions answered. In preparing to work, your next step is to sit down with the new recruit to discuss the job description. You will want to identify up-front any variations or deviations from the expected. Questions that you may want to ask include:

- Does this description accurately reflect the task (or assignment) you've said you'd do here?
- What questions do you have about the job as written?
- What part of the task do you especially look forward to doing?
- What parts of the job are new to you or you're concerned about?
- What special information would you like me to know about you, your availability or your ability to do this job?

Clarify your own relationship to the volunteer. Are you the first person to ask if there's a question? When and how can you be contacted? Under what circumstance do you want to be notified? Talk a little about your own supervisory style. If you need to hover to be sure the volunteer gets it right, let her/him know that's your intention. If your style is more laissez-faire, be sure to provide back up and checkpoints for the volunteer to clarify issues of concerns. If you are not the immediate supervisor, remember to share the relevant information you've gathered with the person who will be the direct supervisor.

The purpose of this initial conversation is to:

- clarify your expectations and those of the volunteer.
- determine the needs and preference of the volunteer.
- identify areas for future support, training and direction.
- build a solid foundation for your relationship.

You may choose to delegate parts of this initial contact to a subordinate but recognize this has the potential to weaken your future relationship. It is wonderful if you can orient more than one volunteer, or volunteers and staff together. You are then creating a team right off the bat. Your next step is to assign the newcomer to a "buddy" or "mentor" who can show the recruit the ropes during an initial settling-in phase.

Orienting A Chairperson or Committee Member

If you are orienting a chairperson or committee member, you'll want to move beyond job descriptions to the terms of reference of that group. Be very clear about your own role with the committee. What can they expect from you in terms of:

- * time
- * support services
- * resources
- * expertise (content or process)

Is this an advisory committee or a steering committee? What is its mandate? What is the history that has lead to its creation? To whom will it report?

Both of you will need an opportunity to talk about work styles, how you react to stress or conflict and the kind of help you will need

from the other. The more information you can share the better. In this situation you are trying to create a sense of synergy - the contribution of the two of you together is greater than the sum of your individual efforts.

Pfeiffer and Jones¹ have done some interesting work to prepare trainers to team teach. They suggest you need to thoroughly explore your beliefs, expectations, and personal styles to work effectively as a team. To adapt their work to productive partnerships in the voluntary sector, you might independently complete the following questionnaire and then share your answers with your team member.

Preparing to Team in the Voluntary Sector

This I believe about volunteers _____

This I believe about staff _____

Here are my expectations about our work together _____

The best thing that could happen would be _____

The worst thing that could happen would be _____

When things are not going well, I _____

When I'm angry or personally hurt, I _____

What I'm trying to work on personally is _____

What I'd like feedback from you on is _____

We can best handle conflict between us by _____

For those of you shaking your heads at the time commitment this implies, let me reaffirm that your pre-work investment will pay huge dividends in increased effectiveness and efficiency. You will also minimize the tensions, misunderstandings and miscommunications that routinely arise when you don't really appreciate your counterpart's point of view.

During the Work Phase

During the work phase, each interaction provides an opportunity to strengthen the bonds of friendship that can arise between volunteers and staff. They share responsibility for the successful completion of all phases of their work together, acting as cheerleader, coach and mentor, one for the other. Helpful encounters between them often include:

Listening - being prepared to act as a sounding board for new, untested ideas.

Clarifying, questioning, reflecting on, amplifying, playing out the logical next steps, assisting in problem definition.

Providing feedback, options and redirection.

Supporting, advising when it is sought, problem solving if requested.

Recognizing and rewarding - "finding someone doing something right"². Celebrating small victories especially when big wins are elusive.

All this takes place in an atmosphere that encourages risk, that demonstrates caring and personal concern. Each partner feels safe from ridicule or failure, for both are committed to each other's success. This commitment builds trust, confidence and respect.

I'm suggesting a very different model than the norm. In the one proposed, neither staff nor volunteer identifies herself as boss. Each is colleague to the other. They are jointly accountable for projects assigned to them, they report together on their progress and they are recognized for their achievements as a team. Both "own" their success.

Building a collaborative approach doesn't just happen. It requires nurture and support from senior staff and volunteer leaders. People need training to develop their listening and feedback skills. They need support to work with others rather than to pre-determine how and what is to be done. I call this "training to team". A productive partnership will be enhanced if both partners are encouraged to attend workshops that foster team development.

Postwork Review

After the project is completed, the accomplishments acknowledged, and the dust has settled, there is another opportunity to solidify the staff - volunteer bond. Two elements are worthy of attention:

- The project review - a candid exchange of views on how the project could be improved next time. The focus here is on the work.

- The performance review - a frank discussion of how each partner might improve next time. What might each do differently? What was helpful, wise and timely? What was not? What did you need that you didn't get? What expectations were met, what ones were unmet? The focus here is on the folks.

People weave bonds of incredible strength, complexity and beauty when they learn these communication skills together. By reflecting on their joint learnings, the partnership makes conscious their personal and professional growth.

The Executive Director's Role

The Executive Director sets the tone for the existence of successful volunteer - staff relationships. She is a **role model** for her staff, working hard to establish and enhance her own relationship with senior volunteers in the agency. She **recommends policies** that promote the ethical use of volunteers, not to supplant staff but as a support to them and an enhancement to the service delivered. She **advocates** on behalf of volunteers within her community and in the larger community. Finally, she **puts in place procedures** that strengthen the volunteer - staff bond.

One of the most common mistakes made by Executive Directors is to insist that all staff must use volunteers. Volunteers are then sent to the "black holes" of volunteering where they are not wanted, not well treated and bound to fail. The presence of volunteers in a service is a privilege not a right. Staff must demonstrate a willingness to work effectively with volunteers before they are permitted to apply for volunteer assistance. Colleagues who have had positive experiences with volunteers can act as powerful examples to reticent staff members.

Some further suggestions for the Executive Director anxious to build Productive Partnerships:

Involve staff in planning how and when to use volunteers

Write volunteer supervision into job descriptions. Accept that it is part of the job and allow time for it. Do not suggest it is an "add-on" - something to be done in spare time.

Take time to acknowledge staff concerns and work with them to develop practical strategies to eliminate or minimize their concerns.

Train people to work effectively with volunteers.

Establish "ability to work effectively with volunteers" as a criterion for hiring.

Include "ability to work effectively with volunteers" as a criterion for performance appraisals.

Recognize staff who work effectively with volunteers. Promote these folk!

Involve volunteers in your own office.

Apply the same standards to volunteers as you do to staff when hiring, advancing.

Orient/train staff and volunteers together where practical and possible.

Make staff and volunteers jointly accountable for tasks assigned to them.

Show volunteers and staff as teams on the organizational chart.

Reward volunteer-staff teams for work well done, not just the volunteer.

Handle problems that surface promptly and objectively.

Evaluate how well staff and volunteers work together as an element of all project reviews.

Invest time in nurturing relationships with more experienced volunteers in your agency.

Footnotes

1. Pfeiffer and Jones, *Co-Facilitating, Handbook for Group Facilitators*, 1975, University Associates, San Diego, California.

2. Spencer Johnson and Ken Blanchard, *The One Minute Manager*, Avon Press, New York, 1982.

Chapter 4

WHEN PROBLEMS ARISE

Terminal Niceness, Case 1

Menda Gleek is the Special Events Chairperson for the Collapsing Corners Recreation Centre. Menda didn't want to be chairperson but no one else offered. She reluctantly agreed. This is her first role as chair. She expected a lot more help from her staff person. Why, he knows how important fund raising is to the Centre! He should be out there raising dollars. He seems to be very busy complaining and criticizing others. Menda's not sure she's ready to "do battle" with Bill. Her self-esteem just couldn't handle one more blow. He never listens when suggestions are made about how he could help the committee. "If Bill wanted to help, he would have offered."

Bill Sleek, the staff person assigned to the Special Events Committee, is a bright, knowledgeable guy with quite a bit of experience running effective committees. He was disappointed when Menda was appointed Chairperson. Now he is frustrated with her poor chairing skills. He can see that Menda is in over her head but he doesn't know what to do about it. His subtle suggestions for improving the meetings just aren't listened to. Menda seems to resent his offers of help. "It's difficult to watch Menda bungle yet another meeting but criticizing a volunteer just isn't done here. As a staff person, my role here is to be supportive but Menda won't let me."

What we have here is a textbook case of Terminal Niceness. Menda is a new Chairperson, not well skilled in the task expected of her. Perhaps she was a convenient choice as chairperson, not the best choice. She has expectations of Bill's role (that he is an active fund raiser) that he doesn't know about. Menda is fragile - aware of Bill's dissatisfaction but not able to identify why. She may want to be a better Chairperson but she is intimidated by what she perceives as Bill's critical style. She feels unheard and unhelped, waiting for Bill to make the first move. Menda needs Bill's expertise to manage meetings more effectively but she may not even realize he has these skills to offer. Menda's first concern is fund raising but she's getting no help here.

Bill feels he has tried to be helpful but his suggestions are rejected. Bill is trapped in the "subtle" approach because he feels that's how staff are supposed to behave, and although he is not comfortable with the way things are going, he's too polite (constrained) to deal with the problem openly.

This is what usually happens in voluntary agencies. Nothing. Both parties wait it out. Bill and Menda must accept that the situation will not improve until they take charge of it. Bill and Menda must create a sense of team committed to a shared goal - a successful Special Event Program. Each will achieve their goal only if the other participates fully.

1. Bill and Menda need to talk about:

- Expectations
- Who does what - job description
- How are we doing?
- What is the nature of the task?
- Skills, knowledge, experience each can offer the other
- The barriers that block their progress

2. Bill needs to attend to Menda's concerns about the task - fund raising. He will want to help her achieve her goals in this area by assisting in planning and problem solving.

3. Bill needs to guide Menda gently on enhancing her chairing skills, providing feedback and support as she tries to incorporate new skills into her repertoire. Approach is everything here. Not "You must do this..." but "Have you considered..." or "Here's an interesting approach you might try..."

4. Both Bill and Menda need to take time out to celebrate movement toward the goal. What is Menda good at? Let's support that effort. What help has Bill given? Can it be recognized? Each must recognize the unique and important contributions they bring to this partnership.

Terminal Niceness prevents staff and volunteers from confronting issues, from taking responsibility for them. It suggests instead that problems, untended, will disappear or diminish. It just ain't so!

Neither party in this scenario is a bad person. Neither is out to get the other, but by pretending there is no conflict, both are doing exactly that. In order to resolve the impasse:

Accept that the situation will not improve until both take responsibility for it.

Identify mutually held goals, values, beliefs and work towards these.

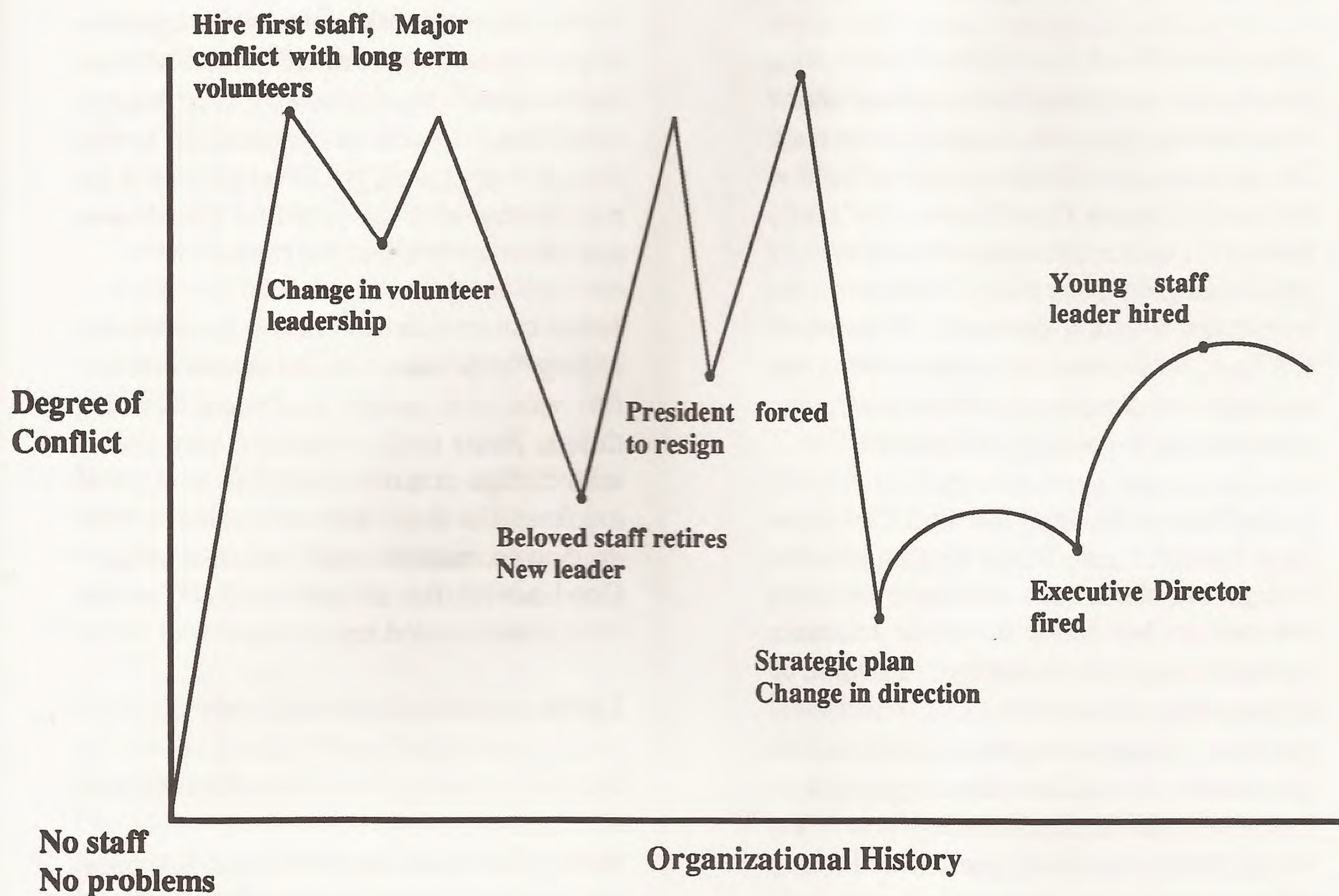
Identify barriers that block the progress of the other and develop strategies to eliminate these barriers.

Acknowledge and value the unique contributions each of the partners makes toward achievement of their shared goals.

Who initiates the Productive Partnership? Ideally it could be either partner but in reality it is most often the staff person. When a thorough discussion of beliefs, goals and styles is an integral part of all beginning work relationships, the problems discussed here are less likely to occur. Tensions are anticipated and dealt with before they get out of hand.

Having said that, there are some situations that are a fertile breeding ground for volunteer-staff conflict. Knowing that problems may surface during these periods should be a source of small comfort to those afflicted. The conflict is not directed so much at the person as the POSITION or place they find themselves. When an organization hires its first staff person, for example, there is almost always conflict, often most acutely displayed by the very volunteers who hired the staff member. Everyone is taken aback when this happens. Rest assured it is normal, even expected.

Common Trouble Spots - When Volunteer-Staff Conflicts Occur



1. When an organization hires its first staff person.

blurring of roles
lack of trust - need to build it
difficult to let go of day-to-day operation, difficult to share power, control
the folks most threatened are the long term volunteers (the founders)

if change is imposed there is even less trust
must establish confidence, respect, reliability

2. When there is a change in leadership

period of readjustment - if the person is widely respected and much loved, the transition may be more difficult
need to change style
mourning or grief period for the lost one

3. During a period of rapid change, or uncertainty

when the rules are changing
when the expectations are not clear
when job security is threatened
when people are feeling personally unheard
often more attention is focused on organizational issues, not personnel problems or concerns
tensions are high, trust is low, relationship problems are many

The Brand New Staff Person Terminal Niceness, Case 2

Mrs. Freda Founder, a volunteer with a long list of achievements on behalf of the Podunk Pond Family Services, is deeply troubled. Try as she might, she just can't get used to the new Volunteer Coordinator. She's only been at the agency three months and already she's changing everything. Well, now she wants to evaluate volunteers! What next? "Why, I've been here six years working day and night on behalf of Podunk Pond. No young missy is going to evaluate me."

Jenny Eager is the new Volunteer Coordinator at Podunk Pond. This is her first job after college but she's been reading everything she can get her hands on about volunteer management. There is so much that could be done to make this a better place to work and volunteer. It's hard to know where to start. Obviously, the old Coordinator just had no initiative. She really let things go. It's a shame Freda Founder is such an old fossil. "What can you do when volunteers seem to resist every new idea, putting up roadblocks to creative solutions?"

What's happening here? Another case of Terminal Niceness. Neither Freda nor Jenny will confront the situation. Freda will passively resist change - "Oh, I forgot. You want us to sign it now?" or mutter idly to her colleagues about the young "missy". Jenny will devise elaborate strategies to work around Freda. Both will endure (but just) a very difficult year together that won't be much fun. Little progress toward achievement of organizational goals will be made as they invest so much energy in blocking one another.

What's to be done?

Jenny ought not take this conflict personally, as it is as much related to the "new kid on the block" syndrome as it is to Jenny's behaviour. Freda is responding to the change in approach, grief over the loss of her relationship with the previous Coordinator and uncertainty about the future.

Jenny can reduce the tension by acknowledging Freda's sense of loss and her discomfort with new people and ways of doing things. Jenny needs to proceed very slowly with change as a new staff person. One of my favourite Sue Vineyard quotes is "For the first six months, smile and wear beige." Good advice for all new staff. Use that honeymoon period to:

Listen to people's points of view

Respond to widely held concerns and needs

Build positive relationships with key opinion leaders both volunteer and staff

Gather data on existing programs within your agency and on comparable programs in the community

Establish an Advisory Committee "because I can benefit from your knowledge and experience"

Explore a variety of options for possible changes - Ask people - "If we did this what do you think would be the result?" - "If you were the Coordinator of Volunteers what would you do first?"

To build credibility with Freda, Jenny must:

- demonstrate quiet competence
- deliver what she has promised
- be positive and supportive of past staff
- make small changes that are widely accepted as necessary
- program herself for success by choosing projects that will work
- involve others in planning and decision making
- seek out the wisdom and experience of key leaders.

Jenny may choose to pull back on the evaluation of volunteers until she is well accepted and respected by the volunteers already in place. Evaluation is a sensitive area in which to initiate change.

Freda may be encouraged to share her point of view by Jenny. When Jenny accepts it as an opportunity to learn more about Podunk Pond than as a threat to her leadership, both partners feel affirmed and valued. Terminal Niceness gives way to a truly Productive Partnership.

The Personality Conflict Terminal Niceness Case 3

Rob Studios was the new chairman of the Board of Downers Dumps Zoological Society. He was eager for the challenge of leadership after 5 years on the Board. He wanted to be where the action was. He had watched with admiration and longing, the warm relationship between the Zoo Executive Director and the Past President. They worked so well together and were able to accomplish so much. That Past President was always ready with a funny remark, always able to say and do the right thing. They were big shoes he had to fill and if one were honest, Rob just wasn't sure he had

“the right stuff”. The Executive Director was pleasant enough with him but it just wasn't the same. No spark, nothing!

Mike Motion, the Executive Director of Downers Dumps Zoological Society, couldn't work up much enthusiasm for the new Chairman. It was obvious from the beginning he wanted to be in charge. He was brash, pushy almost, always volunteering his opinion. True enough he worked hard but it just wasn't the same. Mike and the Past President had forged a real friendship. They thought alike, they worked as a team. Even when they disagreed, they could talk about it. Make a suggestion to Rob and he bristles. “Three years more with this guy! What a switch!”

In this situation, Rob is the newcomer and the Executive Director is mourning the loss of his friend, the Past President. Mike and Rob have not yet developed a relationship but it would appear that their personalities may make a strong personal friendship difficult.

Despite their differences, they must still work together for the health of the organization. In a climate of Terminal Niceness, each would tolerate the other until the term finished. They would never discuss their different styles because they mistakenly believe all conflict is bad. In fact in this situation, differing styles may encourage creativity, a variety of approaches to problems and new insights for both.

What's to be done?

1. Rob and Mike need to **identify their shared goals, beliefs and mission**. They need to clarify what binds them together so that when there are differences in methods of approach, they can re-visit their shared vision.

2. Both need to **acknowledge their different styles** and identify how the differences can be of benefit to each other in planning and decision making. They need to be candid about barriers to working together, shared in a helpful way that can be heard.

Rob to Mike :"You'll need to give me a signal if I'm coming on too strong at the board. I've been called Atilla the Hun."

Mike to Rob :"I need time to think about ideas. When I feel pressured to agree too soon, I'm uncomfortable."

3. Both need to **make explicit the strengths, skills, attitudes and knowledge** they offer to the partnership and the areas where they feel they would welcome support, advice and nurture.

4. With this pair in particular, they need to **negotiate how they will handle conflicts**.

- How can I be sure you've heard my point of view?
- What indicates you've had enough?
- Is it alright to call "time out"?
- What is fair fighting?
- What are my personal hot spots?

This is a relationship with promise and potential. It is worth working at to establish trust, respect and mutual understanding.

A Period of Great Uncertainty Terminal Niceness, Case 4

"I can't get a straight answer from anyone"

Alice Unease is the Patient Coordinator of the Muscular Dystrophy Association. Every day she fields calls from anxious parents. The guidelines for Patient Service are under review and until final decisions are made, no new clients are being accepted for service. No one knows for sure what services are to be cut, which ones will be expanded. Alice isn't even on the committee that makes these critical decisions. Never has Alice felt as frustrated and helpless as she does now. Everyone is calling her, desperate for news and fearful that their child's service project will not be favourably considered. The Review Committee Chairwoman babbles on about confidentiality of the process. Doesn't she realise the strain Alice is under?

Maybelle Mute, Patient Service Review Chairperson, is delighted with the progress her committee is making. It has been fifteen years since a solid review of service was undertaken and at last, she has it under way. But there is work to be done. Some services are now unnecessary. Some are duplications. Major gaps have been already identified. It has been three months of slugging but the committee is making progress. In just another three months, four months tops, it will report the recommendations to the Board. Then the Board will have some hard choices to make. Not all the volunteers (or staff) will support the recommended changes. No need to upset people yet. Maybelle takes her job seriously. Alice will just have to wait even if it means she is hostile and difficult to deal with. "It is horrid of Alice to be so unsupportive. I thought she really cared about Patient Service."

Volunteer-staff relations are often strained during periods of uncertainty and rapid change. The rules appear to be changing but no one knows for sure what the rules are. The conflict is aggravated if

- you suspect someone knows the new rules but refuses to share them.
- you are responsible for enforcing the rules.

The situation reminds me of trying to take a subway ride in a foreign country. You don't know how to buy a ticket, how much to pay, where the money goes, what you have to do to access the train, when your station is coming up, or how to get off. When you ask, no one understands your questions, or you, their answers. You ride the train (if you get that far) in a mix of anticipation and dread.

Trying to work in an agency that is undergoing rapid change is something like that. Many of us find ourselves in this situation as funding sources decline and demands for more sophisticated service increase.

Alice is on the firing line without any sense that her concerns will be attended to. Many times a day she is reminded of her powerlessness. It is because she does care that she is feeling especially vulnerable. She is hurt that she was not automatically included on the decision making team.

Maybelle is simply oblivious to Alice's point of view. This Review Committee is a real personal triumph for Maybelle. Because she is removed from the firing line, she doesn't share Alice's urgency to have the Guidelines published and in place. Maybelle is further alienated by Alice's "hostile" and "difficult" behaviour. She doesn't connect the work of the committee to the behaviour demonstrated. In a climate of

Terminal Niceness, neither Alice nor Maybelle will ever face up to the real issues that distance them. They will continue to be difficult and indifferent.

What is to be done?

In the best of all possible worlds, Maybelle would wake up and demand that Alice as the staff person for the Service sit on the Review Committee. But failing that:

1. Alice and Maybelle **need to talk**. Alice will want to acknowledge the work of Maybelle's committee and her own appreciation of the value and complexity of the task. Although it may be hard for Maybelle to hear, Alice has a right to share her feelings of powerlessness and frustration, being careful not to blame Maybelle or her committee but to take ownership for the feelings and for Alice's own need to have more information.
2. Alice will want to **describe her willingness** to have input to the committee, identifying the potential benefits to them of hearing the staff viewpoint on the issues.
3. Alice should be **clear** about what she needs or wants to have happen in order to feel less frustrated. She might ask that she have access to the proposed timetable so that she can share it with the parents who call in or she might ask Maybelle to ask the committee what information she might have permission to share with parents over the phone.

Now let's say Alice sits up late one night and constructs a responsible, clear and passionate plea for more information and Maybelle says no way!! What next?

Take a few deep breaths. Slow down the process of discussion so you can clear your own head and really listen.

Ask for clarification. Try to really understand what Maybelle is saying - to see the issue from her perspective. "Help me understand what you're saying, please..."

Repeat or paraphrase what you think you heard. You are really trying to understand the concern of the other person.

If possible, create solutions for elements of the concern

- "Would you feel more comfortable if this happened..."
- "What might you feel able to share with me?"

Remind Maybelle of your shared commitment to the best interests of the muscular dystrophy patient

Keep the lines of communication open. "Can we talk about this again?" Identify it as an issue of ongoing importance to you.

Be prepared for Maybelle to go home and think about your questions and concerns. Conflict identified in one session may not be resolved immediately but may need time out for reflection, weighing of the options, and then, possible resolution.

Guiding Principles When Problems Surface

Accept that the situation will not improve until both staff and volunteer take charge of it. Both must want improvement.

Identify what links you together, your mutually held beliefs, goals, values. Work together to achieve these mutually agreed upon ends.

Acknowledge the value of the contribution of each of the partners. Celebrate your differing gifts.

Listen to the other's point of view.

Keep lines of communication open.

Work to eliminate barriers to the achievement of goals that are important to the other, even if they seem unimportant to you.

Be patient. Resolution of conflict may take time.

Bibliography

1. Elaine Yarbrough, *Constructive Conflict*, VMSystems Heritage Arts, Downers Grove, 1988.
2. Marlene Wilson, *Survival Skills for Managers*, Volunteer Management Associates, Boulder, 1981.
3. Marlene Wilson, *The Effective Management of Volunteer Programs*, Volunteer Management Associates, Boulder, 1976.
4. N. Gaston, 'Everyone Can Win, Creative Resolution of Conflict', *Journal of Volunteer Administration*, Summer, 1989.
5. W. Conrad and W. Glenn, *The Effective Voluntary Board of Directors*, Swallow Press, Athens Ohio, 1976.
6. Marilyn MacKenzie, *Dealing with Difficult Volunteers*, VMSystems, Downers Grove, 1988.
7. C. Mausner, "The Underlying Dynamics of Staff/Volunteer Relations", *Journal of Volunteer Administration*, Summer 1988
8. Susan Ellis, *From the Top Down: The Executive Role in Volunteer Program Success*, Philadelphia, PA, Energize Associates, 1986.
9. Ivan Scheier, *Winning with Staff: A New Look at Support for Volunteers*, Boulder, Colorado, 1978.
10. Nancy MacDuff, *Building Effective Volunteer Committees*, MacDuff and Bunt Associates, Walla Walla, Washington, 1986.
11. Steve McCurley and Sue Vineyard, *101 Ideas for Volunteer Programs*, Heritage Arts, Downers Grove, Illinois, 1986.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marilyn MacKenzie, M.Ed.(Adult), B.ScN., is a founding partner of Partners Plus - Innovative Ideas for the Voluntary Sector. She has many years experience working in the non-profit sector, and is widely acknowledged as a trainer, facilitator, consultant and author. Marilyn coordinates a certificate program in the Fundamentals of Volunteer Management at Humber College in Toronto, Canada, and is as well a National Trainer for the United Way of Canada. Marilyn's volunteer experiences are extensive, and range from direct services at the grassroots level to administrative leadership on numerous boards of directors. She currently sits on the board of the Canadian Cancer Society, Ontario Division, as Chair of Public Education. Marilyn is the author of the highly acclaimed book, *Dealing With Difficult Volunteers*. She has also recently co-authored a new book, *Building Credibility With The Powers That Be*.

PARTNERS PLUS

Partners Plus is a management consulting firm specializing in training and consulting services to the voluntary and public sectors. The partnership's mission is to act as a catalyst in the growth and enhancement of volunteerism in Canada. The firm provides resources and consulting support to national, provincial and local organizations, and is the major distributor of voluntary sector publications in Canada. Their newsletter, *Partners in Print*, has subscribers from coast to coast.

Partners Plus
9030 Leslie Street, Suite 220
Richmond Hill, Ontario
Canada, L4B 1G2
(416) 886-8585