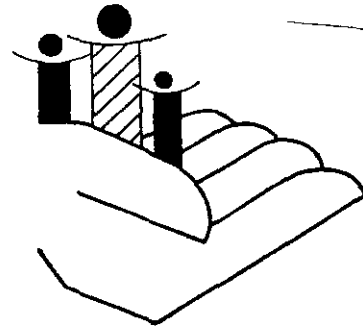




ACTIVE VOLUNTEER



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The Role of the Volunteer Administrator

By Valerie Dalto

Five years ago, as Director of Volunteer Services at The Medical Center at Princeton, I was interviewed by a local newspaper reporter who was doing a series on area volunteer programs. I remember spending nearly an hour with her, carefully explaining

the organization and scope of Princeton's program, my role as a volunteer administrator and the responsibilities of my staff. By the end of our conversation, I felt that I had been successful in providing a positive sense of our program and its value to both volunteers and the Medical Center.

Imagine my chagrin when the reporter's parting comment was "gee the Medical Center must really think a lot of volunteers to actually pay someone to manage them!"

I would guess that many volunteer administrators have similar stories to tell. Volunteer Management is still a young profession and even five years later, I find it is often misunderstood or dismissed as unimportant by those unfamiliar with the field, or more distressingly, by management, staff, and even volunteers within our own organizations. In 1987, when both the need and the competition for volunteers have never been greater, I believe it is critical that volunteer administrators better define their roles and be able to clearly articulate them to their internal and external "audiences."

For me, there are four very broad roles for today's effective volunteer administrator, each with a unique set of challenges and responsibilities. I believe they define our profession, regardless of the specific setting in which we work.

The Volunteer Administrator As Advocate and Educator

As volunteer managers, our primary focus is to facilitate responsible volunteer involvement. We represent multiple publics — our organizations, volunteers, paid staff, clients/patients and the community — and have a unique opportunity to impact on each of them. Unfortunately, we don't always accept the strength our positions give us or learn how to use it effectively.

As advocates and educators, I believe we must:

- * Recognize that volunteers can make a significant contribution and be deeply committed to helping them do it well.
- * Be responsive to individual human needs, extending the opportunity to volunteer to all segments of our communities.

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- * Develop programs that truly represent our communities and include a variety of roles, offering "something for everyone."
- * Understand "who our volunteers are," their individual motivations, interests and needs and help them to blend their goals with those of our organizations.
- * Accept our responsibility to establish and enforce specific standards for our volunteers.
- * Continually strive to create a "pro-volunteerism" environment throughout our organizations, promoting and supporting both volunteers and paid staff as equal members of "the team."
- * Provide our volunteers with the information and tools necessary to become effective advocates for our organizations in the community.
- * Serve as role models, demonstrating a personal commitment to volunteerism through volunteer service in our communities.

The Volunteer Administrator as Planner

For most volunteer managers, planning has traditionally meant the management-by-objective process.

The Role of the Volunteer Administrator

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Today however, if our programs are to survive in an increasingly competitive environment, we must move beyond setting annual goals, objectives and program plans. Our focus must shift to serious strategic planning, determining where we want our organizations to be in the future and how we will get there.

As planners, I believe we must:

- * Combine the resources available to us (staff, finances, facilities and so forth) in creative new ways to best accomplish our mission.
- * Develop a viable process for involving our organization's leadership, staff and volunteers in the strategic planning process as well as in defining specific volunteer roles.
- * Cultivate a working knowledge of our organizations and communities, as well as the societal and technological factors affecting volunteerism, and integrate this information into the planning process.
- * Be proactive in terms of developing new volunteer assignments and services, assuming a leadership role in helping management and staff identify and evaluate possibilities.
- * Have the vision and courage to eliminate or adapt programs or services that are obsolete, inefficient or unsound use of financial and human resources.
- * Think through our programs logically and carefully before placing volunteers, thus minimizing the potential for "crisis management," spending our days "fixing" what went wrong.
- * Become increasingly accountable for results, not merely tasks or volume of activity.
- * Establish objective methods of measuring results.
- * Strike a balance between idealism and realism, setting challenging yet attainable goals.

The Volunteer Administrator as Manager of Human Resources

As volunteer managers, our day-to-day functions closely parallel those of personnel administrators. Recruitment, interviewing, orientation and training, placement, supervision, evaluation, record keeping and recognition have long been recognized as the "basic principles" of our profession. However, while the functions themselves remain

constant, how we approach them is rapidly changing.

As managers of human resources, I believe we must:

- * Replace traditional recruitment methods with marketing strategies that promote specific programs to well defined target groups.
- * Invest greater amounts of time and effort on the volunteer interview, recognizing this process as the key to successful placements.
- * Consider opportunities for personal growth and development when arranging volunteer placements, looking beyond the "surface" matching of interests and availability.
- * Effectively decentralize our programs, giving greater responsibility and accountability to volunteers and paid staff.
- * Increase our emphasis on volunteer leadership development, creating equitable channels for volunteers to advance within our organizations and providing opportunities for training and skills-building.
- * Make a strong commitment to promoting positive volunteer-staff relations, providing increased assistance to staff in planning and implementing effective training programs and designing appropriate patterns of supervision, motivation and recognition.
- * Develop objective evaluation criteria for volunteer performance as part of our quality assurance programs.
- * Explore non-traditional, performance-based criteria for volunteer recognition and supplement established formal events and techniques with new strategies.
- * Become proficient in "identifying" and "treating" volunteer burnout to ensure the "life" of our programs.

The Volunteer Administrator as Colleague

In the vast majority of human service organizations, the position of volunteer administrator is a singular one. Volunteer managers often report feelings of isolation due to lack of understanding, support and identification with those in other disciplines. As "young" professionals, we need to purposefully work on building relationships within our organizations and communities and through professional affiliations.

As colleagues, I believe we must:

- * Establish informal networks for

sharing knowledge, expertise, concerns and support.

- * Assume active roles in our professional organizations, particularly in working toward establishing universal standards for our field.
- * Serve as mentors, providing internship experiences for those seeking to enter our profession.
- * Actively pursue continuing education opportunities and endeavor to initiate new or expanded possibilities.
- * Cultivate "exchange relationships" with other professionals within our organizations, such as planners, marketing/public relations managers and human resources directors.
- * Continually work to increase our internal and external visibility through participation on committees, task forces and so forth.
- * Position ourselves as both internal and community-wide specialists in volunteer management and on volunteerism-related issues.

The role of the volunteer administrator in the 80's is unquestionably a demanding one. Yet I believe, it is an even more dynamic and rewarding one. Think for a moment. What other position offers . . . limitless opportunities for creativity . . . tremendous potential for self satisfaction, growth and development . . . and most importantly, the ability to reach and affect the lives of so many. With a combination of vision, commitment and courage, the volunteer administrator can make anything happen!

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Ms. Dalto is recognized throughout the state as a trainer and facilitator of workshops and conferences on volunteer management.

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