

A RECONSIDERATION OF VOLUNTEERISM
SOME EXERCISES FOR THE CREATIVE GADFLY

By

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These mini think tanks offer encouragement and process in support of creative thinking about volunteerism. They cannot think for anyone or even make anyone want to think. We hope you want to, though, for several reasons.

First of all, the creative thinking process itself is renewing, especially for the burnout-prone leadership we're often in danger of losing. Include here the experienced, curiosity-prone volunteer coordinator mired overlong in maintenance of program or organization. For these, the pursuit of the possible can be pretty exhilarating.

We also need the products of creative thinking, because the basic assumptions and perspectives underlying modern volunteerism are overdue for creative reconsideration. We seem to be suffering from advanced hardening of the categories, complicated by addiction to skill-acquisition for its own sake, and idolatry of new equipment (computers, FAX, etc.). On the other hand, there is much that is right about modern volunteerism, much that the deeper thought we advocate can re-establish on an even firmer basis, because now we understand the "why" of it. In all, this iconoclasm-for-its-own-sake is no more desirable than knee-jerk orthodoxy.

Finally, creative thinking can have practical problem-solving benefits, especially when more conventional problem-solving reaches a dead-end. Consider the Executive Director whose board is passive except in resisting the training she believes they most urgently need. On creative consideration of the type practiced here, the conclusion emerged that no amount of training could rehabilitate this board for the purposes of this organization. They were, instead, the wrong people for this board; therefore the issue was board selection or rotation rather than board training. The latter was something the Executive Director might be able to do something about eventually and, in that sense, thinking about the situation gave her a problem she could solve in place of one she probably couldn't.

The exercises presented here are designed as both warm-ups and keep-it-ups for board or staff retreats, long-range planning, team building, thinking-oriented workshops, meetings (especially those dealing with problems that have long resisted conventional approaches), futuring sessions, and think tanks. Add to this list, any occasion on which we want to get beneath the surface of an issue, seek fresh perspectives, re-examine basic assumptions and values.

Rarely will you want to use all the exercises at any one session. Review them all, then try out the most promising on a pilot basis before deciding which to use--one or two may be all you need at any one session. At present, separately packaged exercises have the following titles: "Tower of Babel"; "Upside Down and Inside Out"; "Question, Question, Who's Got the Question?"; "The Evolution of a Question"; "The Power of Assumptions"; "What If..."; "Anchors Away"; "The Freedom to Dream"; and "Getting Out of the Groove: Avoiding Creativity Traps in Pursuit of the Possible." (The last is also a summary of other exercises.) In many cases,

the exercises are mainly different ways of dealing with the same basic material. Indeed, certain virtually identical examples are carried through several different exercises, to illustrate differences in handling the same or similar material.

Other modules in the "creative reconsideration" series, now in preparation, include one on futuring in volunteerism, and another on frontier projects to develop new dimensions in volunteerism. You're invited to check with us on the progress of these modules.

These guideline materials are for the session navigator/facilitator, who will probably want to modify the material for handout use. In particular, you may not want to include in handouts the suggested responses to exercise questions. I say "responses" rather than "answers" because, strictly speaking, there are usually no absolutely correct or incorrect answers to the exercises; there is only the opportunity for participants to identify more clearly where they stand, or might stand, on important issues.

The exercises are an outgrowth of this Center's CHALLENGE series of think tanks on volunteerism. Some three hundred people have participated in these events over the past three years. All were mentors in the continuous experiential refinement of these exercises, though there's room to mention only a few here: Janice Allan, Eileen Brown, Nancy Cole, Rob Cole, Mary Louise Cox, Sandie Guthans, Carol Hutchings, Connie Hyatt, Jane Janey, Mary Mokler, Steve Mullen, Bill Turner, and Maxine Williamson.

* we have always had the freedom to dream; let us begin to use it more. No one has more reason to do so for, historically, volunteers have always been the main way a free people made dreams come true.

Ivan Scheier

TOWER OF BABEL

Volunteerism is still in the process of defining itself. So, sometimes when we use the same word we assume we're talking about the same thing, but we really aren't. Appeals to evidence or principle settle nothing when in fact the same word screens important differences in meaning. Example: if by "volunteer" you mean someone who receives no money at all, and I mean someone who can receive expense reimbursement and even a stipend, it's hard for us to have a productive discussion about incentives for volunteers. My suggestion that they be offered expenses reimbursement strikes you as a contradiction in terms because then they will no longer be volunteers. And your suggestions for how to attract low-income volunteers strike me as fundamentally unrealistic because they can't include offering such reimbursement.

Another example: suppose you and I agree that we need to apply the principles of management more rigorously to our volunteer program. Sounds good. But what if, deep down, "management" means to me controlling volunteers enough so that they'll be accountable to the agency; but you take the enabling concept of management seriously--management to help people do what they want and can do. This being so, our apparent agreement on the need for more management is really saying two opposite things.

Such chaos in communication is not to be confused with creativity and in fact suffocates it.

EXERCISE 1

Have two or three individuals, or small groups, independently look at the following list of key terms (and any others you'd like to add) and each come up with their own definition. Don't consult the dictionary at this point.

Volunteer	Voluntary Sector
<u>Volunteerism</u>	Recognition
Networking	Empowerment
<u>Coordinator</u> of volunteers	Accountability
<u>Volunteer Administrator</u>	Management
<u>Director</u> of volunteers	Evaluation

In discussing the differences and similarities in your definitions, you may want to refer to the dictionary to "settle" differences. But that isn't the main point of the exercise. The point is to illuminate how differences in definition can affect the basic assumptions we make about a subject, the recommendations we make, etc., and how failure to recognize this destroys communication.

EXERCISE 2A (Intended to accomplish the same as Exercise 1, but more open-ended.)

In pairs or small groups, look at the following paragraph and:

- 1) Identify the terms on which there may be serious differences in definition among discussants. A few examples are asterisked, but there are many more.
- 2) For each of these terms, what are the main variations or differences in definition?
- 3) How do these differences (unconsciously) affect our assumptions about what we are doing or should be doing?

"Volunteerism has always been a vital part of the way we do things here. Volunteers* built this country, and even today, the voluntary sector* remains strong in our society. Indeed, over the past half-century, an entirely new profession* has evolved which specializes in the recruiting, screening, training, and supervision of volunteers. This is the profession of volunteer administration which employs an estimated 100,000 people in North America to facilitate citizen participation."

Some comments on the paragraph in Exercise 2A:

We've already mentioned the word "volunteer's" many meanings. "Voluntary sector," to some, includes a whole lot more than volunteers, e.g., the private sector or at least the private nonprofit sector. Finally, we are probably throwing around the word "profession" as justification for all kinds of different behaviors ranging from ethical to elitist. A recent article gave eight distinct definitions of professional!

EXERCISE 2B

Discuss and analyze in the same way, the following paragraph:

"Expertise in management is a key competency in the field of volunteer administration. The Volunteer Coordinator's skills as an enabler assure that her volunteers will be accountable to the agency. Communication is another skill that any certification process needs to look at carefully for the Director of Volunteer Services."

Some comments on the paragraph in Exercise 2B: Do "expertise," "skill" and "competency" mean precisely the same thing? And how is a "field" related to a "profession"? (previous paragraph) What is "management," and insofar as it enables a person to do what she/he really wants to do and does best, how can we be sure that is also what the agency wants the person to do (accountability)?

EXERCISES 2C, 2D...

The above kind of exercise can be repeated with virtually any paragraph from a text on volunteerism, a handbook, journal, newsletter, workshop handout, and even a paragraph from elsewhere in this publication!

Concluding Discussion

This can reach beyond specifics to a general consideration of what we should do about the kinds of misunderstandings illustrated here. First of all, are they frequent and basic enough to be of concern, or merely occasional oddities? If frequent, what can we do except be wary in discussions? Is there such a thing as being too wary, e.g. spending so much time trying to define things precisely that we never really get to discuss them? And are there some important concepts that are intrinsically undefinable, for example love and friendship? Finally, is it possible that the clash of misunderstanding sometimes actually stimulates creativity?

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UPSIDE DOWN AND INSIDE OUT

Background

Reversing or inverting a sentence won't always make obvious sense. But sometimes it's enough of a jolt to free us from well-grooved preconceptions and thereby encourage significant new exploration of issues or problems.

One form of reversal interchanges the subject and object of a sentence, thus:

"Staff should appreciate volunteers more"

becomes

"Volunteers should appreciate staff more"

and

"Volunteers should be accountable to the organization they work for"

becomes

"The host organization should be accountable to its volunteers"

Finally, "Volunteers save money" becomes "Money saves volunteers." (!)

EXERCISE 1 (about 30-45 minutes)

Ask people to get in pairs or small groups to practice reversal on the statements below and see what kinds of discussion this leads to: Creative or just plain crazy? Useful fresh perspectives or just absurdity?

1. Staff needs better training on how to work with volunteers.
2. Economic conditions in a community greatly impact volunteerism.
3. In 1-to-1 programs, volunteers should be able to choose the clients they work with.
4. Volunteers need a lot of recognition and support from the organization they work for.
5. The aging of the population will affect our volunteer programs.
6. We need to get better at recruiting volunteers.
7. The board is the policy-making body for (the staff of) an organization.
8. You can fire volunteers.
9. Our new FAX machine really improves our program.
10. More media exposure will result in a better volunteer program.

Exercise 1 Possible Responses:

These seem to be straightforward enough in most cases not to need a "key"; thus: "Staff needs better training on how to work with volunteers" becomes "Volunteers need better training on how to work with staff." A few statements, however, are a bit tricky and even problematic, thus:

4. "Organizations need a lot of recognition and support from their volunteers."
5. "Volunteer programs will affect the process of aging."
6. "Volunteers need to do a better job recruiting us (organizations to work for?)."
7. "Organizations make policy (control?) for their boards." (?)
9. "An improved program will (improve the use of) our new FAX machine, make it more useful."

EXERCISE 2 (30-45 minutes)

Working in pairs or small groups, have each participant identify a commonly accepted statement about volunteerism, other than the examples given thus far. Then, work together on the nature and meaning of any inversions. Report out and discuss as in Exercise 1. Here, however, we are likely to encounter more statements that cannot easily be reversed, and that point is itself worthy of discussion.

EXERCISE 3 (30 minutes)

Given that there are many un-reversible statements, we may wish to explore the possibilities in single words.

Thus: "Overly busy people tend to burn out"
 might become
 "Underly busy (idle) people tend to burn out"

which might lead us to wonder whether sheer busyness has anything to do with it.

Another example: "Most volunteer programs need more money"
 could become either
"Most volunteer programs need less money" or
"Most volunteer programs need more imagination"
 or, if we went back to the reversal mode, something like
"Money needs more volunteer programs" (?)

EXERCISE 4

You can end with a general discussion of the impact and value of sentence or word reversal. Just how and why might it be helpful or unhelpful for creative thinking?

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Have fun with these exercises but don't let them have fun with you.

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THE POWER OF ASSUMPTIONS

The dictionary defines "assumption" as "something taken for granted, a supposition." Several other exercises have concentrated on the role of assumptions in problem-solving; here we explore their broader significance in powerfully affecting what we see, how we behave, and the kind of impact we have on the world around us. This is so, whether we are fully conscious of our assumptions or not. Indeed, some people dislike being reminded they even have any assumptions; they'd rather believe they operate on a facts-only basis.

Here are some general points:

1. Assumptions can be made by individuals, organizations, communities, cultures, or professions.
2. The power of assumptions doesn't necessarily depend on their being true. If teacher is sure Johnny is a bad boy, that assumption--right or wrong--will influence Johnny's behavior as well as the teacher's, probably in a negative way.

(Now ask participants for an example or two of assumptions that might not be demonstrably or literally "true" but nevertheless impact importantly on modern volunteerism.)

3. Some assumptions tend to limit the scope of thought and action; others expand it.

- When we took for granted that the world was flat, most sailors didn't venture far from land for fear of falling off, probably a good idea, anyhow, given the kind of ships they had then. Once the round-world assumption overtook the flatworlders, a massive exploratory energy was released, from Columbus onward (though if you think assumptions change easily, there is still a flatworld-believers association in England!)

- Prior to 1960, going to the moon was generally considered a fairly crazy idea. When President Kennedy told us we were going to the moon, that assumption was a huge first step on the road there.

- Once upon a time, it was scarcely questioned that a woman's place was in the home, and only there. The more modern expectation of a far wider range of work choices for women, including the home, has fundamentally changed the lives of women, and the men who relate to them.

(Now ask participants to come up with examples of an assumption or two in modern volunteerism that may limit our scope of thought or action. What would be a more expansive assumption, in each case?)

4. Assumptions help determine how we interact with the world around us; for example, the way in which the teacher works with Johnny once she's made up her mind he is a bad boy. Certainly, too, those who basically consider the environment an adversary to be conquered, deal with it differently than those who see it as a friend to be cherished, or a parent to be protected.

(Now, can you think of an assumption in modern volunteerism that importantly determines how we interact with each other and with the world around us?)

5. Basic values are essentially assumptions, hard to "prove" one way or another. But what a difference they make in the way we live, and what we do. Only consider the difference between the behavior of people who believe:
...money and material things are most important vs. the spirit, the spiritual are more important.
...the "me first" theory of caring vs. the primary value of taking care of others.

(Now try to identify an additional example or two of assumptions which involve values influencing modern volunteerism)

6. Assumptions also change over time. When I was a boy it was slightly shameful to owe money, even if you had no choice. Today, it is practically a patriotic duty to be in debt. Keeps the economy rolling.

(Now, identify an assumption or two which has changed over time in modern volunteerism--suggested time frame: the last twenty or thirty years.)

SOME POSSIBLE RESPONSES TO THE EXERCISE CHALLENGES

We suggest participants try to come up with their own examples before looking at these, and discussing them. Only if people are having trouble coming up with examples, should these be used to "prime the pump."

1. The power of assumptions doesn't necessarily depend on their being demonstrably true.

- Though it's hardly ever put quite this way, there is a "bad boy" something like Johnny in staff-volunteer relations when staff is held primarily responsible for the problem. Staff have to be more appreciative, supportive; they need to be trained exhorted, etc. But WHAT IF volunteers were responsible for a large share of the problem; what would we do differently, under that assumption?

- Another example: a recent study indicated that attendees at workshops remember and use no more than 5% of the material presented--hardly an efficiency ratio you would accept, say, in your car. Knowing this, and well aware also of the ritual and recreational components in conferences, we nevertheless seem to assume that workshop training is "the solution" to (most) every problem. But WHAT IF we really focused on other possible avenues--not as "easy" or quick perhaps--but deeper, more permanent, such as changes in policy, long term education, better selection..?

- Board members are apathetic? Maybe that's false and what's true is that the organization is boring. But the apathy assumption limits us to trying to "motivate" board members.

2. Some assumptions tend to limit the scope of thought and action; others expand it. Here first are some limiting assumptions:

...ASSUMPTION: Agency-organized volunteer programs are the core of organized volunteerism. WHAT IF we assumed, instead, that all-volunteer groups and freelance volunteers, and other volunteering in other non-agency settings were at least as important? What would we do differently?

...ASSUMPTION. We should concentrate on professional leadership of volunteers which is (preferably) full-time and paid, and goes under a set of prescribed job titles such as "Volunteer Administrator" or "Director of Volunteer Services." WHAT IF we began to focus also on the millions of people who in fact lead volunteers on a much more part-time unpaid basis?

...ASSUMPTION. Volunteerism is best defended and advanced as a separate field defined by its target group: volunteers. But WHAT IF we assumed instead that volunteerism would gain more respect and status as part of a larger package of "community-based support systems" or "community resource development" which includes, along with volunteer service, volunteered materials, things, information, ideas, money, and advocacy support from the community?

...ASSUMPTION: Volunteers are a special breed of people with a distinct (unique?) motivation, personality, values. They are (sort of) the elite of unpaid helping. But WHAT IF we assumed instead that everyone is a volunteer in some basic sense, though not everyone does it in our preferred way? How would that impact our approach to, say, recruiting?

...Among the more positive, expansive assumptions in modern volunteerism is that every individual can make a difference, because everybody has something to give. Conveying that belief to people probably helps them be all they can be as volunteers.

3. Assumptions help determine how we interact with each other and with the world around us.
 - One such assumption is that volunteer administration is a profession and we are professionals. We're not always sure exactly what that means--I've seen eight distinct definitions of "professional"--but for some, at least, it means a certain degree of dignity and reserve. At an evening social during a major volunteer administration conference, the band was good and the vast majority of us got up and did an impromptu snake dance. Many of us thought it was wonderful fun, but an officer of the association was deeply concerned that we were being "unprofessional."
 - Another basic interactive assumption is that volunteers are nice, and so are their leaders. This tends to make us not as ready as we might be to confront ugly situations directly, or to advocate on key issues, where some people might end up not liking us (e.g. not thinking we are "nice"). Far better to lick our wounds than try to lick the system.
4. Our basic values are essentially assumptions about what is right and wrong. Among these assumptions are:
 - Individuals can make a difference, and a free society depends on their trying to do so.
 - Work has value in and of itself, regardless of how much people are paid for it (related to pride in work).
 - The Judeo-Christian and other fundamental ethics are not fully realized just by talking about them; you have to do something about them.

(Discussion here might also include the two value assumptions given in the earlier example. On all five of these, then, we might ask ourselves if modern volunteerism is clear and consistent about its underlying values.)

5. Assumptions can change over time (focusing on a 20-30 year time frame).

Once again, these are purely subjective impressions, though based on over 25 years in the volunteer leadership field.

- One long-term trend seems to be from optimistic assumptions/expectations about what volunteers can do, to more realistic (or pessimistic, take your choice) ones. Twenty five years ago, for example, Keith Leenhouts was hailing the volunteer as an "inspirational personality," and--preserved in a movie still being shown (!)--I was proclaiming things like "if you've got a problem, any problem, somewhere there's a volunteer who can solve it for you." Some folks still feel this way today, but you're also likely to see more pessimistic/realistic assumptions about volunteers incorporated in topics such as: staff resistance to volunteers, how to deal with difficult volunteers, how to fire a volunteer, and how to keep from getting wounded on the firing line.

- I also sense a progressive in-turning of focus in our assumptions about who are the most important actors in the helping drama. In the 1960's I remember Hat Naylor and others talking a whole lot more than we do about clients/patients or other people impacted by what volunteers do. Everything about volunteers was to be judged by results for the people we were trying to help. Later, in the 1970's, the circle contracted and we began to talk more about volunteers and how we could care better for them with less emphasis on care for clients (maybe that was just assumed). In the 1980's I felt the circle further contract as we became more and more concerned about caring for ourselves as leaders of volunteers. If I'm right about that trend, I wonder how much further we can go in transition of attention from treatment target persons to treatment agents themselves.

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THE EVOLUTION OF A QUESTION

Background

In "Question, Question, Who's Got the Question?", the task was to identify hidden assumptions in a question and remove them by rephrasing the question. "How can we start a new volunteer center in our community?", which assumes that such a center is desirable, is re-cast to: "How can we decide whether or not our community needs a new volunteer center?"

The present exercise pushes the process a step further. Instead of just removing hidden assumptions, we actively explore issues raised by these assumptions, and this can result in the articulation of alternative assumptions.

Examples

Suppose the starting question was "How can we design staff training for the use of volunteers?" Straightforward problem-solving would tend to accept the question pretty much as given, brainstorm possible solutions, and shape an action plan from the higher-priority ones. By contrast, the creative gadfly would not only identify the assumptions in the question, but identify and analyze alternative assumptions. For example:

- Will improved staff training on the use of volunteers help at all if staff isn't first motivated to work with volunteers?

or

- Why do we always assume that improving staff-volunteer relations means that staff has to change? How about more emphasis on changing the behavior of volunteers or the volunteer coordinator?

or

- After decades of frustration, why are we still trying to get volunteers genuinely welcomed as partners with staff in the human service delivery system? The same energy might be better invested in identifying and developing other avenues for volunteer contribution to their communities.

Another example might be the starting question: "How can we interest more people in our certification program?" Problem-solvers would likely proceed quite directly to suggestions for marketing the certification program more effectively. The responsible iconoclast, however, would be more inclined to want to validate the certification program as valuable, before any knee-jerk efforts at implementing it. Generally, the change is from "how can we get" to "why do we want" as follows:

"Why do we want...more people to sign up for our certification program?"

The "why" in turn may break down into questions such as:

Who benefits most from this program (demonstrably)?

Who, if anyone, will lose as others benefit from this program?

These "who" questions might finally evolve into WHAT IF's as follows:

- What if there were no such certification program? What would it be like?

- What would it be like if the certification program had 100% participation of eligibles?
- What would it be like during a transitional stage in which many people in the field were certified and many others were not?
- What changes in the certification program might make it more marketable/useful? To whom?
- What if we concentrated more on certifying volunteer programs/organizations than individual volunteer administrators?

I deliberately picked the certification example because it is just the kind of crucial issue we avoid discussing on a "why" or "what if" basis. Such discussion is widely considered discourteous to people who have so much invested in the program even though, ironically, it may only result in placing their belief on a firmer footing! In any event, this example illustrates why serious thinking is not usually the way to win popularity contests.

Now, here's a third and final example of the evolution of a question:

"How can we give more help to those (poor, weak, disadvantaged, helpless) people?" becomes, via the making of "opposite" assumptions:

- How can they help us more? or
- How can they help themselves more?

What we have here, especially in the first version above, is the kind of subject-predicate reversal discussed elsewhere in "Upside Down and Inside Out." This apparently simple "gimmick" can open up vast possibilities of profound importance. Thus, historically, "How can we do more for those poor old folks?" became, through someone's concerned questioning of the question, "How, also, can they do more for us?" or "for themselves?"

And Senior volunteer programs were born!

EXERCISES (Anywhere from 20-60 minutes)

In pairs or small groups, ask participants to pick other popular or significant questions on volunteerism, and subject them to the same sort of analysis. If the group has difficulty thinking of such questions, they might start with some of the questions in the previous exercise, "Question, Question, Who's Got the Question?"

Small groups then share their results for discussion with the group-at-large.

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GETTING OUT OF THE GROOVE
Avoiding Creativity Traps in the Pursuit of the Possible

No formula guarantees the occurrence of creative thinking. Conditions which cancel creativity are easier to identify, and one of these is getting too comfortable with grooved patterns in our thinking. Here then is a list of ruts not to relax in, with asterisks to indicate areas an entire exercise is devoted to elsewhere in this collection.

*Liberate yourself from the restrictions of the present by visualizing ideal futures. Give yourself the freedom to dream. (See exercise of that name.)

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As a counterpoint to visualizing how you see the (ideal) future, visualize how that future might see you, or at least how you would like a future historian to see you. An intriguing way of doing this is to prepare a description of your program and also volunteerism generally, if you like, for a time capsule to be opened in, say, 50 or 60 years, or longer or shorter. To make this "real," you might want to study material (probably attached) on the actual volunteerism time capsule now being launched toward the year 2050! Either way, the exercise gets you out of yourself, seeing yourself as others might see you.

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*Don't automatically accept questions as currently phrased. Getting a better question can be a lot more productive than just getting "better" answers to the old questions. (see the two QUESTION exercises.)

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*Go beyond the face value of statements and try to identify underlying assumptions. Once you've done that, try to conceive of alternative assumptions that might be made. (ANCHORS AWAY and POWER OF ASSUMPTIONS exercises.)

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*Take obvious statements and turn them upside down (or inside out). Given "Staff should be trained to work with volunteers," think about "opposites" such as "Volunteers should get better training on how to work with staff." Another example: Much of our thinking about volunteerism seems to be in a passive rut, e.g., how an aging population will impact volunteerism, rather than how volunteering might impact the aging process; how a recession will affect volunteerism, rather than how volunteerism might improve economic conditions enough to prevent or mitigate recession. (See UPSIDE DOWN AND INSIDE OUT.)

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*Watch out for different definitions of the same key term, especially used unconsciously for well-worn words. These variations not only hide different basic assumptions about the nature of volunteerism, they are obviously a bar even to effective communication about these differences. (See TOWER OF BABEL exercise).

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*Be pervasively paranoid about "obvious" truths, especially those that are unconsciously taken for granted, by most people. Example: "Organizing things ensures that the volunteer's time won't be wasted." Un-taking that obvious statement for granted might help us see that too much structure could turn off certain kinds of volunteers. Or we might be led to wonder about how, at some point, structure takes more of a volunteer's time than it frees up, e.g. filling out overly long forms. (See WHAT IF... and ANCHORS AWAY.)

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*Beware "Linear Extrapolation." 1) If a little is good, a lot will be even better. If six hours of pre-service volunteer training is good, 60 hours will be super! An absurd example, but subtler ones often lull us, I'm sure. See, for example, the "organizing things" example in the previous paragraph. 2) Current

rates of increase (or decrease) will remain constant. Statements predicting that Hispanics will be the largest minority group in the U.S. in 30 years assume that the current Hispanic birth rate will stay constant, also that Hispanics marrying non-Hispanics will fully maintain their Hispanic identity in the marriage, with their children, etc. Either assumption may or may not be true. 3) Sometimes a current rate doesn't just slow down; it actually reverses as when the mid-1970's oil price increases set in motion forces which subsequently drove oil prices down. Similarly, in volunteerism, the threat of board member liability is stimulating legislation which, we hope, will mitigate that threat.

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Beware the "Happily Ever After" Fantasy. Success doesn't necessarily lead to success; it might only raise a fresh set of problems. Just as the answer to one question might only raise some new questions, the surmounting of one challenge might simply raise another. Example: having achieved exemplary success in line leadership of volunteers, you seek another level of success as a consultant on volunteers, and have a hard time finding enough work of that type. Or a state or province which once needed more volunteer centers, DOVIAs and similar volunteer program resources, now has so many that coordination and avoidance of conflict between them, emerges as a serious, new problem.

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Logicians may like "either-or" but that doesn't mean the world works that way. The world is (has to be) either getting warmer or colder, right? No, in a sense it could be getting both warmer and colder. Similarly, getting 100 new volunteers could have both good and bad consequences. And, to a certain extent you can both go back to school and continue working; it isn't absolutely either-or.

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Finally, many people today seem to feel that taking care of yourself is versus taking care of others: essentially an either-or proposition. If you give too much attention to helping others, you're necessarily neglecting yourself. The more likely case, according to recent research, is that taking care of others is essential to the caregiver's well-being, within a wide normal range. Conversely, you can't take good care of others unless you devote a decent concern to yourself. The two are symbiotic, rather than mutually exclusive.

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EXERCISE: (30-45 minutes)

Ask participants to get as many volunteer-related examples as they can of the grooved thinking described above. Once these "creativity traps" are identified, try to show how much creativity would be released by getting out of that groove, and pursuing the possible.

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QUESTION, QUESTION, WHO'S GOT THE QUESTION?

Preparation

Before proceeding further with this exercise, please write down a main question you came to this session with. We'll come back to this question later. For now, just write it down as it occurs to you without much reflection.

First Examples

There's an old saying that we advance more by finding better questions, than by finding better answers to the old questions. There's no formula for producing better questions, but there are helpful guidelines. Thus, for any question, ask yourself:

- Are there any hidden assumptions in this question? Yes or no?
- If so, what are these hidden assumptions?
- Can you think of a better question or questions? (Either as an addition or a replacement question.)

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Now, in pairs or small groups, apply these guidelines to the following question and see what you come up with.

HOW CAN I DOUBLE THE NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS IN MY PROGRAM IN THE NEXT 19 MONTHS?

Some comments on this question:

Hidden assumptions here include that we do need more volunteers, and that the proposed rate of increase is a reasonable one. Another hidden assumption might be that program design is just fine now; all we need to do is "fill 'er up" with more volunteers.

Therefore, better question(s) might be: "How can we decide if more volunteers are needed, and at what rate of increase?" Also, "What is our best present strategy: getting more volunteers for the present program or first changing the program?"

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Now, here's another example we can work on together:

WHAT KIND OF LARGE CONFERENCE SHOULD THE CENTER FOR CREATIVE COMMUNITY HOST NEXT SPRING IN SANTA FE (OUR HEADQUARTERS)?

Some comments on this question: I actually asked the Center's Board of Directors a question something like this! Among the glaring assumptions are that the Center should be hosting large conferences of any kind. Even if so, why necessarily in Santa Fe? A better question might be: WHAT SORT OF LEARNING EVENTS, IF ANY, SHOULD THE CENTER FOR CREATIVE COMMUNITY BE SPONSORING OR CO-SPONSORING? Once we have decided this, a second question becomes: WHERE WOULD BE THE BEST LOCATION(S) FOR THESE LEARNING EVENTS? (assuming we decide to have any)

EXERCISE A

In pairs or small groups, ask participants to choose any one of the following questions to work on in the same way as the examples above. If they finish one question, they can go on to any other they wish.

Fifteen to twenty minutes is usually about right for this process. One person in each pair or group should be ready to report their results. Any pair or group that wants to do so can begin, but after every report ask if any other group has analyzed that particular question--the comparisons can be extremely interesting. The discussion following the analysis may easily go as long as 30-45 minutes.

1. How can we start a new (volunteer center, senior volunteer clearinghouse, local professional association/DOVIA) in our community?
2. Why can't staff accept volunteers more?
3. How can we improve staff training for work with volunteers?
4. What is the influence of volunteerism on pluralism, participation, and democracy?
5. How can we convince executives to allow volunteer coordinators to spend more (100%) of their time on the volunteer program?
6. How can we become better managers?
7. What is the optimum relation between the profit and nonprofit sectors, now and in the future?
8. How can we get people to work together better in groups to achieve common goals?
9. How can we convince more people to participate in Senior Centers?
10. How can I improve training for my board?
11. How can we persuade more minority people to volunteer for human service agency volunteer programs?
12. How can we get people to write more precise job descriptions for youth volunteers?
13. What kinds of information do I need to make the best possible decision on whether or not to go for professional certification in volunteer administration?
14. Does our program want to renew its subscription this year for _____? (name of professional journal)
15. Any other important question you can think of.

Comments on some of the Exercise Questions:

...Questions #2, 3, 6, 10 and maybe some others are dealt with also in other exercises. Note, however, that in some situations, #10 may be the right question as phrased now, if in fact you have appropriate people on your board, but they need more training. Other questions that might be about as good as you can get them now are 7, 13, and 14 (though improvement--nitpickingly?--is always possible). The main point, however, is that, far from "destroying" every question, the process can actually reaffirm it even more strongly as the right question.

As for other questions--

4. What if there isn't any influence...
5. What if it were more valuable to move up to supervision of a larger package of "community relations" or resource development, with less hands-on time on the volunteer program, and maybe an assistant to help you there. ALSO, maybe having a full-time volunteer specialist simply isolates the volunteer program more.
8. People can contribute to common goals as individuals, too, solo.
9. What about all the people whose needs are not met by Senior Centers as they exist now? What about Senior Centers (rather than Seniors) doing more of the changing?
11. Assuming we could all agree on what we mean by "minority" (hardly likely), this question lumps together all minority people as if their motivations and situations were identical--a rather absurd assumption. Beyond that, the question assumes that a) agency volunteer programs are the most meaningful, productive kinds of involvement for any given minority group--maybe they aren't. b) The question also seems to assume that the minority people will be doing the changing, to become motivated by the agency program as is, rather than the program changing to be more satisfying for minority people.
12. The wording seems to assume that (all) youth seek or need the additional structure of precise job descriptions. Maybe some of them want more freedom to decide the manner and style of helping most congenial to them.

EXERCISE B (About 20-30 minutes)

Ask people to pair up with another participant, or get in small groups of 3 or 4, and apply the question review process of Exercise A to the original question they recorded at the beginning of this session (see section on Preparation). Participants should then be ready to share with the total group what happened to their question, if anything; how their question might have been "improved" or at least changed by the process; and how they felt about all this.

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THE FREEDOM TO DREAM

Frightened vs. Affirmative Goal-Setting

Some people never dare to dream anything unless they're sure beforehand of achieving it. This gets you nice, safe, sanitized goals, guaranteed not to stimulate or stretch.

Standard problem-solving habits reinforce such caution. Ideally we set a desirable goal, then we worry about how to get there. In practice, however, worries about how to get there often "leak" over into goal-setting aspirations, prematurely diminishing their scope and imaginativeness. Some people are very resourceful in applying this "philosophy" to your goals as well as theirs; they can always come up with ten reasons why your idea won't work. They're adept at negative prediction, explaining why anything desirable is also impossible.

By contrast here, our policy will be full affirmation first and, only then, implementation. We seek a process which bypasses implementary barriers in setting goals.

Illustrations

- The year: 1960. Landing people on the moon within a decade was strictly for the comic books. Realists, if they thought about it at all, could give you lots of reasons why it could never happen. Probably, U.S. President John F. Kennedy was pretty well aware of these implementary implausibilities. Yet, he chose to affirm a U.S. national goal that we would have a man on the moon within ten years. That declaration was itself a major factor in making the dream happen; it galvanized energy and expertise as timidity never could.
- Down-to-earth parallels are not hard to find. How many of us never asked that celebrity to participate in our conference or recognition event because we were sure she'd never come. Next thing you know, someone whose event is no more important than yours has the "nerve" to ask her, and she accepts! That person visualized the ideal, then leapfrogged normal problem-solving restraints to "go for it." This is also known as the chutzpah factor.
- Another example: if you can't (or won't) imagine yourself as a higher-level manager/supervisor, chances are you're never going to get there. Imagining yourself there is no guarantee, but it is a first step.

Maybe "wishing won't make it so," but it's a start sometimes. And never daring to dream will only get you safe mediocrity in the short run. In the longer run it virtually guarantees failure against the only standard that really matters--becoming all you can be and doing all you might do.

SIMULATIONS (About an hour each)

EXERCISE A. Ask participants to visualize THE BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS FOR YOU AT WORK, the ideal situation in all respects. Include feelings as well as facts. Put it down as it comes to you, without much analysis. In particular, do not worry about how you got to this ideal situation; just think what it's like to be there. Work alone. Take about 15 minutes. You can write it out fully, outline it, or just keep it in your head--whichever suits you best. And if drawing a picture helps you visualize and express your dream, that's fine too.

Some people will seek more structure, e.g., "How far in the future is this?", "Am I still with my present organization?", "Should I take into account the possibility of moving to another community?" Encourage people to answer such questions for themselves, by letting the vision emerge freely first, then seeing what structure is implied. Thus, to the time frame kind of question, you might say: "Everyone's style is different, of course, but we'd prefer you let your best-of-all-possible-work-worlds take shape first unlimited by strict time limits. Once this is done, it should become fairly clear approximately how far in the future this is likely to be."

This laissez-faire approach is hard for some people to handle. Many of these are the very people who most need some lifting of limits to their imagination. Only ask participants to keep structure to the minimum they can tolerate. As for facilitator-imposed structure from the outside, the starting question itself, with approximate time limit, is usually the main structure. I sometimes also--with concurrence of participants--encourage a mood of reflection and quiet, by asking people to close their eyes and otherwise get "centered" before responding to the question. Someone familiar with meditation is best for leading this process.

Here's a composite example of a typical participant visualization for their best of all possible worlds at work.

"The time I'm allowed to spend on the volunteer program has dramatically increased to 90%, and I have a wonderfully efficient and pleasant executive assistant. Requests for volunteers from staff have doubled, running slightly ahead of my ability to fill them. Even better, staff are coming in with well-thought-out volunteer job requests, realistic, often innovative, and responsible. Staff are clearly taking their obligation to supervise volunteers far more seriously and do it much more skillfully. Among other things, this has resulted in a much lower volunteer dropout rate. The help and support volunteers give staff is also credited with easing the staff burnout problem we've had in previous years.

I'm now at a middle management level and have had several satisfying salary increases with a substantial boost in my benefits package as well (especially medical). I report to a person who encourages and appreciates my creativity and is generous in giving me credit for what I do (she doesn't need to get the credit herself). I am also consistently "in the loop" on executive staff decisions concerning overall goals and mission of the agency. Among other things, I am the expert on how community involvement can contribute to any purpose or goal of the agency, current or contemplated.

Professional development funds are now at a level where I can attend at least one national conference a year, and several in-state (or province). There's also plenty of financial support for recognition items and events for volunteers.

I enjoy non-work activities as much as ever, maybe more, but there are still lots of days when I can hardly wait to get to work in the morning--it's such a fulfilling place to be. Even better, I bring the happiness home with me at night; friends and family say they've never seen me looking or feeling better."

Implementation

What do we do with these dreams, once they're "out"?

--Ask participants to get in pairs or small groups.

--Concentrate on one person's visualization before moving on to the next.

--No one is pressured to share material they consider too private.

--Allow at least 45 minutes for the exercise, and you may need longer.

--Task is to decide which of the three elementary approaches below, or which combination, is best for each ideal visualization. Then, as time permits, follow out the implications in more detail.

The three approaches to "doing something about the dream" are:

TYPE 1 - DO NOTHING. This confronts the common assumption that we always have to do something about an idea, and do it immediately. (Just because you have an idea doesn't mean it's time for it.) Instead we could just leave it alone and let it ripen like early-picked fruit, or mellow like new-made wine. This is very hard for some people to do--I'm one of them--but it is nevertheless a viable option. My dream of building VOLUNTAS (described in an attachment here) allowed this vision of a retreat and renewal center for volunteers and their leaders to ripen several years before we started to do anything about it. There may be some analogy to dreams of making a concert pianist of a promising three-year-old. The potential may be there, but you probably have to wait awhile for readiness to respond to intensive cultivation of latent talents. And the child must also be given time to form her/his own vision of who they'd like to be.

TYPE 2 - WALK BACKWARDS FROM THEN TO NOW. This classic approach to implementation would first of all try to pin the person down as to when exactly their ideal situation was to be reached. Then, we work backwards in time, thusly: if this is to happen by, say 1995, what needs to start happening today? next month? next year?

TYPE 3 - HAVE A "PEP RALLY." Here, the group's role may include gently asking for a bit more description on certain parts of the ideal visualization, to help the person flesh it out. But most of all, the group would shower the dreamer with all kinds of reasons why and how the dream will come true--no critique allowed. We're more into morale than mechanics here.

EXERCISE B. (There is no obligation to do both exercises A and B or to do them in order if you decide to do both.)

Ask participants to visualize THE THING(S) I'D MOST LIKE TO SEE HAPPEN IN MY ORGANIZATION/PROGRAM/CAUSE. This is broader than the previous visualization because it probably involves, crucially, other people and resources besides the participant as an individual. Otherwise, the process is essentially the same, with the three elementary options, etc. Here, however, the third "pep rally" option might also be called "catchfire," in that you hope for more than having people cheer you on from the sidelines, so to speak, in your personal advancement or fulfillment. Here, you need people's active participation in making a shared dream come true. Prospects for implementation depend importantly on the ability

of the idea to excite people. Once that happens, they will help you find ways to make it happen, ways you might never have thought of yourself. They will become co-owners of the dream and therefore co-implementors.

The attached report on the VOLUNTAS project illustrates this, naming some of the people with whom the concept caught fire, and who therefore took important initiatives to help make it happen. Many of these ideas, e.g. "tithing" training fees, "benefit workshops," the time capsule, and taking a desktop display around to conferences, are implementations I never thought of as one of the originators of the idea. I therefore think this Type 3 approach deserves more legitimacy and respect than it has had in the past. VOLUNTAS also illustrates the Type 1 approach, or laissez-faire, as previously noted. I let the idea "steep" for several years without doing anything about it, except talking with friends and colleagues now and then. There's no way I know of to prove that such incubation helped. I only sense strongly that during this fallow period, the idea fleshed out and matured through largely unconscious incubation and elaboration.

As for the "walk backwards" Type 2 approach, many colleagues were concerned that we mainly put the VOLUNTAS idea out there for "catchfire" at first, without having detailed MBO "how to" plans in place. These are steadily evolving, however; see, for example, the grass roots fundraising and grantwriting plans described in the attached brochure. My belief is that the Type 1 and Type 3 approaches ultimately contribute to Type 2 development rather than conflict with it.

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Please note: The Center is producing an entire module on visualizing the future of volunteering. You might want to check on the status of this publication as supplemental material to the present exercise.

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WHAT IF.....

Paranoiac suspicion of "the obvious" is virtually a precondition of creativity, practiced here in an exercise very similar to "The Evolution of a Question." The purpose: identify the key underlying assumption, then "rotate" to an alternative assumption, and consider what different consequences might then occur. The difference is that here we start with statements or assertions, rather than questions, and mix examples from volunteerism with examples from the world-at-large.

Examples for Orientation:

Assumption: For increasing understanding and friendship with another nation or culture, there's nothing better than personal people-to-people visits back and forth, becoming acquainted with one another as individuals.

What if... propinquity does not necessarily lead to friendship? The worst wars of the 19th century were between the French and English who, at that time, knew each other on an individual basis, better than any other two countries in Europe. Could be, they just didn't like each other, and being together made that worse.

Assumption: The population is aging, so we'd better get ready with more older/aging programs, more services for the frail elderly, more nursing homes, etc.

What if... tomorrow's older/elderly do not act like today's? And what if medical science develops in a way to preserve health and vigor at a nearly 100% level until just before death, rather than today's typical slow decline? Some medical futurists believe this possible.

Assumption: It's important for us to show how nice volunteers are, through our recognition ceremonies, posters, publicity material, etc.

What if... however well-intended or even "true" this message might be, it gives certain decision-makers permission to take volunteers for granted-- "They're too nice to make a fuss." To the extent this is so, having volunteers take a day off, en masse, during national volunteer week, would be much more effective advocacy for the respect due volunteers and their leaders.

EXERCISES (Allow about 30-45 minutes)

In pairs or small groups, pick any of the statements below and work it through on a "what if..." basis. If you finish one statement, go on to another as time permits. Be prepared to share with the group-at-large, but in case there are any specimen "answers" in your packet, please don't peek ahead at this point.

SOME ASSUMPTIONS

1. Assumption of the mid-1970's: The OPEC oil boycott seemed to mean that oil and gasoline prices would skyrocket, or at least continue to increase substantially. But a certain "What if..." actually happened. What was it?

2. In the "litigious society," people sue each other more and more over less and less. This will continue to be a deterrent to many kinds of volunteer service, especially on policy boards. But WHAT IF...
3. About half the people in the field of volunteer leadership (administration) leave the field every two or three years, a tremendous subtraction of skill and spirit. One likely reason is lack of career options within the field, but WHAT IF...
4. We need better ways to justify our volunteer programs to funding and administrative sponsors, and the public at large. But WHAT IF...
5. If the major military powers succeed in negotiating progressively deeper mutual reductions in missiles and nuclear bombs, the world will become a considerably safer place. But WHAT IF...
6. What this country needs is more volunteer programs. But WHAT IF...
7. We need to gear up to learn even more from fields like personnel, business administration, communications, etc. But WHAT IF...
8. It's a good bet that one of the top eight baseball teams this year in the major leagues will be the world's champion next year. But WHAT IF...
9. You read that book in three hours? It must be a short book! But WHAT IF...
10. We need to know more about the profile of the typical volunteer. But WHAT IF...
11. At worst, TV commercials are harmless or boring, and sometimes they're quite amusing, too. But WHAT IF...
12. Our professional association needs to raise membership dues again this year in order to gain more revenue. But WHAT IF...
13. Since Volunteer Administration is largely a women's profession, a solid raise in salaries across the board will be good news for women, But WHAT IF...
14. There are more consultants in volunteerism entering the field today than there is work or clientele for them to serve. Many of these consultants, therefore, will have to have another means of financial support besides their consulting. But WHAT IF...
15. Offenders sentenced to community service, students obliged to do community service as part of their schoolwork, and other "prescribed participants," are best mixed in with regular community volunteers in a program, and treated in the same way. But WHAT IF...

(Possible "answers" follow. Don't peek--until you're ready!)

SOME POSSIBLE "WHAT IF'S..." KEYED TO ORIGINAL NUMBERS
(These are just samples; possibilities are infinite)

1. ...higher prices led to more oil exploration, emphasis on conservation of energy, cars with higher gas mileage, all of which drove prices back down. (The rubber-band effect.)
2. ...the problem is already beginning to provoke a corrective response in legislation to protect volunteers. As in #1, this factor provokes its own counter-reaction.
3. ..we began to imagine fresh and new career options within the field or in closely allied settings. (I can think of four, even now.) And do we necessarily "lose" people who "leave the field" if we keep in better touch with them via DOVIA alumnae associations, etc.?
4. ...we at least began to act as if they had to justify themselves to us.
5. ...as the current military powers disarm, another nation(s) "fills the vacuum" by drastically increasing their armament.
6. ...both in terms of overall quality of life, and even career opportunities for volunteer coordinators, the most promising growth opportunities for volunteerism were in the encouragement and understanding of relatively informal, entrepreneurial volunteering outside of programs, e.g. networking, freelancing, etc.
7. ...we began to see ourselves more as their teachers or at least their peers and less as their students. In fact, most of "the latest" in personnel practices is little more than a recap of the way volunteer coordinators have always had to treat their volunteers. But our collective inferiority complex is such that we can't believe it until we see it in "In Search of Excellence."
9. ...you're just a fast reader...or just skimmed the book.
10. ...this simply preserves a narrow elitist approach to recruiting. What if we took the broadest and most meaningful definition of volunteer--"doing more than you have to because you want to, in a cause you consider good"--and begin by assuming that in fact virtually everybody does volunteer. Our challenge then would become not getting people to volunteer in the first place, but rather increasing the quality and impact of their volunteering, in more formal settings.
11. ...all these years they have been powerfully reinforcing the message that, in fact, the sober truth doesn't matter all that much, anywhere, e.g. in politics, relationships with other people, etc. A U.S. Senate Committee recently excused a probably lying witness by observing that he was telling at least "the approximate truth."
12. ...this leads to such a decline in membership that we end up with less total revenue.
13. ...this encourages more men to compete for jobs as Volunteer Administrators, with the possible result that fewer such jobs would be available to women.

14. ...we deliberately began to imagine and then develop new clients for the services of consultants in volunteerism, e.g., all-volunteer groups, the "volunteerizing" of paid employment, etc.
15. ...the motivations of these and traditional community volunteers tend to be so different that it is difficult to treat them all the same way. And what if volunteers began to be discouraged and even resent blurring of their special voluntary heritage/identity, through inter-mingling with "involuntary" workers who are also called "volunteers."

From here on, the discussion can go just about anywhere, and we hope it does.

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Epilogue: The Anatomy of the Process

Most participants seem to favor the free-flowing nature of the "WHAT IF..." exercises; freedom from rules is a major plus. However, some people work better with more structure, and, for them, a more detailed layout of the WHAT IF process may be useful.

Step 1) Identify and state clearly the underlying assumption, as it actually is, which is not necessarily the way most people might state it. Indeed, many or most people may not even be conscious of a particular assumption, when it is so completely taken for granted.

Example: We should focus on professional leadership of volunteers which is as close to full-time as possible and (usually) paid.

Step 2) What are the consequences or results of this assumption, in what volunteerism does?

Example: Our basic constituency is limited to an estimated 100,000 individuals in North America. Publications and workshops focus on them, tending to neglect the part-time and/or unpaid leadership person. This concentration tends to ensure a coherent, defined body of knowledge. But our fee structure for national events, at least, and membership in professional associations, tends to assume the person is paid or of substantial independent means and this excludes a lot of unpaid people.

Step 3) What are some other, alternative assumptions which might be made in the subject area?

Example: What if we began to broaden our focus to include people who lead volunteers on a more part-time, informal and usually unpaid basis, e.g. service club leaders, religious group leadership, self-help group leaders, officers of recreational, political, and cultural groups, etc.

Step 4) What are the consequences of making these assumptions and how do these consequences differ from those which result from the current assumption (Step 2)?

Example: Our potential constituency would number in the millions; our current knowledge base would probably have to be "stretched," adapted, or at least reworded. Our time and money demands on people for involvement and support via workshops, association membership, etc. would have to be lowered, but we would have many more potential participants.

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ANCHORS AWAY!

A. Preparation: Before proceeding with explanations for this exercise, ask participants to describe:

- up to 3 or 4 main issues or concerns related to their volunteer program or organization.
- several issues, concerns or challenges they see facing volunteerism in general.

Then ask participants to put these aside to come back to later.

B. The "Anchors" Metaphor

Anchors keep a ship from moving when you don't want it to. But you must pull up anchors first when you want your ship to move; otherwise, anchors become a serious drag. We have something like anchors in our thinking, too, fixed ideas; taken-for-granted assumptions never challenged; psychological sacred cows; forbidden perspectives; rooted reference points around which everything else must move, but which do not themselves move. When we do move these anchors, considerable creativity can be unleashed. Results can also be merely absurd--or actually repugnant. But that's always the chance creativity takes. Nor do we claim the process is easy. Sailors tell me that, sometimes, you have to move against the current before you can get your anchor up; this, for us, means moving against current mainstream assumptions.

(You may wish to have some group discussion of the metaphor at this point, although it may be better first to consider the examples which follow.)

C. Examples of Anchors

- * Bernard is 5 ft 4 inches tall, weights 220 pounds, and has trouble buying clothes. At any rate, that will be seen as the problem as long as his present weight is a given, taken for granted. If he pulls up that anchor, he may be able to re-perceive his problem not so much as finding clothes for his present figure, but rather changing that figure by taking off some weight. Joshua, too, has trouble buying clothes because he is 6 ft 11 inches tall. This anchor cannot be pulled up (e.g. by cutting oneself off at the knees, as some have threatened), and we should be on the lookout, always, for such truly fixed anchors.
- * Josie's volunteer program is going poorly, though she seems to have good volunteers and agency support. One assumption might be that she needs to become a better manager. Never (except in one think tank I know of) is it seriously proposed that the management process itself may not be able to cure the ills of her program. True or not, that proposal is, I believe, essentially undiscussable, for most people in volunteerism today. Of course, so the assumption goes, better management is the solution to (all) volunteer program problems.

- * Another volunteer program panacea (there are at least two of them) is workshops. Essentially the snake medicine of the late twentieth century, workshops are seen as being able to cure just about any volunteer program-related problem. This anchor tends to suppress serious consideration of alternatives such as policy change, longer-term education, improvements in motivation or incentive systems, or simple recognition that a problem may be inherently unsolvable--at least for the present.
- * Accountability to the host agency anchors much of our thinking about volunteer programs (e.g., volunteer supervision, job descriptions, training). This stifles exploration of 1) ways in which the host agency should be accountable to its volunteers, and 2) productive forms of entrepreneurial volunteer effort which don't involve agencies at all.
- * Volunteer recruiting is falling off in Steve's program. A strongly suggested remedy, almost always, will be to improve recruiting techniques. Relatively rare will be consideration of the extent to which the volunteer program itself might be changed to make it more attractive to volunteers. Not as a priority, anyhow. The volunteer program is an anchor, a sacred cow.
- * This kind of anchored thinking--they must change, rather than us--is particularly unhelpful in considering why certain ethnic, racial, income, or other groups do not volunteer. Their "apathy" is defined in terms of the immutable goodness of our program-as-anchor. Too little attention is given to how our program might be changed to become more attractive to them, or, beyond that, the possibility that maybe our entire organization doesn't really deserve their participation and support.
- * The progress of modern volunteerism has been seriously slowed by massively anchored perceptions of certain groups as intrinsically recipients of services, rather than providers. The list is long and includes older people, youth, persons with disabilities, people who have emotional problems, etc. Pulling up such anchors one by one, e.g. seeing older people as part of the solution, not just part of the problem, has been the success story of modern volunteerism, in tremendous release of new helping energies. One wonders how many more recipient-to-resource conversions remain to be explored and cultivated? (Might be worth some discussion at this point.) Chances are, too, that the more "obvious" the group's role as help-absorber (e.g. infants), the more ripe the prospects are for challenging this role. (How about infants bringing smiles to nursing home residents?)
- * A related anchor may be that desirable transitions are always in the direction of receiver-to-giver of help. In fact, volunteer administrators now seem in the midst of a transition in the other direction, from being solely or primarily givers of help, to seeing themselves as in need of help (e.g. Sue Vineyard's book, "How To Take Care of Yourself...").
- * There is also some inkling of movement in a fairly fixed perception that staff's role is predominantly giving support to volunteers, towards a more balanced view in which volunteers also have to give staff a great deal of recognition and support.
- * Taking both the above perceptions together, there seems to be general movement towards the center (as both receiver and giver) both by groups formerly considered mainly receivers and groups formerly considered mainly givers of help.

* One fairly common anchor concerning recognition of volunteers--though hardly ever stated quite this baldly--is "the more the better." This anchor prevents many of us from seeing that some volunteers, especially "internally" motivated ones, do not necessarily value external recognition, especially in its more public forms. (See Gil Clary: "Intrinsically vs. Extrinsically Motivated Volunteers..."). Similarly, we are blinded to the possibility that some forms of public recognition events are more for the benefit of agency executives and politicians than for rank-and-file volunteers. (See Scheier, "Exploding the Big Banquet Theory of Recognition.")

D. Other Anchors (About 30 minutes)

Participants at this point can be asked to think of other anchors, either in their own experience or in other written material (including these exercises). Analyze these anchors as in the preceding examples.

E. The Concern You Came With (30-45 minutes)

Go back to part A and in small groups or pairs look for possible anchors in the issues and concerns you raised there. Would it help to pull up some of these anchors? If so, how?

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