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Team Building and Older Volunteers

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INTRODUCTION

Teamwork as a method to enable volunteers of all ages to participate effectively in the work of organizations is discussed in this presentation, with special emphasis on its value with older volunteers. As used here, teamwork is "work done by several associates, each doing a part but all subordinating personal prominence to the efficiency of the whole."[1] Volunteering is a significant means whereby retired persons, supported by paid staff, can pursue the dual objectives of (1) attaining the goals of the organization and (2) satisfying some of their own needs as older adults.

Growing numbers of older persons with energy, education and experience provide a far larger pool of potential team members than has been utilized so far by organizations. While most older persons have not yet chosen to give their time to mainline organizations,[2] the potential pool of retired adults is so great that a large number of volunteers can be attracted to organizations that want them enough to offer them challenging, interesting teamwork.

Many older adults are well suited to teamwork:

1. They know what is needed to complete a complex task.
2. They have had experience in playing a variety of roles.
3. Skills learned as members of family, sports, social, fraternal, church, and other groups can be adapted for use as members of teams now. Although the particular work of the team may be "new," older members can probably draw upon previous experience and adapt this earlier experience to the new task. This prior experience may be particularly valuable on a team composed of persons both young and old.

The extension of life for such a large proportion of our population is so recent historically that much is unknown. Teamwork offers the advantages of pooling what knowledge there is to search for solutions to the problems of aging in our modern rapidly changing society. Also, those older volunteers who have few opportunities for human interaction elsewhere in their lives may find the support of teammates particularly rewarding. This intrinsic reward of sociability can help them to fulfill one of Maslow's basic needs.[3]

TEAMWORK BY VOLUNTEERS

Teamwork can be done by any

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person over the age of seven, the age at which children first become able to subordinate their individual needs and wishes in order to work together toward common goals. Teamwork is used wisely only under those circumstances which produce more effective results when performed by a team than when done by an individual working alone. This means that teamwork is suited to tasks that require:

1. The pooling of knowledge, skills, and perspectives possessed by different team members, who together can solve the problem or do the work that no one member could do alone.
2. More time or energy than one person can give. Two or more teammates can often divide the work among them that one individual working full-time would carry. This practice of time-sharing is gaining acceptance among paid workers as well as volunteers.
3. When older volunteers are involved, tasks gain the maturity and experience of the older volunteers as a special dimension.

Teammates may find it difficult to "subordinate personal prominence in order to achieve the efficiency of the whole," especially in our work-oriented society which traditionally places high value on individual performance and achievement. The value of subordinating oneself may seem foreign and not feel "right." When the work of the team clearly calls for different kinds of knowledge or skill, the reason for teamwork is more readily perceived than when the different parts of the work are undifferentiated. Teammates, then, are more likely to accept the leadership of those with specific contributions that add to the efficiency of the whole. Thus, teamwork is not for individuals who have never learned the give-and-take of common pursuits. Nor is it for people who cannot take directions from others; the team effort suffers when energy is expended trying to cope with an individual's struggle for power, or inappropriate display of knowledge, skill, or charisma.

To compensate for subordinating personal prominence, each team member must have the promise and eventual realization of personal reward or satisfaction. A member must be reasonably able to expect that the team's work will be recognized by others inside and outside the organization and that he or she will have the satisfaction of helping to accomplish something worthwhile that is "bigger" than himself/herself. Often teammates energize one another so that they feel a positive inflow of energy, thus meeting a basic human need for close association with other people.

But no matter how much members may enjoy it, teamwork is effective only when it helps the organization do what society expects it to do. The team can know that it did its work satisfactorily when team members and others recognize that they have fulfilled the purposes of the organization.

The application of these teamwork principles is illustrated by the experience of the Andrus Volunteers as described next.

TEAMWORK BY ANDRUS VOLUNTEERS

Profile

In the Spring of 1984, there were 100 Andrus Volunteers (66 active and 34 sustaining members) representing a cross-section of ethnic, economic, and social backgrounds. Many of these are retired male and female business personnel, and professionals such as educators, health care and social service providers. They are well qualified to help accomplish the missions of the Center and University.

The Andrus Volunteer Program[4] began in 1973 as a research and demonstration project. Its original

goals of augmenting the services of the Andrus Gerontology Center and developing new roles for retired persons continue to guide the program today in the expansion of its activities and projects. The effectiveness of Andrus Volunteers lies in the basic concept that it is a program "for" and "by" older adults. Andrus Volunteers engage in various multi-generational and peer teamwork projects to support the Gerontology Center.

Multi-generational Teamwork

Older volunteers share responsibility with younger students and faculty/staff. For example:

1. Volunteer/student pairing for recruitment of new students.
2. Participation in courses and classes acting as teaching assistants, librarians, panelists and instructors.
3. Serving as research subjects and data collectors for various research studies.
4. Participation in model development and applied research as peer counselors, members of advisory committees, technical assistants and in other roles with such projects as Pre-Retirement Planning, Multi-Service Senior Center Development and Legal Services.
5. Volunteer/student pairing as resource counselors to provide information and referral to older persons and families.

Peer Teamwork

The model of peer teamwork--older volunteers helping other older volunteers--was characteristic of many volunteer-initiated activities developed over the past decade. It is apparent from Andrus Volunteers productivity that seniors have generated ways of relating to one another and to their work that releases "person power" and potential. How this is done can be illustrated through their organizational structure--a structure that is compatible with that of the Gerontology Center. Administered by a paid Director of Volunteers and an elected Executive Board who operate according to by-laws developed by the Volunteers, all active members serve on one or more of the following committees: Docents, Education, Leadership Development, Membership, Nominating, Office, Newsletter, Research, Speakers Corps, Ways and Means. The committee system, an integral component of the volunteer structure since its inception, provides the volunteers with the opportunity to participate as team members in a variety of tasks and options.

Wednesday is "meeting day." The Andrus Volunteers come together for an exchange of information and personal interaction before beginning committee work. Early morning general meetings serve a triple purpose in that they: (a) provide a forum for the exchange of information about gerontology, including the research findings of the Andrus Center staff and the various activities of the Andrus Volunteers; (b) afford members an effective support group; and (c) structure the volunteer program by receiving and evaluating requests for volunteer service from the university as well as from the outside community.

The committee structure which has evolved demonstrates many different "team" approaches in a wide variety of committee-chair functions and committee-membership relationships:

1. *Co-chairpeople sharing equal responsibilities.*

A. Coordinating Committee--a two-member team established when the part time secretary/receptionist position was eliminated due to budget cuts. Two experienced volunteers, one the immediate past chairman, volunteered time in the office to assist the director by reorganizing the volunteer skills bank for maximum use; scheduling assistance in the

office (phones, mailings); updating roster; helping other committee chairs as needed.

B. Leadership Development--a committee to enhance skills of Andrus Volunteer leaders and to strengthen leadership capabilities of older adults in the community. Last year the co-chairpeople took turns chairing committee meetings to plan in-service training and worked together to train discussion leaders for a community lecture series. Then, each one supervised a group of workers at one of the two sites.

2. *Co-chairmen with equal responsibility but different functions.*

A. The Docent Committee--one person in charge of training and meetings; the other in charge of scheduling the Docents.

B. The Speakers Corps--one person in charge of training and meetings; the other scheduling speakers.

3. *Chairperson and subcommittee chairpeople.*

A. Executive Board--composed of elected officers, membership chair, news editor, past chairperson, and director of volunteers, each with major responsibility for the overall operation of the program. (The two vice-chairs supervise an equal number of committees.) The sharing of knowledge, experience, and decision making at this level make the whole cohesive. Issues and requests are processed through the Executive Board and then taken to the membership for discussion and action to keep them informed and to help them feel a part of the whole.

B. The Education Committee--a chair working with three subcommittee chairpeople on advocacy; the seminar series, "Aging: Today's Research and You;" and an educational program for the general membership. These smaller groups present their suggestions to the whole committee for additional input.

4. *Steering committee with rotating chairpeople.*

A. Research Committee--when two appointed chairs became unable to serve early in the year, the Executive Board was unable to find replacements. They took the problem to the committee itself to come up with a workable solution. The group decided to rotate chairpeople at each meeting, thus providing opportunity for new Volunteers to get their "feet wet" by serving an "apprenticeship" backed up by those familiar with Center and Andrus Volunteer research procedures. Work was further divided among members and subteams formed to handle research requests, seminar and community lecture series evaluation and tabulations, and an update of a previous research study.

B. Ways and Means--another example of rotating chairpeople. In 1983-1984 four fund-raising events were planned: a Summer Institute Food Services Program in which volunteers sold homebaked goods, sandwiches, fruit and coffee during class break; a Fall Festival held the last week of October; a special luncheon with speaker at a nearby savings and loan branch; and a two-day excursion trip for members and friends. Chairs of these individual events teamed together by taking turns chairing meetings as their event drew near as well as to plan and coordinate each fundraiser with the membership.

5. *Inter-committee cooperation involving committees with different functions working together for a common goal.*

A. A Seminar Series--"Aging: Today's Research and You" was the combined effort of an Education sub-committee and a Research sub-committee working together. Designed by the Volunteers to bridge the gap between research and practice and drawing on the expertise of Center staff, the series focuses on helping older adults realize the full potential of their later years. Topics were formulated, speakers invited, flyers and materials were prepared by the Education component; the Research team handled the evaluations and tabulated the results.

B. Community Lecture Series--Andrus Volunteers were asked by the academic arm of the Center to take major responsibility for a lecture series on health concerns of older adults to be held at two community college campuses in April 1984. The Volunteers divided the workload by assigning several committees a particular task. Hence, the Education Committee assisted with the overall planning. The Speakers Corps helped to recruit community participants and trained its members to administer a needs-assessment instrument. The Leadership Development Committee planned and presented training sessions to prepare members to lead small group discussions following each lecture. The Research Committee developed the needs assessment instrument with the assistance of the project's staff coordinators, then prepared and tabulated evaluations of each lecture. The Education and Docent Committees assembled and coordinated handout materials for each lecture. This project provided major focus for the entire membership during the year.

6. *The pairing of an experienced Volunteer with a new member.*

A. The Docent program--provides friendly, knowledgeable persons at the entrance to the Center to greet and guide visitors and to perform whatever incidental tasks need to be done. As new Volunteers come aboard they are paired with a "veteran" Docent to "learn the ropes."

As they have discovered their functions, the Andrus Volunteers have evolved a structure that not only permits flexibility of time commitment and movement from task to task, but ways of accomplishing their tasks that work best in a given variety of circumstances. They have established both a context and content of work that has met their own needs and that combines their goals with the goals of the institution.

TEAM BUILDING, MANAGEMENT AND ASSSESSMENT WITHIN AN ORGANIZATION

The topics of team building, management and assessment as illustrated by the Andrus Volunteer experience can be applied to a variety of settings.

Much of the literature on teamwork[5] is addressed to paid professionals in non-profit organizations who confront issues that are too complex and/or time consuming for any one person or one discipline to resolve alone. The principles and pitfalls that govern teamwork by interdisciplinary teams of professionals and para-professionals are similar to those experienced by the Andrus Volunteers. Guidelines for teamwork in organizations and for workers who

become team members seem to apply broadly to both paid workers and volunteers in many kinds of organizations.

The following three elements provide a framework for discussing team building, management and assessment; namely, the volunteer or worker, the workplace or organization, and the (team)work itself; i.e., tasks which bring together worker and workplace in order to achieve the goals of the organization and to meet the needs of the individual.

Team Building

The potential volunteer or paid worker must be willing and able to become a team member when teamwork is to be undertaken. In addition to other characteristics desired in a worker, recruiters must try to determine whether or not the candidate has the capacity to engage in the give-and-take required to work closely with others and to subordinate personal prominence to the efficiency of the whole. A team of volunteers in charge of the recruitment and deployment of volunteers is an effective means of obtaining and placing qualified volunteers for membership on teams.

The environment of the organization influences how the teams function. First, the organization must attract potential volunteers capable of working on teams by: (1) providing stimulating relationships with others, both paid and volunteer personnel, in the workplace; (2) offering "real work"--important, needed, and recognized work that can be done with the time, talent and energy of the volunteer; and (3) assuring the volunteer a sense of pride in being affiliated with the organization. A climate that will attract and hold all ages, but especially older volunteer team members includes:

1. Permission for teams of older volunteers to perform more than ancillary tasks. A women's auxiliary, for example, whose primary and important function is to raise money for an organization is more limited in scope than a volunteer corps of men and women who participate in several aspects of the work which society expects the organization to do. Volunteers with a broad range of talents are more likely to be attracted to an organization in which they can do some of the "real" work than to one in which they are limited to money-raising or any other single function.
2. An organizational structure that encourages innovation and tolerates differences, especially when younger paid personnel are introduced to volunteers, retired persons, and/or teamwork for the first time.
3. Allocation of enough resources for older volunteer team members to demonstrate their value, e.g., financial support for a paid Director of Volunteers and for volunteers' out-of-pocket expenses; physical space, time, and encouragement for teammates to develop a mutual support structure so they can talk over their work and help one another; supplies and equipment both for efficient teamwork and for social interaction.
4. Rewards to the volunteers through recognition of their value by paid personnel.
5. Acceptance of older volunteer teammates by paid personnel, i.e., retired persons may fear being ejected from the workplace by younger employees who may, in turn, feel threatened by these experienced persons who do volunteer work. Volunteer work often arouses definite feelings--positive or negative--about persons who work for "free."

The work itself should clearly require a team approach. Especially in the beginning when people are learning to work together, the work should call for division of labor which requires specific knowledge and skill possessed by different team members. As the advantages of working together as a team are experienced, less clearly differentiated work may be undertaken by the team.

Team Management

Team members must be in charge of their work. Decision making authority and responsibility must rest with all of the people on the team. Each member must have a stake in the outcome and a knowledge of his or her particular contribution if the team is to work productively and efficiently. The individual gains this sense of teamwork as he or she participates in deciding what work the team will undertake, who will do what, and in assessing the outcome of their joint effort.

Organizations that sponsor teamwork must provide the context in which teamwork can flourish. This may be difficult for organizations which engage large numbers of paid and/or volunteer workers, since teamwork as conceived here requires face-to-face interaction among team members in order for them to participate fully in decision-making and other aspects of teamwork. Whether the organization is large or small, whether teamwork is often or only occasionally the modus operandi, a firm belief and expectation should permeate the organization that teamwork is an appropriate means of work, that volunteers are important and capable workers, and that retired persons can and will contribute as team members.

Guidelines need to be established that state the jurisdiction of the team and indicate its relationship to other parts of the organization and impinging organizations.

In organizations with paid and volunteer personnel, the Coordinator or Director of Volunteers and key volunteers often function as a management team. This team brings to the volunteers the viewpoint of the organization as expressed by the paid administrators, supports the volunteers in the organization, conveys their views to the administration, and helps both paid staff and volunteers understand the group dynamics of teamwork.

Team Assessment

From time to time members of the team need to assess their team as a whole in relation to the work it has accomplished for the organization and in relation to the personal satisfaction it has brought individual members. This can be done in a climate of mutual trust and respect in which members can candidly help one another take stock of each one's contribution to the work and how to improve it as well as appraise their joint product vis-a-vis their goal. They may want to bring in a person from outside their team who is not so close to their work to assist them in this process.

The organization in which the team operates should periodically look for obstacles and supports for the team in its efforts to:

1. do needed, important work;
2. develop a structure suitable for its teamwork and for linkages to others in and out of the organization;
3. obtain resources enough to work efficiently and effectively;
4. find and develop team members with needed talents; and
5. gain acceptance in the organization and with other impinging groups.

The work that the team is trying to accomplish is perhaps the most critical factor in the assessment process. How does the team know when its work is done? How do others know? When the results can be measured (e.g., the barn raised or the quilt made), the answer is straightforward. Team members can take pride in their product and gain satisfaction from others who compliment them on their work. Seldom, how-

ever, is the outcome so clearcut. Most teams, therefore, must state their goals as clearly and specifically as possible at the outset and reclarify them periodically if they and others are to know whether or not they have done what they set out to do.

Time spent in interaction that energizes the workers, although not directly related to the common task, results in effective teamwork. The effectiveness of the team's work can be measured by how well it carries out the dual functions of helping to meet the organization's goals and of helping its members realize their full potential as persons.

CONCLUSION

Especially in these times of expanding opportunity and diminishing resources, many private non-profit and governmental organizations need volunteers. A large pool of potential older volunteers is available to organizations willing to attract them by offering important work that both helps to accomplish the primary mission of the organization and that satisfies some of the volunteers' needs.

Teamwork is an appropriate means for utilizing retired men and women in the work of many kinds of organizations. They can work in teams of their peers to recruit, train and deploy older volunteers to work within organizations on projects they initiate within the central purpose of that organization. Older volunteers can also serve on multi-generational teams composed of volunteers and paid personnel, and in tasks requiring them to be a liaison with other constituents in the community.

The experience of the Andrus Volunteers and the examples cited here are evidence that senior adult volunteers can help an organization realize its goals in innovative and pioneering ways, and at the same time help the volunteers develop their full potential.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, Springfield, MA: G&C Merriam Company, 1979.

2 Americans Volunteer, 1974, Washington, D.C.: ACTION, February 1975. Americans Volunteer, 1981, Princeton, NJ: Independent Sector and the Gallup Organization, June 1981. Carol L. Jusenius, Retirement and Older American's Participation in Volunteer Activities, Washington, D.C.: National Commission for Employment Policy, Research Report Series, June 1983.

[3] Abraham Maslow, Motivation and Personality, New York: Harper and Row, 1954.

[4] Andrus Volunteers, Volunteer News, Volumes I-X (published five times/year), Los Angeles: Andrus Gerontology Center, University of Southern California, 1974-1984. Mary M. Seguin and Polly F. McConney, "The Andrus Volunteer Program," in Holly Jellison (Ed.), Higher Education and the Older Volunteer: A Place for Everyone, Washington, D.C.: American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, Older American Programs, 1980. Mary M. Seguin, Polly F. McConney and Lillian M. Watkins, Older Volunteers and New Frontiers, 1982 National Conference on Volunteerism, Anaheim, CA.

[5] Naomi Brill, Teamwork: Working Together in the Human Services, Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1976. Donald Brieland, Thomas A. Briggs and Paul Levenberger, The Team Model of Social Work Practice, Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University School of Social Work, Manpower Monograph Number Five, 1973. Dave Holder and Mike Wardle, Teamwork and the Development of a Unitary Approach, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981. John Horowitz, Team Practice and the Specialist: An Introduction to Interdisciplinary Teamwork, Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publisher, 1970.