PROFESSIONALS AND VOLUNTEERS : A ROLE COMPARISON

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DEFINITIONS: THE PROFESSIONAL AND THE VOLUNTEER

Carr-Saunders and Wilson gave in 1933 what has remained an important and central definition of the term "profession". They noted:

> It is the existence of specialized intellectual techniques acquired as a result of prolonged training which gives rise to professionalism and accounts for its peculiar features (1).

Other important criteria noted were: the forming of professional associations, specialized intellectual techniques, some tests of competence for potential full members, a code of ethics for the group, and some sort of format within which they could meet at regular intervals for social and vocational purposes, especially the exchange of information (2). Greenwood, some decades later, agreed essentially with these authors in saying that five criteria for a profession were: a systematic body of theory, authority in the eyes of the client, community sanction, ethical codes, and a group culture (3). An additional point which Greenwood made is very relevant to our problem -- that many of these qualities can be present in what we call a non-professional group, an occupational group which isn't a profession. He believed that it was a matter of intensity or quantity, rather than quality. That is, you had to have a strong body of theory, a lot of authority and substantial community sanction, a firm ethical code and a strong group culture, in order to have a true profession. Any occupational group, and even a group such as a labor union, could possess some of these characteristics, or even all of them to a minimal degree. So also could a group of volunteers (4).

There is little discussion in social science literature on how one goes about defining a volunteer. Because volunteers come from all walks of life, with all sorts of previous training, it seems that the primary dimension for defining is an economic one -- they don't get paid, in a situation where they volunteer their services. This much we can say. Anything beyond that varies, depending on where they are volunteering, what they are doing, in what capacity they are volunteering. If we compare these two, we see then that a professional usually defines his qualifications in terms of training and special group membership, while the volunteer is self-defined and defined by others in terms of interest in being of service, and in possessing a value system which includes the principle, "thou shalt give thy time for nothing in the way of financial reward, toward a higher good," and they may or may not have formal training in the work (5). Certainly in many situations today the volunteer tries to get this training in the role, and most volunteer organizations do seem to select out some people almost by definition. Some people would never dream of volunteering for anything.

A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE GROUPS

Volunteers have probably been around just as long as professionals. If we take one of the world's oldest professions -- prostitution -- I think we find that going back to ancient Egypt, we possibly had both professionals and volunteers! The situation does not seem to have changed that much in the meantime -- where we have professionals, we usually also have volunteers. A professional group tries to create a mandate for itself, a set of things which it claims it does and that only it is capable of doing (6). However, professions, as they carve out areas for themselves, taking the traditional professions of medicine, law, and the ministry, will still find that there is a greater need for their services than existing trained individuals recognized as fully competent by the

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professionals in performing the services. Historically, as a profession becomes established, it increases its power to regulate "quacks" or deviant practitioners of the arts in which they claim competence (7). In the absence of a majority of people who are willing to go against the existent power of the professional group by such deviant pathways, there will still be a need for more services. In the mind of the professional group there is usually some desire to meet what they're not meeting in the way of community needs, in a way which is non-competitive for them. Volunteering as a way of gaining support for their work has been traditionally seen by the professionals as a resource in meeting their ethical committments.

The early volunteers in such "auxiliary" fields as social work seemed to be rather free from close scrutiny of the relevant professional groups. The social service volunteer in the late nineteenth century certainly was watched, but it was not in the professional terms of the present day but was rather a scrutiny of her morality and correctness of demeanor in acting as a benefactor toward those everyone conceived of as her social inferiors (8).

Between the end of the nineteenth century and the middle of the twentieth, industrialization speeded up, the economy changed over to a service model from the earlier entrepeneurial industrial model, the world opened up and communication improved. A phenomenon which was not prevalent at the end of the nineteenth century began to become more frequent, to its present dominant position as a social process -- the process of professionalization (9). Professionalization refers to the desire of almost every occupation to consider itself no longer as an occupation but rather as an emerging profession. One example of this is the role which used to be called the health inspector or rat inspector in a public health department, which has now evolved into the role of the (semi-professional) "sanitarian." Sanitarians are not just rat inspectors but have many duties, which, though often minor and menial, can often be important in preventing epidemics such as typhoid fever (10). This is one instance of a general social trend. Wherever there is an opportunity for greater learning in any service occupation, the opportunity and the learning process become formalized. Courses are set up somewhere, by somebody, and the individuals setting up the courses usually set up formal criteria and start giving a degree. Once a degree program is set up, this means formal accreditation and standards. A grandfather clause is set up, so that all people presently practicing whatever it is can still do it. But their approval is still needed -- for in the early years of a new profession, the only ones practicing it are formally unqualified.

Historically, as professionalization became more prevalent, as more and more occupations redefined themselves in professional terms, and as the role of the professional became more important, the standards became stricter. And so, in many professions, there was a period during which volunteers were not conceived of primarily as helpers for professionals but rather mainly as <u>the old way of being a professional</u>, and therefore something to be actively fought. This social phenomenon is similar to the behavior of the nouveau riche, the arriviste, who wants to put his slum past, and his slum friends, behind him, by actively denying their relevance to him or their value in any way. Thus the hardest time to be a volunteer may have been in the period halfway between the turn of the century and the present day. At this time, in the health and welfare areas, the need was thought of as primarily to professionalize, with extra volunteers seen as a distraction and an uncomfortable reminder of a recent past. As Lobove stated, in his study of the development of social work as a profession:

> In the late nineteenth century, social agencies had delegated important administrative and treatment responsibilities to the volunteer; by 1930, her activities were often marginal or else closely supervised. The paid social worker's claim to expertise, the emergence of a professional identity nurtured by schools and associations, and the development of a formal organization or bureaucracy as a characteristic feature of administration, were crucial in the devaluation of voluntarism.(11)

I think this is changed at the present time, because many of the groups who were professionalizing in the middle period have now arrived. Nurses are considered as professionals, social workers, certainly dentists are considered as professionals, yet this was for them an open question in 1900.

Other things of major importance, as we noted above, have been happening during the previous half century: the population explosion, and the fact that still in 1966 one-fifth of the nation exists beneath the "poverty line" of $3000/year for a family of four (12). These individuals are in need of services, and through the present way of funding public services -- through the voter and Congress -- public services are underfinanced and public servants underpaid. The need for volunteers is seen as increasing proportional with the realization of their usefulness and the shortage of funds (13). And finally, as an expectable step in this historical prowess -- volunteers are professionalizing. Volunteers are beginning to think of themselves as an occupational group, with an organized body of individuals pressing toward status, respect, power, some allocation of resources, and some definition of their role in a more modern sense. They are becoming a self-conscious occupational group. Not a full-time occupational group -- and not by definition a paid occupational group, but an occupational group whose existence as a group is sometimes of particular interest to training programs in universities, set up specifically for volunteers across different service areas. I think that this last turn of events is historically important, for it appears that the original helping role of the volunteer, which was an important one in the society, was eclipsed and devalued in the drive toward professionalism. A new generation of volunteers wishes to establish a renewed position of importance, and a new relationship with the professionals -- often in their image. This has some ironic aspects, which will be considered in the concluding section. At the present time, the shortage of trained people in the helping professions is encouraging this trend toward a newer and more progressive use of volunteer workers. So I think that at the present time we are beginning to see a coming together or a partnership between two groups -- not the same partnership which existed back then, and not the active antagonism which existed in several areas halfway between then and now, but new types of relationships between the groups.

PRESENT-DAY INTERRELATIONS

There are several dimensions of relationships between volunteers and professionals which hold for many settings -- several types of permutations and combinations in their working arrangements. We can take up five main ones at this point.

First, there is the administrator of volunteers. Most social service work is carried out in some sort of organization. This organization has an administration; the administration must order the work tasks and the flow of work, the flow of patients, and all other everyday activities, in some sort of rational sequence so that to some degree what is going on is predictable. If volunteers enter into the helping process in any significant way, in any significant numbers, in any organization larger than about ten to fifteen people, there is sure to be someone whose part-time job will be the administration of volunteers and their program. Traditionally this may have been done in an informal way, by an unpaid senior volunteer, before the growth of large service organizations. But in a bureaucratic framework often a special role is formally defined, and in large service organizations such as mental hospitals, there will be someone who is called the administrator of volunteers, or the volunteer administrator. Now this can be a confusing term -- "volunteer administrator" -- because in many cases in large settings such people are not volunteering their services, but are in fact paid staff members, perhaps trained in some form of interpersonal work, who have been delegated this responsibility in the organization.

The volunteer administrator has divided loyalties almost by definition, in the same way that the foreman in industry has loyalties divided between management (who want to use him as a tool for forcing the workers to work harder) and the workers on the line, who are his fellow union members and with whom he must unite at times to fight management (14). The volunteer administrator,

ideally at least, is a person who cares about volunteering. He or she believes in it, in its value -- "there should be more volunteers, we should have an enlarged program". A volunteer administrator can usually be expected to not only keep the program going, but also to improve and expand it. The other administrators, in a hospital or any other type of service agency, may have mixed feelings about this, because the volunteer is not completely under the organizational thumb. The volunteers can come and go. Volunteers, not being paid, are not subject to the restrictions which can be imposed upon an employee. And this economic bond is an important consideration to any administrator. Other complexities involve the high-status community volunteer with good intentions and no skill, who can make life miserable for the administrator of volunteers, but who may not be offended at any cost, as she and her husband are powerful in the community and in the "board" of the agency or organization (15). To sum up, one cannot command the loyalty or unquestioning total obedience of those who are offering their services at their own free will, and can withdraw them at their own free will with little or no consequences to themselves. Therefore the administrator of volunteers has to treat the volunteer as a pseudo-employee, and try to fit them into a schedule like an employee. But the idea of the volunteer and the employee are not always the same. The part-time problem is only one example of this.

Administrators of volunteer programs constitute a group which now seem to be increasingly interested in professionalizing. Here are individuals who are dealing both with service staffs and with volunteers, and dealing constantly with the conflicts and dilemmas discussed above. The goals of the training programs being set up for volunteer administrators are presumably to bring about a greater degree of expertise in handling these problems, and in more fully utilizing the resources presented by the volunteer. They are a bridge between the professional, the administration, and the service organization on the one hand, and the volunteer on the other.

A second type of relationship between professional and volunteer is what can be called the "professional" volunteer (16). By this is meant the volunteer who has been around so long in the setting that they know all the rules, how the rules can be broken or observed, what the culture of the service organization is, what the informal channels of communication are as well as the formal channels, what the routine is, on an everyday basis, what the best and most efficient ways are for acting in an emergency. Usually the "professional" volunteer is someone who has given a significant proportion of his or her time to this activity, someone who is in the setting almost as much as a paid worker. The "professional" volunteer comes in several species, usually not obvious ones. Many service organizations have someone who is considered as an unpaid staff member rather than an obvious volunteer or "lady bountiful" type who spends only a few hours per week. This type of person may be counted on quite heavily in some service organizations, especially in understaffed and overworked ones. These individuals may also, informally, have training. That is, their in-service training may have been quite extensive by the time they reach this status, over a period of years. In many ways, they are most accurately described as unpaid, informally trained professionals. One can observe senior administrators on service staffs pleading with the "professional" volunteer to join the staff as a paid member. But these offers are usually rejected, for either the money is not a factor to the volunteer or her freedom in the role -- as well as its uniqueness -- counterbalances any desires for economic reward.

A third relationship, one with extensive historical precedent, is that of the professional as a volunteer. Going back to ancient Greece, we note that the Hippocratic oath, taken by all physicians, states that one performs one's services according to need, and expects to receive renumeration only according to ability to pay, and that no criterion shall be used to eliminate anyone from the receipt of services (17). The volunteer activities of the professional are often considered part of the ethical dimension of the profession itself. Taking physicians, we can note that they have traditionally tried to reserve some time for the charity ward; lawyers are expected to give at least some legal aid to the poor, the minister performs many activities for which he

receives no remuneration. When a professional acts in this capacity, he does not expect immediate and public praise for his efforts. He would be embarrassed if it came, because it is defined as part of his role, as part of what he ought to do as a professional.

But we have to be very careful about equating the professional as volunteer with the volunteer as volunteer. Because professionals as volunteers are not just volunteers their physical selves and their good will -- they are volunteering their professional expertise and this primarily is what people want and need from them. The doctor offers his skills and training in diagnosis and treatment, the lawyer his familiarity with the ins and outs of legal process. Also, as Parsons notes, the professional is in many senses a businessman, interested in profit, differing from the businessman primarily not in this area but rather in the ethical restrictions on advertising, universalistic (impartial and impersonal) attitude toward the client, and the rule of confidentiality (18).

The issue of how much volunteering professional groups actually do needs much further consideration and research. For public relations purposes professional groups like to create the image of "public service" -- that they spend a large amount of their time volunteering. In fact, the few studies which have been done indicate that most physicians give about one hour a week to this work. This is certainly better than nothing, but it certainly is not a massive committment to help the poor. Of course, hospitals and physicians vary, and findings like this are tentative. The question remains, though, as to the difference between the image of a group and their actual practices. In medicine, the last few years have seen a sharp decrease in the public's and the physician's expectations of the physician as a selfless volunteer of free service (19). In general, we cannot expect, with any of the professions, that the professional will supplant the volunteer in volunteering work, thereby putting the volunteer out of business.

Fourth, there is the case of the professional who turns volunteer. The retired professional who just wants to keep his hand in, or the professor emeritus who teaches a course just for the enjoyment of it are examples of this category of individuals.

Finally, there is the case of the volunteer who turns professional. Being exposed to the service activities in a profession for a long period of time, getting a lot of experience, being exposed to pressures, given responsibilities and enjoying the work, volunteers may decide to take up a career, in whatever they have been volunteering. We find this true often among students, especially those volunteering in mental hospitals. At a work-study plan university, such as Antioch or Northeastern, students working during the off-term at a social agency sometimes become so interested that they begin thinking of a career in the work. This holds for more than young people. Housewives, after their children grow up, have been becoming more active in volunteering work, and in turn their experience leads to professional training, especially in universities equipped with programs for adult women. Thus people who are in some way deviant to the educational system (dropouts, married women who left college) as well as those in college, form major pools of volunteers who become recruited to a professional career, as a result of the volunteer experience.

To sum up, relationships between volunteers and professionals are quite complex, involving such dimensions as the status of occupational groups, the setting of the service activity, and the time dimension over which the roles are considered. It is possible for professionals to act as volunteers and (almost) for selected volunteers to act as professionals; in full life careers it is possible for the full time professional to develop into the full-time volunteer and vice versa; and there is a role-administrator of volunteers-which is by definition a bridge between the two groups. In each one of these interrelationship situations we see an actual or a potential role passage-a "crossover" type of situation - and any situation of this sort is a source of conflict, because of different expectations made on individuals as a result of

changing roles (20). Typical examples, from our five categories, are the cross-pressured situation of the administrator of volunteers, the skill-without-legal-status dilemma of the "professional" volunteer, the time limitations and ethical dilemmas of the professional acting in a volunteer capacity, and the conflicts over career decisions of the volunteer who is considering turning professional. These are issues which intimately involve individual personalities and service programs, and are also key issues in the sociology of role behavior, and the sociology of occupations and professions. As such, they will warrant much further study.

VOLUNTEERS, PROFESSIONALS, AND BUREAUCRACY: A NOTE OF IRONY

Can one just throw a group of volunteers into a treatment setting? It might in some cases have a positive effect, in others a disastrous and negative effect, depending on the nature of the individual thrown in, and the organization into which he is thrown. Several studies of volunteers in mental hospitals have shown how the back wards can be transformed by a volunteer group into a more cheerful place, for three or four days, possibly even a week or longer. But when the volunteer group leaves, the setting can be plunged into a deeper depression than if the volunteers had not arrived - for the feeling of abandonment and desertion is added to the social experience of the patients, recreating their feelings of earlier desertions by family members, perhaps years in the past (21). As Bruno Bettelheim suggested in the title of one of his books, perhaps love is not enough (22). On the other hand, it certainly suffices more than nothing at all, as in the case of professionals who remain in their role for financial purposes alone, having lost all idealism and humanitarian feelings for others. This is the other side of the coin - the enthusiasm and genuine interest in people which characterize many volunteers.

As service organizations have grown larger they have become more bureaucratic. By bureaucratic is meant the increase of rules in a setting, the increase in complexity of rules, the increase in the number and complexity of the roles of staff members, an increase in the confusion over the definition of these roles by themselves and in relation to one another, and an increase in the level of bickering and conflict on the issue of simply who should do what, rather than what should we do (23). Bureaucratization entails an increase in the complexity of self-consciousness of a group of people trying to work together, and quite possibly a slowdown in whatever they are trying to do. In this, the ironic thing is that the professional by definition is much more involved in this internal bickering and role defining than is the volunteer. Also, as settings become more hierarchically structured, the professionals in high status tend to define out much of their contact with human beings - especially the "dirty work" of the profession, to use Hughes' phrase (24). Increasingly, it becomes the volunteer who sits at the bedside, and talks with the patient. Volunteers are performing more and more of the activities which in ancient times were called "clinical" - a Greek word which originally meant ministration to the soul of the individual, after the biological therapies of the time had done what they could (25). The irony, restated, is that as service occupations professionalize, they leave to the volunteer more of the activities which traditionally were part of their own role. Also, as federal and state bureaucracies apply cost-accounting procedures to public service agencies, they create pressures toward increased impersonality and a production of "numbers served" orientation on the part of the professionals and semi-professionals in the organization (26). As Scott puts it, "professions and bureaucracies are becoming more and more alike; that is, 'bureaucrats' are being professionalized at the same time that 'professionals' are being 'bureaucratized'" (27). Only in the highly prestigeful professions such as medicine and law do the practitioners have enough group power to resist some of these trends. In auxiliary and public service professions like nursing and social work the bureaucratic trends make even more inroads in the individualized service

model (28). Here, when so many volunteers in fact work, the imitation of the prevailing "professional" model is somewhat like compounding a felony. In "professionalizing" in these areas, volunteers who follow the model of the paid practitioners stand the risk of intensifying factors which prevent a meaningful interpersonal helping relationship. Volunteer groups and administrators of volunteer programs may need to be cautioned, in order to avoid the slavish imitation of recent professional trends which deprive the volunteer of a potentially useful gift to others - the personal approach and the non-bureaucratic values which are presumed to lie at the base of authentic humanitarian efforts, whether practiced by professionals or by volunteers.

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