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When a Volunteer Transforms into an Employee

By [Susan J. Ellis](#)

June
2001

Just as I was thinking about this month's Hot Topic subject, an e-mail from a colleague raised one. She asked whether I could direct her to written materials describing what happens if a volunteer is hired to fill a paid staff position. Although I have heard many conversations on this subject over the years, I was hard pressed to identify much that had been written down. So instead I offered to make this the Hot Topic this month and request the good thinking of our site visitors in the response section.

I'll admit to conflicted feelings about tapping volunteers to become employees. On one hand, this naturally feels complimentary, since it sends the good message that the organization views volunteers as a talent pool of equal merit to its employees. On the other hand, I see three possible concerns:

- If a volunteer comes on board in the hope of eventually becoming an employee, it transforms what ought to be the freedoms of volunteering into more of an "audition." In other words, the volunteer is less likely to criticize or give unconventional input, will accept tasks that may not be his or her first choice, etc. -- all in an effort to show how s/he would fit in as an employee.
- Being paid is not necessarily a "promotion out of" volunteering. If there are too many congratulations or comments like "this person used to be a volunteer but now we've hired him/her," listeners might infer that the new employee was elevated rather than transferred. Given that the majority of volunteers don't even desire full-time employment with the organization, such an implication is unfair.
- Finally, I'd advise great caution against saying or even hinting to any volunteer that contributing services might lead to a paid job. This could lead to false expectations and even a lawsuit, should the employment not materialize.

When It Happens

In the real world, of course, volunteers who really do want to join the paid staff of the organization will apply for vacant positions. And their experience as volunteers ought to weigh in their favor, presuming that they have been competent and productive. However, anecdotal evidence reveals that

making the transition from volunteer status to that of an employee is often much harder than anticipated. Here are a few factors:

- Employment generally means a change from a part-time volunteer schedule to full time. These extra hours can change both how the ex-volunteer feels about the workplace and how colleagues view him or her. Small irritants that seemed insignificant when only encountered once or twice a week for a few hours now magnify into more serious issues. The enthusiasm of focusing volunteer attention on tasks a few hours a week becomes tempered by daily/weekly regularity. Where once the volunteer could ignore administrative memos, computer security procedures, weekly statistical reports, and other mundane responsibilities of employees, they now become a part of the job.
- Relationships change between the ex-volunteer and other volunteers and with employee colleagues. If the volunteer enjoyed friendships with other volunteers, there may be disappointment in store. Just as employees promoted to leadership positions speak of being treated differently by their former colleagues, the same perspective shift occurs when an ex-volunteer now spends full-time in the organization. Suddenly the work becomes of primary importance and it is harder to mesh schedules with volunteer friends. Meanwhile, because the new employee is not really “new,” the normal get-acquainted period with other employees is skipped—although, in truth, most employees don’t actually get to know volunteers very well. It may come as a surprise to discover that other employees and the ex-volunteer still feel some distance, even after several months in the new situation.
- No matter how hard we try to apply the same standards of performance for both employees and volunteers, non-paid staff are often given more leeway. Expectations are simply lower, or we accept less work or lower quality as a cost of working with volunteers. This should never be the case, but it is hard to ignore its existence. If such different standards are at work in an organization, then an ex-volunteer now in a paying job may find that the same work previously accepted without comment is now criticized or that other rules have changed to make the work harder. The new hire’s performance is scrutinized more closely and colleague employees may suddenly seem less satisfied than they were when the person was a volunteer. Often both sides are surprised—and dismayed—by this.

It is worth noting that the opposite situation is also fraught with potential problems: when an employee leaves the job (often for retirement but also for other reasons) and then returns as a volunteer. The situation has changed, but expectations—particularly about relationships—have not. The ex-employee is suddenly without the assumed privileges of a full-time staff member, from small things such as no longer having a locker or keys to the front door, to the very real change in what work will be assigned.

What Can We Do?

If any of our visitors have had experience with this transformation of a volunteer into an employee or vice versa, please share your observations and advice with the rest of us! For example:

- How do we strike a balance between wanting volunteers to be seen as a talent pool while avoiding any “promises” of employment?
- Should there be a required break between volunteering and taking a paid job in the same setting?
- How can an organization make a clear demarcation between volunteering and employment so that true orientation can occur and new boundaries defined?

Let's see what our collective wisdom can surface on this subject. Thanks in advance!

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Posted 6/28/01

Submitted by Sue Pickavance, Director of Volunteering; Wales Council for Voluntary Action, Cardiff, South Wales, UK

Volunteering is promoted as a way of acquiring new skills and for its capacity to improve peoples' employability. If we truly believe this then we should be happy to encourage and support volunteers' transition to paid positions. If we don't, aren't we simply saying "you are good enough to volunteer but your work is not good enough to be paid". Back in the 70s and 80s, I was involved in an organisation whose whole purpose was to create paid work for volunteers and, despite a few occasions, it worked exceedingly well. The occasions where it did not work out were almost exclusively about people being employed into posts which were beyond their capacity. The issue should be about employing the best person for the job - whether or not they are volunteers. Advantages include having people on board who understand and are sympathetic to volunteering and to the aims of the organisation.

Posted 6/28/01

Submitted by Jonnina Benson, Volunteer and Community Development Coordinator, Norman, Oklahoma

I am the volunteer coordinator of a youth services agency that provides an emergency youth shelter. In the past seven years, we have been fortunate to hire about 10 of our volunteer staff as full time employees. In a field where employee turn over is very high, we have found that those who come to us through volunteering are the highest retention simply because they know what they are getting into before they start. I credit the fact that our orientation/training manual is very close to that of our agency's policies and procedures for employees. Our paid staff feel pleased that they have the opportunity to help train future professionals in their field.

Posted 6/25/01

Submitted by Ruth Lyte, The Friends, Ontario, Canada

I do not think you can say if you volunteer with us it will lead to employment. But if you want to network, are in a new community or want to try a new field, volunteering is a good way to learn new

skills or keep skills you have in use. We have hired volunteers if they have applied for positions available within our organization.

Posted 6/25/01

Submitted by Sherri Batie, Programs Manger, Help, Inc., Redding, CA, USA

Twice we have made volunteers paid staff in the recent past and both times were disasters. Though our director was originally a volunteer and that worked out. I was both a part time staff and volunteer. I would like to caution people that the volunteer can change once they become paid staff. The two I am referring to were excellent volunteers but lousy staff. They turned out to both be huge procrastinators and didn't take their jobs very seriously (though they did as volunteers - go figure!)

Posted 6/19/01

Submitted by Nancy A. Boyett, Executive Director, Autism Society of Western Kentucky, Kentucky, USA

I spent 8 years as a volunteer for the agency I currently hold a paid position with. The Board of this organization saw this as a natural flow to grow this agency. I think those who have a passion for the cause they serve, whether it be through volunteerism or as an employee, along with the business savvy necessary to keep a non-profit afloat, can only continue in their respective roles to affect the agency in a positive manner.

Posted 6/19/01

Submitted by Linda Duhon, Director of Consulting Services, Community Resource Center, Denver, CO -- USA

This is a situation common to small and start-up organization which I try to approach in a 'developmental' frame. Just as when an organization is transitioning to another developmental stage it is crucial to success to attend to such matters as job descriptions, roles and responsibilities, accountability, communication, etc. so it is when a person 'transitions' from volunteer to paid staff. Pay attention to the details and structure. Otherwise it's a conflict waiting to happen.

Posted 6/18/01

Submitted by Kevin A. Laack, Hogan Family Foundation, California, USA

I obtained my first career position at a VA Medical Center following a brief stint as a volunteer while I was completing my Bachelor's degree. Over the next couple of years, two other student volunteers "followed in my footsteps" and obtained full-time employment in the office where I worked. For several reasons, many of which have already been discussed, I think it makes perfect sense for employers to hire volunteers. However, based on my own experience and my observations of my two fellow "ex-volunteers," I see at least two caveats:

First, employees tend to treat the volunteer-turned-employee with a great deal of suspicion and, sometimes, hostility. I am not sure why this behavior arises, but I think it has to do with the fact that the new employee seems somehow disingenuous to the other staff because, by converting from volunteer to employee status, he or she distinguishes himself as someone with career ambitions, not

simply an altruistic worker bee. This can make some staff, especially the ones with job-related insecurities, feel threatened.

Second, supervisors often expect the volunteer-turned-employee to continue doing some work on a volunteer basis. Supervisors assume that the ex-volunteer would be happy to not be compensated for a portion of his or her work. Also, some employers seem to expect that the ex-volunteer should continue to provide some volunteer services in an effort to "repay" the employer for the paid position. Needless to say, this is unfair to the ex-volunteer and puts him or her in the awkward position of having to set boundaries while not appearing uncooperative.

Before accepting an offer of employment, I would encourage all volunteers to make sure that these issues are explicitly discussed with the prospective employer.

Posted 6/16/01

Submitted by Helen Rusich, Volunteer Services, Terra Association, Alberta, Canada

My experience of hiring volunteers has been very successful mainly because the role, responsibilities and expectations of the volunteer position were quite different from the paid position. When someone volunteers for 3 hours a week or even one day a week, they usually have quite specific duties. When someone is hired for full-time employment, their role and responsibilities are larger and more diverse. I hired a student after her placement because she had the skills and knowledge to work with the population (brain injury) we needed. There is some debate as to whether placement students are volunteers. In the broadest sense, I say they are. I was hired by an organization where I volunteered. My volunteer role was specific to one program area. My position involved managing a regional office. I completed my volunteer role one year into my work position. I kept both roles separate. It was a challenge but done carefully it is possible. After some years as a staff I then again volunteered to help the local group with fundraising, making it clear to the group of my limitations and where to draw the line. It was a bit of a challenge but again it depends on accountability, clarifying roles and responsibilities.

Posted 6/15/01

Submitted by George Thompson, , Delaware/USA

It sounds to me like you're blaming volunteers for problems that may be the result of other factors, such as lack of organizational focus, poor management decisions and the perennial culprit -- poor communication of goals and expectations. Of course, some volunteers will not work out, no matter what the circumstances. But that's how it works in any organization. As someone seeking to switch from for-profit to non-profit work myself, I've already been rejected because I didn't have any non-profit experience. Although I don't expect a job to necessarily follow a volunteer experience, I would hope, if not expect, that it would be a plus -- not a minus -- to my being hired if the opportunity arose. How can the non-profit sector grow effectively if there are persistent doubts about those outside AND inside your own ranks?

Posted 6/15/01

Submitted by Sue York, volunteer, Army, VA

I have experienced both "sides of the coin" I have gone from volunteer to paid staff and then, due to a move, from paid staff to volunteer (in order to maintain some skills while becoming familiar with my new community. The hardest was transitioning back to volunteering, as I find the agenda I worked with as paid staff does not fit appropriately into my duties in my volunteer position. On the other hand, the paid staff are appreciative and responsive to any input given, so it is a matter of developing appropriate boundaries on my part.

Posted 6/12/01

Submitted by Carol Friedland, CVA, Deputy Director, Mayor's Voluntary Action Center, New York City USA

I got my job through volunteering at the Mayor's Voluntary Action Center. That was 25 years so I guess it worked out OK. I applied when I knew there was a job opening and since I had been doing some of the work already and they knew me, I had an inside track. Since then we have hired several people who have been volunteers or interns. This is a very small office and we like to think that we treat all of our personnel with respect. Knowing whether a new employee will fit in has been very helpful and has usually served us well. MVAC has its own distinctive environment that not everyone would enjoy.

Posted 6/8/01

Submitted anonymously

A recent (paid) project support person, who was previously a volunteer, identified for herself that at the end of the clearly defined project, she would take a few weeks off to readjust, attend to other parts of her life, and come back (again) as a volunteer. Her self-awareness was impressive and thought-provoking.

Posted 6/8/01

Submitted by MeChelle M. Callen, Director of Special PRograms, Indiana

We have been "fortunate" that 12 of our former volunteers have become paid staff members. Perhaps it is because some of our "volunteers" are from programs such as AARP or Training Inc. (a Welfare-to-work program) in which volunteers do internships here to gain experience before going out to look for a job. We never tell people that volunteering could get them a job, in fact we tell them that volunteering in no way automatically makes them eligible for employment. The organization looks at hiring volunteers as a great way to recruit for less money than other forms of advertising and I look at it as a way to validate that we have great volunteers. Only those actively searching for employment on their own are even considered. We don't search out volunteers and offer them jobs but rather let them know where the job board is if they are interested. I think it is a win/win for our program and the hospital!

Posted 6/7/01

Submitted by Linda Sifri, Volunteer Coordinator, Transportation, Washington state

I would like to hear from folks who's volunteer job description is very close to the paid staff job

description. Our department management has wanted to hire my volunteers to cover openings in our "off time" schedules @ weekends and evenings when paid staff are not available. I have explained that when the volunteer becomes paid staff they cannot participate in the volunteer program. The real problem is that our volunteers are proving to be so reliable and so committed to our program and we are unable to fully utilize them due to concerns for the paid staff positions. At what point can we turn to the volunteers when the paid staff are not available? We are actively looking into this issue and would appreciate any comments.

Posted 6/6/01

Submitted by Jon Irby, National Program Leader, 4-H, USDA

It strikes me that in an ideal situation or relationship with a volunteer should be the same as with a salaried staff member. IF the organization is open about its structure and requirements for different job roles, then we should not be surprised if a volunteer decides to apply when an opening occurs.

Posted 6/6/01

Submitted by Marsha Riddle

Our agency has had a active youth volunteer and service learning program for over 35 years. About 1 out of 7 of the current staff began their work as volunteers either as teenage volunteers, students or interns, or adults who are discovering the world of work with persons with severe and profound disabilities. The term "Volunteen" was coined by the first group of youth volunteers in 1964. The director of the agency has often referred to the fact that we work to "Grow our own staff" in a community that sometimes lacks the luster of a larger city or community.

Our efforts have always been to find the best staff and volunteers possible to support the persons with disabilities we serve. When we can support a volunteer in their decision to work for the agency, we do so, particularly if their experience with us and ours with them has been a positive one. When staff retire from our agency, we encourage them to come back, to volunteer, to visit, and to be with us for special events and activities. It is very difficult to explain to a person with severe disabilities that you have work for them and supported them in their needs for 30 years and then you just disappear from their lives, never to return.

We strive to build a living and working community where all are respected for what they can do at any given time in their relationship, either as receivers or givers of service. The pay check as an employee is only a small part of the personal and professional commitment needed to make a difference in someone's life. The time we spend together and the relationships developed over the years change in all types of human services work. Today the Volunteens have wonderful understanding supervisors because the supervisor once walked in their shoes and can mentor them to be good volunteers today...and we hope excellent staff tomorrow.

Posted 6/6/01

Submitted by Jan Masaokc, CompassPoint Nonprofit Services, California, USA

Another great article from Susan. Thanks!

Posted 6/6/01

Submitted by Martha Evans, Volunteer and Training Program, Lane County Department of Youth Services, Eugene, OR

We are a juvenile department in a city with a large university, a small college and a community college. Many of our volunteers are interested in a job in juvenile corrections. Volunteering is a method to find out if they like these kids and this kind of work, to learn job skills and to meet the staff in this facility. I always emphasize that there are no guarantees or even "extra points," but that they will have exposure to the kinds of topics that are included in employment interviews. Additionally, this department wants to increase the diversity of its workforce. That translates into my increasing the diversity of the volunteer force so that there will be more knowledgeable, qualified potential job applicants. Hiring volunteers as employees has always been a win-win situation in this agency.

Posted 6/6/01

Submitted by Susan E. Koch, Director of Volunteer Services Luther Crest Retirement Community, Allentown PA, USA

I am one person who has made the transition from volunteer to employee. All of my working life I have been in retail and design and being past fifty I thought I would retire from this field. But after dealing with temperamental people, I wanted an outlet. I started to volunteer on my day off and the feeling of helping someone was great. I volunteered for almost two years and then I was asked if I would like to be employed. I started off in the activity department as a part-time assistant. Within a year I was employed full time. My transition was easy with the help of the staff. While volunteering, I tried very hard to develop a relationship with the staff and residents. When going into any project, keep an open mind and be prepared for surprises. Life is full of surprises. I think more research should be done on this subject before any judgment is given. I am now director of volunteer services and I love every minute of my job.

Posted 6/6/01

Submitted by Georgia Bergen, Rutland Regional Medical Center, Vermont, USA

I have had this happen several times and you are correct in saying it can lead to a less than positive outcome. I make it clear when interviewing prospective volunteers who are in the job market that volunteering at this hospital should not be viewed as an avenue for employment here. When volunteers are hired, it is usually for a part-time and temporary positions. I ask the volunteer to sign a statement stating they understand this position is temporary, with the expected duration and that at the end of their employee status they can ask to be considered again for a volunteer position. I also let the hiring department know they chance permanently losing this person as a volunteer because often a person will not want to resume a volunteer position after having been a paid employee. As managers we want to advocate for our volunteers, yet we realize there is the danger of losing them after their hire. A tough position for a volunteer manager to be in!

Posted 6/6/01

Submitted by Lori A. Ropa, Sr. Section Services Representative, American Water Works Association, Colorado, USA

Here's another caution for those organizations considering hiring a volunteer as staff. Our association has sections (chapters), many of whom have hired a staff person. Sometimes, sections have hired volunteers as staff and it has worked out beautifully. They have a good understanding of the organization and therefore a short learning curve when it comes to knowing the profession. Other times, a volunteer who wasn't doing a spectacular job as a volunteer, is hired. The results are far less stellar. The section's expectation seems to be that if this person is paid, he/she will take the job more seriously and perform well. Certainly if he/she is not tied down to the commitments that come with another employer, he/she can focus on the work of the association. Unfortunately, this generally does not happen and the volunteer Board of Trustees for the section is faced with a non-performing staff member. This can lead to some very uncomfortable situations for all. I suppose the bottom line here is that organizations should be sure that they have chosen the most qualified person for the job, not just the most convenient. If a volunteer is not performing as a volunteer, then he/she probably won't perform as staff.

Posted 6/6/01

Submitted by Joani Shaver, Programs Assistant Supervisor, Sorenson Multi-Cultural Center, Utah, USA

My experience has been a positive one regarding transitioning volunteers into paid positions. I never hinted that volunteering for the organization meant an "in" for future employment; however, when an opening became available and I had a volunteer with the right combination of skills, experience, and personality, I would encourage that person to apply and oftentimes the person would be the best fit for the job. It was a comfortable situation as an employer, because I was already familiar with quality of work, commitment to the organization, and reliability.

Posted 6/6/01

Submitted by Joan Smith, Director of Volunteer Services, Catholic Charities of St. Louis, St. Louis, MO USA

I once was a volunteer who became an Executive Director of the agency I volunteered for. This particular agency was almost purely 'volunteer,' so it worked out well. I've known a number of volunteers who became staff members (especially directors of volunteers!) I think they continue to see the agency in fresh ways. They tend to be the ones who remind other staff members of the reason they are there. The benefit of hiring a volunteer is more information before that person comes into the position. This is the same benefit when a staff person takes on a new position. Adjustments go on constantly, and a living organization is always changing. Rather than lose out in fear of possible problems, any problems should be met if they arise.

Posted 6/6/01

Submitted by Rebecca Lamb, Executive Director / Smith-McDowell House Museum/ WNC Historical Assn., Asheville, NC USA

As a former volunteer who eventually became a "professional," I obviously think that volunteers can make great employees. While I did not become a volunteer to get a job, my volunteer experience exposed me to a new career and encouraged me to go back to school for additional training. I know many others who entered their chosen career the same way. Over the years, I have hired several volunteers and have found them to be great employees. I find that the same drive that made a

dedicated volunteer does make a very committed staff member. On a practical note, if your organization is a small nonprofit, volunteers frequently fill important staff functions. When funds do come available to make the position a paid position, it would be very insulting to the person that has been capability performing the job as a volunteer, to hire another person to do the same job for pay. Despite any downside you can think of to hiring a volunteer, you must remember the importance of recognizing a volunteer for their efforts..

Posted 6/6/01

Submitted by Margo Ashmore, Consultant to several organizations, Minnesota, USA

In Minneapolis neighborhood organizations designated to deliver "citizen participation" it's common for hard-working volunteers to be chosen as paid staff. The burnout time for most volunteers who have a balanced life is two to four years (or single-issue based), so it's not uncommon for the uncommonly interested volunteer to be the "only one left" from their group of friends, when they take the position. They go through a re-building time, a natural regulator against some of the resentments that can happen when a volunteer starts to get paid. Their history in the neighborhood makes for a smoother transition than hiring an outsider, but it can perpetuate a certain clique assumption and make it hard to do diversity outreach--unless that person is really committed. Some personalities can do it. I felt I would be such a personality, as outreach had been a hallmark of earlier efforts. When I was (by one vote) turned down for a project manager job (being told on the one hand that the job was too small for me, and by others that the group felt threatened by all my connections) I then got hired for several pathbreaking projects, both inside and out of the neighborhood. I'm enjoying life immensely, and when people talk about creating a job (and possibly hiring me) that I could have quickly created from the original position, I have some real misgivings. Long story short, I'd endorse the idea of a "break" for different life experience before trying to go home again.

Posted 6/6/01

Submitted by Barbara Witte, Homebound & Vol. Coord., Fremont Public Library, Illinois, USA

Our library has had some experience with this topic. We currently have four employees who began as volunteers. One of those has become a manager. In her work (before becoming a manager), her experience as a volunteer helped her to appreciate the job the volunteers do. However, along the way, one of the volunteers turned employees wanted monetary compensation for the work she did as a volunteer since it paralleled her work as an employee. We have since written a statement that all volunteers must read and sign stating that their time as a volunteer "is made willingly and without expectation of compensation or future employment".

Posted 6/6/01

Submitted by Sister M. Peter Bernard, Holy Family Home & Shelter, Inc., CT/USA

We have had both good and bad results from hiring volunteers. The most difficult problem has been the "take over" attitude along with "I will do things my way." This created a conflict with staff that was hired from outside. On the other hand, there have been volunteers that were hired that did well in the transition and proved a greater asset to the organization.

Posted 6/2/01

Submitted by Cheryl Morehouse, Manager, Volunteer & Community Services, Saint Joseph Hospital, Nebraska, USA

Our hospital is located right next door to a university, so a large portion of our volunteer force is dominated by students. I consider it a wonderful event when a volunteer has been hired on by either our hospital or the university, usually in a part-time or on-call capacity. They are still part of our hospital "family", just in a different role. Our volunteer office happens to be located right next door to our human resource department. On our orientation tour, I simply make mention of the job posting board by HR's door, and encourage the new volunteer that if they, or someone they know, needs employment, that our facility is a great place to work. I never imply that volunteering can lead to guaranteed employment. I have never encountered any negative attitudes between volunteers turned employees, or vice-versa, with current staff. I think it's because everyone, from staff to volunteer, realize we are all part of a team with a common purpose and goal, and that leaves little room for petty attitudes.

Posted 6/1/01

Submitted by Lori Hoyer-Logan, Volunteer Coordinator, Washington State, USA

In our agency we have had quite a few volunteers become paid staff members. Often, the success or failure of the action depends on what the paid position entails. For instance, persons who come into the agency as case aide volunteers will often garner the skills to become community support specialists. Typically, they work in the same location as their volunteer assignment and since paid staff are encouraged to recognize only the pay grade rather than a skill grade positions transfer well. Another category which is successful is our consumer volunteers. The volunteer program has been instrumental in helping persons suffering from mental illness to become active members of society once again. The volunteer program is the second or third step in the continuum of care with the fourth step being hired as a consumer employee. Frankly, the problem areas have come when community volunteers, those with no stated agenda for being here other than altruism, apply for and are accepted for employment. I have seen too many in that category look down on the volunteer staff as if they have suddenly been elevated to a higher plane. I am very clear and have in our written policies that volunteering at our agency does not guarantee or imply the promise of paid employment. Each prospective volunteer signs a statement of understanding which helps with the legal aspects. Each person is also told however, that they are welcome to apply and compete for openings as they occur. The jury is still out as to whether or not this is a perfect system but it is working well so far.

Comments from Readers

Submitted on September 5th, 2017

Anonymous, Watford Hertfordshire, England

If a long standing volunteer (10 years) is covered at holiday times by a person being paid is this fair?

Submitted on September 5th, 2017

Susan J Ellis, Energize, Inc., Philadelphia, PA, United States

I'm not sure where "fairness" comes in here. Are you saying that, if work is being done by a volunteer, then no paid employee should ever be expected to "cover" for the volunteer if s/he is away due to illness, scheduled time off, or other reason? First, BOTH the employee and the volunteer have a standard of care to give to your recipients of service. So the first question is: with the volunteer away, would clients not be served unless someone substituted? If that's the case, then your organization is quite correct in making alternate plans for assuring the service continues without interruption. If there are a number of volunteers with the proper training to fill in, then of course you can begin by seeing if any of them are available as substitutes. But ultimately, again if the bottom line is service to clients, it would be necessary to ask one of the full-time staff to step in.

Change the question to both people being employees. When a paid work colleague goes on vacation, what happens? I suspect it's the same equation. If the work MUST be done in the interim, someone will be assigned to cover. If it can wait until the person returns, then there's no reason to ask another person to do it.

I don't think the issue is paid or volunteer. It's the priority placed on that particular service during the time the usual worked is absent.

Hope this helps your conversations about this.

- Susan

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