

Ten Challenges

For Volunteer Managers in the Army Community

1. The Double Bind

A Battalion Commander's wife is "tasked" by the Senior Lady to produce volunteers from the unit wives to support a post project. When approached, the wives are not willing, not interested or say they are already over-committed. Rather than embarrass the unit, the Commander's wife tries to do most of the work herself.

2. Conflicting Family Priorities

Young wives who have chosen not to be employed, but to stay home in order to devote more time to husband and children, appear to resent any encroachment on their family time. Agency recruiters or unit commanders' wives who solicit their help are made to feel guilty for doing so.

3. Male Chauvanism

The Commanding General, a beachelor, in complimenting volunteers at ceremonies, makes it quite clear that he considers volunteer activity to be part of the "true" Army wife's responsibilities. He seems not to give concessions to working wife situations, or to modify the type and degree of expected distaff volunteer commitment. At the same time, support for "distaff-related" volunteer programs on his installation receives low-priority attention from his staff, when they are approached for assistance.

4. Senior Lady Influence

A popular post program, enthusiastically supported by past commanders, is publicly criticized on frequent occasions by new Commanding Officer's wife. Her negative attitude becomes contagious and project eventually falters and dies.

5. Unit Pride

A dynamic wife of a Battalion Commander encourages unit wives to develop and work on projects of their own design. Unit wife morale improves and unit cohesiveness results, but this is perceived by the rest of the post as separatism, bringing criticism to the commander's wife and, she fears, to her husband.

6. Lack of Continuity

A successful program, sponsored by a post volunteer agency, thrives under the leadership of a skilled and creative volunteer. She departs with her husband's reassignment and the program soon ends. as no one feels willing or able to replace her.

7. Resistance to Volunteers by Paid Staff

Paid agency personnel (both military and civilian) resist using volunteers in their work setting because they say the volunteers (a) are unreliable, (b) do not respect confidentiality, (c) are available because they can't hold a salaried job, (d) are taking what should be a paid position from needing persons by allowing it to be served by a volunteer.

8. Resentment from Overqualified Volunteer

Army wife who has been a paid professional specialist is not now working, but offers her skills as a volunteer to a post agency. She is accepted as a volunteer, but is assigned to do more menial tasks since they are more needed by the agency. After a few weeks the volunteer drops out of program, does not offer her services again.

9. Dependence on "Old Reliable"

Accepting volunteer leadership position in post agency, wife is referred to experienced volunteer who, she is told, "knows everything" about the program. Older volunteer, a retiree, has been volunteering with agency for years, considers herself the authority on how things should be done. New leader respects the other's experience and reliability, but sees her as a threat to creative management.

10. Leadership Dead-End

Superior volunteer leader departing post is given public recognition by losing agency (a frequent pattern in her past volunteer life) and welcomed enthusiastically by counterpart agency at the next one, where she is expected to take over a weak program and rehabilitate it. Agency is resentful when volunteer declines to serve, since she accepted accolades from organization at previous station. Does not contact volunteer again.

CHALLENGE #1

THE DOUBLE BIND --

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CHALLENGE # 2

CONFLICTING FAMILY PRIORITIES

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RESISTANCE TO VOLUNTEERS BY PAID STAFF

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