

MORE EMPHASIS NEEDED ON RECOGNITION OF TEAMWORK

By Janet L. Unger

Private recognition

Too often the private part of volunteer recognition is forgotten. But volunteers remember when they are not acknowledged for their contributions. Nonprofit leaders need to offer private recognition to volunteers on a regular basis. When a job is done well, the individual should be acknowledged immediately. An appropriate "thank-you" or being told, "You did a great job" goes a long way in keeping volunteers motivated. It is important to remember the little things that will have a significant impact on your volunteers.

Private recognition for an individual should immediately follow a significant contribution. Private recognition for a team or committee should occur in the course of working on their project. Peer recognition is important and celebration of small successes should become commonplace. As Tom Peters noted in his best seller, *Thriving on Chaos* (1987), "There needs to be substantial recognition for fairly mundane actions as well as for truly exceptional performance." Providing big rewards for big accomplishments are a must, but numerous rewards for small acts are equally, if not more important. Above all, volunteer recognition must be sincere, honest and timely. Nothing does more damage than a phony pat on the back. Recognition must be genuine.

Public recognition

As eloquently stated in the American Red Cross Volunteer 2000 Study (1988) "Recognition is respect made visible." When publicly recognizing volunteers, timing is less critical but it should not be too far removed from an individual or team accomplishment.

An award ceremony should bring out pride and provide a good time for all. In planning a recognition event, ask yourself, "What kind of recognition will have the most impact and be most memorable for our volunteers?" Beyond the motivational influence of those being recognized, this is an opportunity to "parade and reinforce the kinds of behavior that the organization hopes others will emulate" (Peters, 1987). Celebrate what you want to see more of by showcasing individuals and groups that represent the foundation of your organization's success.

Public recognition also demonstrates to the community at large that volunteers are important to your organization. Many nonprofit organizations make a point of offering public recognition for volunteers during National Volunteer Week, which is usually the third week in April. This is often a good way to get additional newspaper or television coverage for your agency and your volunteers.

Reward individual and team efforts

Timely recognition is critically important for both individual and group efforts. Individuals should be recognized immediately for their special contributions and accomplishments. Acknowledging a volunteer's special efforts one month after the fact is often too late to have an impact. During the intervening weeks, the volunteer may build up resentment that he or she was not appreciated for the work that was done. The agency should recognize the importance of a volunteer's job as well as the quality of performance.

The most common forms of volunteer recognition are events, certificates, and letters of appreciation. A great deal of volunteer recognition involves rewards for length of volunteer service. While this has its place, much greater emphasis is needed on recognition of teamwork among volunteers and paid staff. Your organization can build a great deal of team spirit by recognizing teams of people instead of individuals.

When a committee completes a successful event, it is time to celebrate and show your appreciation. Have a party, luncheon, or ceremonial meeting for everyone who participated on the project. A department or project team should be recognized when they reach a landmark. This is an opportunity for everyone to see how their small part fit in with the overall project and how many people helped to make the program a success. Given the fluid nature of volunteer work, everyone will enjoy meeting the other people who worked on 'their' project.

Be sure to thank the entire team. Everyone in the unit, both volunteer and paid staff, who has worked to achieve a common goal, should share in and receive recognition. Paid staff also appreciate, need, and benefit from recognition beyond a salary. Too often, public volunteer recognition ceremonies only acknowledge volunteer contributions to the obvious exclusion of the paid staff who have been an integral part of volunteer successes. This does not make for good team spirit. Broad-based volunteer recognition should encompass all levels of the organization and rewards should be innovative. Some suggestions are given in the volunteer recognition chart. It is important to reward individuals and groups for improving systems, programs or services, and for achieving results that significantly contribute to realizing your organization's mission.

VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION		
	INDIVIDUAL	TEAM
PRIVATE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Say "You did a good job" • Send a thank you note for a job well done • Send a letter of appreciation to the volunteer's family • Attend to volunteer's concerns as they arise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peers recognize each other • Provide the team with a treat when it reaches a minor milestone
PUBLIC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge an individual's contribution to their team • Invite volunteer to speak at a convention • Local newspaper coverage • Publish the volunteer's name and success in the agency newsletter • Promote volunteer to new position • Awards and certificates • Ceremonies • Trinkets - mugs, pens, etc... • Nominate volunteer for a local or national award • Create a Volunteer Hall of Fame 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a party or picnic • Team plaques • Group photo in newsletter • Sponsor a team trip • Treat group to lunch • Group t-shirts • Team of the Year award • Newspaper or TV coverage • Ceremonies • Invite special guest to speak to the group

Unger 1991

Janet Unger is president of Unger Consulting Services in Philadelphia, PA. Her work is dedicated to helping community leaders in the areas of board development, strategic planning, affiliate relations, and volunteer management. Janet is a member of AVA Region III. This article was adapted from the chapter she wrote on Volunteer Development in T.D. Connors (Ed.) Nonprofit Organization Policies and Procedures Handbook to be published by John Wiley and Sons in 1992.