

MANAGING VOLUNTEERS

The Girl Scouts, the Red Cross, the pastoral churches—our nonprofit organizations—are becoming America's management leaders. In two areas, strategy and the effectiveness of the board, they are practicing what most American businesses only preach. And in the most crucial area—the motivation and productivity of knowledge workers—they are truly pioneers, working out the policies and practices that business will have to learn tomorrow.

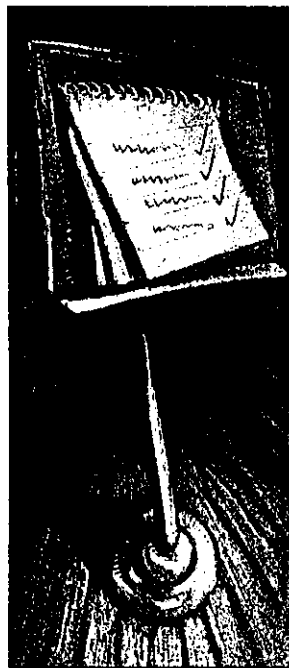
—Peter F. Drucker, "What Business Can Learn from Nonprofits,"

Harvard Business Review, July-August, 1989.

Peter Drucker, a pretty smart guy, has proven adept over the years at scooting along on the crest of every management-trend wave with all 10 toes hanging over the edge of the board. But he's usually confined himself to the profit-making world of business. So why is he saying things like this? And why has he founded the Peter F. Drucker Foundation for Nonprofit Management?

The reason, as he points out in a recent book, *Managing the Nonprofit Organization*, is that he's become convinced that many nonprofits are unparalleled at managing their businesses through excellent management of people. What's more, he believes that the corporate sector could learn a trick or two from nonprofits—or, as Drucker likes to call them, the "third sector." It was Drucker who suggested that Frances Hesselbein, outgoing national executive director of Girl Scouts of the U.S.A., would be the ideal person to ream out the bureaucracy at General Motors Corp. after Roger Smith left. When GM demurred, Drucker chose her as head of the foundation that bears his name.

What Drucker and Hesselbein both preach is that well-managed nonprofits have become expert at three crucial elements of running an organization. First, they define their mission and stick doggedly to it. This tactic alone helps turn a great many "thorny" management decisions into no-brainers. When the Girl Scouts defines its mis-



Mary GrandPre

Most people who do volunteer work these days have full-time jobs, families and very little leisure. Yet they find time to work for free. Maybe the corporate sector can learn something from nonprofits.

BY BEVERLY GEBER

sion as helping girls reach their highest potential, it's easy to turn down charities asking for a free phalanx of Scouts to canvass door-to-door.

Second, says Drucker, nonprofits have figured out how to make the board of directors a resource, not just a high-profile rubber stamp. In the best nonprofits, each board member is recruited for a specific expertise and is expected to head a working committee dealing with those issues. A stockbroker would be expected to oversee the nonprofit's financial committee, an advertising executive would head the advertising committee and so on.

Finally, and most important, exemplary nonprofits have become much more clever at managing people. Specifically, they have figured out how to manage volunteers, who, as full-time workers with family responsibilities, have very little time to give. And nonprofits have become ever more savvy in keeping those people motivated and returning for duty.

Indeed, there has been a significant increase in the number of people volunteering their time over the past few years. If you aren't a volunteer, chances are good that the person sitting next to you is. According to a survey conducted by the Gallup Organization for the Independent Sector, a nonprofit research group in Washington, DC, 98.4 million American adults served as volunteers in 1990, a healthy boost over the 80 million reported in 1988. That means nearly every other U.S. adult volunteers time to nonprofit organizations. And according to the poll, each one works an average of four hours a week for their causes.

Young adults and baby boomers showed the most pronounced uptick of interest in volunteering during that two-year span. In 1988, 45 percent of those aged 25 to 34 volunteered; the comparable figure in 1990 was 62 percent. Among those aged 35 to 44, a little over half were volunteers in 1988; by 1990 the figure stood at 64 percent.

There are other telling shifts in the makeup of volunteers today, changes that have forced nonprofits to become much more professional in their approach to managing people. In the past,

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the bulk of volunteers were full-time homemakers, often empty-nesters who had plenty of time to spend and were daunted by the fact that corporations demanded skills and experiences they hadn't accumulated in 20 years of child rearing.

The third sector welcomed them gladly. There was always something for unskilled but willing hands to do, whether it was filing papers, stuffing envelopes, collecting donations in the neighborhoods or driving meals around the city. Little orientation or training was necessary, especially because these volunteers often did the same jobs over and over on a set schedule. Management staples such as job descriptions and performance appraisals were alien concepts.

But in the 1970s, all the rules changed. Women, out of choice or necessity, marched into the workplace in ever greater numbers, draining nonprofits of their core source of volunteers.

Deborah Walsh remembers how it was back then. She's vice president of the United Way Voluntary Action Center in Hartford, CT, one of some 400 VACs nationwide. The centers serve nonprofits in their regions by providing management training and operating clearinghouses of volunteers who would like to give time but are not devoted to a particular agency. The VACs screen the volunteers and recommend them to various nonprofits in their areas.

Walsh says the world of nonprofits was turned upside down in the 1970s when women sought paying jobs. "It was very scary," she says. "We couldn't get people to drive for Meals on Wheels."

The makeup of volunteers has changed drastically in the time she has been working for the Hartford VAC. Today, more than 70 percent of the volunteers that come through her agency are full-time workers. That's practically a 180-degree twist.

Why do these people do it? Why would full-time workers pressed for time surrender some of the few leisure hours that remain in the week? To begin with, don't discount the value of the charitable impulse; it's still one of the main motivators that lead people to various causes. The feeling that you are giving something worthwhile to society can be a heady one, especially if you don't feel you're contributing anything to society through your paid job.

But there are other, less altruistic reasons people volunteer. Some do it as a way to sharpen or stretch their job skills. Some do it as a way to test new careers. Susan Forand, director of training and volunteer services for the Hartford, CT, Easter Seal Rehabilitation Center, recalls one woman who called recently and said she thought she might want to switch careers to speech therapy. Knowing that the rehabilitation center provided it, she offered to do any kind of work she could as long as it put her near a working speech therapist.



She reasoned that this would be a great way to figure out if that's what she really wanted to do.

Susan R. Summers, deputy executive director for human resources and administration at the American Heart Association in Baltimore, MD, has been with the charity for 15 years. She's noticed an increase in the number of people who are using volunteer work as a way to get ahead in the world of paid work. It's a way to build up a résumé and earn good recommendations from a work supervisor.

NO SCUT WORK

It's the change in the face of volunteers—from homemakers possessing plenty of time and patience to full-time workers possessing little of either—that has done the most to force nonprofits to change the way in which they manage volunteers.

Full-time workers who have just a few hours a week to give—and who often feel they're robbing time from their families or their leisure to do it—disdain the thought of performing scut work. Summers says the American Heart Association chapter now pays a subcontractor to stuff envelopes because it could no longer find enough volunteers who would agree to do it.

Most nonprofits that do a superior job of managing volunteers long ago ceased to wring their hands over the dwindling supply of envelope-stuffers and, like the American Heart Association, found other ways to get their menial work done. Recognizing that their most valuable volunteers would come from the ranks of the employed, they shifted their focus onto highly skilled knowledge workers and tried to figure out how to attract them.

What they discovered is that today's volunteers want to work on carefully defined projects with a clear beginning and end. "People don't want to sign up for Saturday mornings forever," says Rosa Bunn, director of economic and public enrichment for Adolph Coors Co. in Golden, CO. Bunn coordinates the efforts of a worker-led group that proposes community service projects in which Coors employees can get involved.

About 3,000 Coors employees—nearly one-third of the work force—volunteer for at least one project a year. Although some of these people give time continually throughout the year, most volunteer for a handful of projects in a year's time, each lasting a day or less. Special Olympics is a particular favorite, Bunn says.

Many volunteers these days insist on using the skills and expertise they have developed on their jobs. Call this the corollary of their refusal to stuff envelopes. If they have little time to give, they want to make sure it's spent meaningfully. But this personal need also dovetails with the needs of the volunteer organization. After all, if a crack

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instructional designer volunteered his time, why would an organization set him to work as a chauffeur? It's much more useful asking him to design a training program to prepare volunteers to work the organization's major annual fund-raising event.

Forand says one volunteer was a "space" consultant, who donated time to rearrange the office space of the severely overcrowded agency. Another expert in ergonomics was interested in working within the agency's job-training program for the disabled. He worked with one disabled client to help design a better work space for him. Of the 475-or-so volunteers Forand has on hand, about 400 want to work on short-term projects.

This is not to say that nonprofits no longer need the volunteer who will do unskilled work, the one willing to run errands and hold the tape at the finish line of a Special Olympics event. But increasingly these days, nonprofits are recruiting knowledge workers for their expertise and asking them to take over many of the professional and managerial duties of the organization. Summers recently recruited a compensation specialist to join the Heart Association's human resources steering committee—after the committee had decided to redesign the compensation system for the paid staff.

The volunteer skills banks maintained by VACs have proven invaluable to nonprofits in search of professional expertise. Most volunteers who register with the local skills bank want to donate some time to a good cause but don't particularly care *which* good cause—another change with which nonprofits had to cope in the 1980s. Many agencies are happy to draw upon these experts for short projects.

For instance, an agency might ask for a computer programmer who could analyze its needs, recommend a software or hardware system, and teach employees how to operate it once it's installed, says Evie Herrmann, director of volunteer services for the Hartford, CT, Voluntary Action Center. A graphic artist might be tapped to design promotional materials for a fund-raising event. A carpenter might be asked to build a ramp at the home of an agency client who has just become confined to a wheelchair.

Finding these professionals is one thing, managing them effectively is another. VACs help out in this area as well. Herrmann says the organization provides free management training courses to 470 agencies.

JOB CONTRACTS

Back in the days when most volunteers were relatively unskilled homemakers, managing them was a casual affair. It would have been blasphemous to suggest that precious money be spent to teach supervisors how to manage paid staff, much



less how to organize and reward the work of platoons of short-term volunteers.

Granted, not all nonprofits are 14-karat examples of volunteer management today. Herrmann believes it is a relatively small but high-profile group of nonprofits that do an exemplary job. The ones that excel have borrowed some of the best concepts from well-known management theories and simply applied them more faithfully than most profit-making businesses.

Take the concept of job satisfaction. It's been an article of faith for some time now that if only organizations would design interesting, fulfilling, worthwhile jobs, the people who perform them would happily move heaven and earth to excel in them. Swell idea, but how many companies work hard at it?

Nonprofits know that if they do not assign a volunteer to a task that challenges and interests him, he may not even finish the assignment, much less ask for more work in the future. Since volunteers these days are less likely to be devoted to a particular organization, he'll simply go down the street to the next nonprofit or stop volunteering entirely.

"Volunteers have to feel they're fulfilling a need," Forand says. "If volunteer directors do not package jobs attractively, they'll lose those volunteers."

Consequently, the best nonprofits take job descriptions, training and performance appraisals for volunteers very seriously. These are some of their best tools in recruiting and retaining knowledge workers, many of whom expect to be managed as professionally in their volunteer work as they are in their day jobs.

At the Easter Seal Rehabilitation Center, volunteers undergo in-depth interviews to probe their interests, background and experiences, Forand says. The organization checks references and won't take just anybody who volunteers, largely because it serves disabled people who can be vulnerable.

In management training courses Herrmann conducts for nonprofits on behalf of the Hartford VAC, she teaches that people perform volunteer work primarily for one of three reasons: achievement, affiliation or power. Some people want to give something to society. Others volunteer to meet new people. And still others do it because it's an easier way to attain a leadership position than waiting for a promotion at work.

When people come to the VAC skills bank to volunteer for work, Herrmann examines their interests as well as their skills. Are they interested in the arts, law, the environment or social justice? Of what accomplishments are they particularly proud? Herrmann also encourages nonprofits to probe motivation issues during job interviews to identify the primary urge that is driving the vol-

'Could the job be done at home or in the evenings or on the weekends? What are the real requirements, rather than the conveniences?'

unteer. "If you have an advocacy job, you might want someone who has a power motivation," she says. "But you wouldn't want to put someone in a corner with a computer if she's an affiliation-type person."

Once the interviewing is done and a volunteer is accepted for a particular project or ongoing task, the most clever nonprofits ask volunteers to sign contracts outlining what they have agreed to do. This is neither cynical nor presumptuous; the agencies have found that they can invest a job with more meaning if its terms are formalized. If the organization cares so little about the task that it wouldn't bother asking the volunteer to commit to it, it's possible that the volunteer won't—and the job won't get done.

A volunteer for the Girl Scouts is usually asked to sign a "volunteer agreement," which lists the duties that will be expected of her in the ensuing year. For instance, says Kristin Andreasen, director of adult education for the Girl Scout Council of Orange County in Costa Mesa, CA, a volunteer might agree to be a Brownie troop leader during that time and to perform the list of tasks typically required for that position. On the back of the agreement is space for the volunteer to list what she expects from her supervisor in the way of support during the time period. In many cases, Andreasen says, both supervisor and Brownie leader would be volunteers.

The Red Cross makes a point of using very specific job descriptions, both for short-term projects and ongoing assignments. Even a relatively unskilled clerical position—in which a volunteer might be doing little more than filing and typing—carries a detailed job description. The reason, says Cherie Robinson, director of training and volunteer services for the American Red Cross chapter in Farmington, CT, is that it helps ensure job satisfaction in the long run.

A detailed job description not only helps the Red Cross choose the best person for the job, it also helps the volunteer decide if the job is the right one for him. A mismatch is a botched opportunity for the Red Cross to develop a loyal, long-term volunteer. If the volunteer becomes frustrated by his inability to perform the job, or if he decides he's being mismanaged or micromanaged by his supervisor, he'll leave.

"It's costly to train good volunteers and then lose them because you haven't managed them well," Hesselbein says.

Job descriptions do one more important thing in nonprofits. They force managers to define the crucial elements of the job. "We're constantly having to assess the real requirements for the jobs," Robinson says. "Could it be done at home or in the evenings or on the weekends? What are the real requirements, rather than the conveniences?"



DON'T WASTE MY TIME

The *real* requirements. This is a critical issue for nonprofits, and it is one of the things that distinguishes the management of volunteers from the management of paid workers. In years past, when homemakers preferred to do their volunteer work during the day when their husbands were at work, nonprofits operated on much the same nine-to-five schedule as other businesses. Now that so many of their volunteers earn paychecks during those hours, nonprofits have been forced to become much more flexible with scheduling and supervision.

"Volunteers want to give time at their convenience, which is an inconvenience for the [nonprofit's] staff," says Lt. Col. Jean Davis, assistant program director in the Salvation Army's Chicago office.

In part, this has led nonprofits to the short-project method of getting things done through volunteers. If the Special Olympics organization needs someone to design a training program to teach volunteers how to work the annual athletic event, it might recruit an instructional designer, give her the information and guidelines, and turn her loose. The designer would complete the project on her own schedule, using her professional judgment to make decisions that fit within the guidelines. The nonprofit's paid staff has little time or inclination to micromanage that assignment. You might almost call it empowerment.

Most nonprofits have cut down on the number of meetings they ask their volunteers to attend. Meetings that can't be eliminated are often scheduled for early morning or evening to accommodate those who work full time. Changes like these aren't necessarily spurred by sensitivity or brilliance on the part of the agencies: In large part, volunteers have simply demanded that nonprofits not waste their time. They'll attend a meeting if they're convinced it contributes to getting the job done. Otherwise, expect mutiny.

Andreasen says the Girl Scouts once had bi-monthly administrative meetings for staff and volunteers. The meetings were essentially information dumps. They were held mostly out of habit until some volunteers began to question the need. "People just don't have the time," Andreasen says. "Busy people will do the job because they know how to manage their time, but they still don't want to waste time in meetings." The meetings are now held quarterly.

In like manner, Andreasen streamlined the training courses she designed for volunteers. In her original design, she would include various games and exercises to illustrate the concepts and appeal to differing learning styles. But the volunteers were impatient with that approach. "We've had people say, 'Get rid of the songs and games, and give me the meat. I don't have time

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for all the rest of it," Andreasen says.

The best nonprofits not only streamline jobs and give volunteers the latitude to accomplish duties as they see fit, they also invest liberally in orientation and training. Hesselbein believes that a good orientation program is absolutely critical in holding onto—and inspiring—volunteers. It's during the orientation that volunteers learn about the mission of the organization and how their individual efforts help achieve it. No volunteer, no matter how slight or short-term his assignment, should be exempt from some type of orientation, she says.

The orientation needn't be delivered in a classroom. The Red Cross, for instance, gives most new volunteers written material and a video that briefly describe the organization and its mission. They reserve formal orientation classes for those volunteers who are assuming some sort of leadership post, such as a position on the board of directors.

But the take-home materials aren't delivered in a vacuum, Robinson says. Just about every volunteer who performs a task for the Red Cross receives some sort of training session, in which the mission—and the individual's role in accomplishing it—is emphasized.

Some of the training that volunteers receive is quite complete. In the Red Cross' blood services division, for instance, medical professionals must undergo a three-hour course to teach them to collect and screen blood. Once they pass a take-home exam, they're scheduled for a tryout on the job under the close supervision of an experienced professional who evaluates their work.

Even the volunteers who greet the donors when they come in and give them sandwiches and juice after they've given blood must go through a two-hour course. They learn the questions they must ask in order to fill out the donor information form, how to take temperatures, how long to let donors stay in the recovery room and how to watch for signs of medical distress.

Robinson acknowledges that the chapter demands a lot from its volunteers, but that hasn't seemed to drive them away. Many nonprofits these days believe that the more you ask of volunteers, the better they will perform.

FIRING VOLUNTEERS

Some exemplary nonprofits not only set high standards, they follow them up with performance appraisals. This is a management device that's relatively new for nonprofits, but it's in synch with their determination to treat volunteers as unpaid professionals.

"Each volunteer should be able to sit down and be evaluated once a year," says Herrmann. Annual performance appraisals serve the same purpose that they do in the corporate sector: They



give the supervisor a chance to evaluate the volunteer's work, and the volunteer a chance to move on to more interesting assignments. In fact, timely performance appraisals may be even more important in a nonprofit, because a disgruntled or underemployed volunteer has no financial reason to stick around.

In practice, says Forand, not every volunteer gets an annual performance appraisal; management of volunteers at her Easter Seal chapter is not that cut and dried. For instance, she says, there are some people who show up once a year to work phones for the annual fund-raising telethon. She'll thank those people, but she won't conduct a formal appraisal of their work.

She will do appraisals for short-term projects done by professionals. And she'll contact a volunteer almost immediately if he doesn't do what he pledged to do. Many times she discovers that the person would rather be handling some other task. Forand tries to get in touch at least once a year with all 475 volunteers to find out if they would like different assignments.

Many professional volunteers these days demand performance appraisals, says Kenneth J. Kovach, director of the Volunteer Center and Regional Training Center for Cleveland's United Way Services. The center provides management training for some 700 nonprofit organizations in the Cleveland area.

Kovach says some volunteers want to build up skills and experiences they can use when applying for jobs in the corporate sector. Performance appraisals can prove not only that they performed the work but that they did a good job. Some corporations that "loan" executives to nonprofits for special projects insist that performance appraisals be submitted to the loaned executive's superior. "Some are new or fast-tracking executives and [the companies] want to know how well they're doing," Kovach says.

In training sessions, the Salvation Army teaches its managers and supervisors that they should sit down informally with each volunteer four times a year simply to talk about how things are going. In addition, says Davis, managers are asked to keep a file on each volunteer, so the organization can give job references and recommendations.

Do volunteers ever get fired as a result of poor performance? Most directors of nonprofits wince at the word, but, yes, they do occasionally give people the boot. Most often, however, the managers feel that the fault is theirs if an individual who was motivated enough to volunteer in the first place isn't doing the job. It usually means the person wasn't properly placed in a position that would challenge and please her.

Davis recalls one woman who was asked to do clerical work in a Salvation Army office. But the

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woman, a bubbly sort, couldn't stop trying to join in on confidential interviewing of clients that was going on in the same office. So they made her a receptionist, put her out front and let her greet the clients. "They just had to give her a job that suited her needs," Davis says.

Perhaps the one thing that nonprofits do better than most corporations is rewarding and recognizing people. Managers in profit-making businesses understand that they're supposed to do it, too. But the urgency isn't there as long as managers know that most people will stick around for a paycheck.

"Recognition is important in business, but it's absolutely critical in volunteer management," Herrmann says.

Recognizing people in a nonprofit is a bare necessity of doing business. If volunteers don't feel appreciated, they have no reason to stay; their urge to serve humanity can be fulfilled just as well by another agency. Thus the daily or weekly compliments are essential, as well as the annual dinners, the thank-you letters, the birthday cards, the pins, the plaques and the pictures in the local newspapers.

Recognition is almost a religion within the Girl Scouts. It's something that is heavily stressed in the many management training courses the organization offers. And managers are encouraged to be as creative as possible in passing out the recognition, says Andreasen. At the end of the school year, one Girl Scouts chapter placed signs in the yards of troop leaders that said, "A special leader lives here."

The Girl Scouts also emphasizes that one size does not fit all when it comes to recognition and motivation. A plaque may delight one person and overwhelm the next. It's often best to ask the volunteer what kinds of recognition she appreciates. "Any time you have 100 volunteers, you'll get 100 answers," Andreasen says.

The American Heart Association's Summers says her chapter has started sending letters to volunteers' bosses, commending the volunteers for a particular piece of good work. And, as always, sometimes the best recognition of good work is an assignment to a new position with greater responsibility or the chance to stretch one's skills.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Granted, nothing that's been said so far is radically different from the management principles at work in private-sector businesses. Absolutely you must provide good orientation, training and job placement. Of course you should recognize each employee's contribution. Indisputably you must appraise performance regularly. So is managing a volunteer in a nonprofit organization any different from managing an employee in a profit-



making business?

No. And yes.

Management is a process of organizing work and treating people in ways that will inspire them to be as productive as possible. The Red Cross' Robinson says that during a management training exercise she once conducted, she divided paid and unpaid workers into two separate groups and asked them to come up with a list of reasons why they worked for the Red Cross. The only difference between the two lists was that the paid workers wrote down "money" as a motivator.

Before Robinson was assigned to her current duties of directing volunteer services, she worked largely with the Red Cross' paid staff. "Managing people is the same. They all must be managed with the basic understanding that they need clear objectives, feedback and opportunity for input. The main difference is that the schedule of volunteers is something you cannot control," Robinson says.

But some would say that's a significant difference. "Face time" is such a habit in the corporate sector that many managers wouldn't know how to operate if they couldn't hold a worker's salary hostage to a certain minimum number of work hours a week. Never mind the fact that this ignores individual differences in efficiency and productivity. And never mind the fact that it may actually work against any other efforts to motivate workers on the basis of nonmonetary factors.

Drucker says that managing the knowledge worker for productivity is *the* challenge of the future, says Hesselbein.

The most obvious thing that's different about managing volunteers is that nonprofits must spend much more time breaking down jobs into their component parts in order to cater to the interests and schedules of workers. They draw up specific job descriptions for volunteers, hand them over and then get out of the way. "Managing volunteers is different," Forand says. "You have to put a lot more thinking into the jobs you need to have done and how they can be marketed correctly so they will appeal to volunteers."

Keeping volunteers happy and motivated in their jobs is a key goal at the most successful nonprofits. How many profit-making businesses can say they operate for the convenience and fulfillment of their people? How many can truly say they operate to achieve a mission that is anything other than to make a profit? And yet, without an effort to do so, are profit-making businesses getting 100 percent of the commitment and effort they could get from their employees? If Drucker's right, it's a question they'll have to face soon. □

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