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WHERE ARE WE NOW?

In our AAVSC October 1974 Denver meeting, I addressed this same subject, and then I updated my perceptions in 1976 in Leadership for Volunteering. Between those two years we had gained official recognition, but it took two more years for the Dictionary of Occupational Titles to come out officially (three years behind schedule!) It has been interesting to me to note signs of progress over the years, and I believe that in spite of the very different climate for volunteering in Spring '78 from those earlier times, we have been doing an increasingly mature and effective job in our new profession, under economic and social conditions which are much less supportive of volunteering than we used to have.

Looking over the agenda for our meetings, we have been attempting to identify priority values. We really have put the horse before the cart, the why before the how to's! Our ethics statement four years ago was comparatively negative, a series of don'ts, which were reflecting our compliance with institutionalization. Now I see us seeking to identify the positives in life which we seek for the volunteers with whom we work, and even more for the people we all seek to help, not the convenience of staff, but the well-being of all concerned. A major concern was expressed well in the White House Conference for Handicapped Individuals, borrowed from the field of services for the developmentally disabled. As an occupational group I have seen us take almost a 180° turn, from insisting on conformity rigid job specification, to seeking the "least possible restrictive environment" for all persons. We show how much we value increased freedom in inverse proportion to the number of don'ts we need to express. We seem to trust volunteers more.

We are looking less at the service rendered directly for persons, although that still is terribly important to us because it is so important to the victims of disastrous or disabling circumstances. But the tasks performed don't loom as important to us as the relationships which are built through a more accurate matching of a whole-person-to-a whole-person rather than matching a skill to a task to be done. Time constraints seem to mean less than the quality of the experience for the volunteer and the "voluntee".

We still define jobs quite specifically as we seek volunteers to fill them. We haven't thrown out the job description before the idea was ever

universally accepted. But we have come to realize that the job description pictures an assignment's duties and obligations as a basis for making decisions about recruitment, placement, orientation, training and evaluation: decisions in which we and the persons with whom the volunteer will work all have a choice: the volunteer, the volunteer and the supervisor, whether that be a paid staff member or a volunteer. However, the moment a job description is inhabited, we recognize the need for flexibility to adjust it to the particular individuals involved. Ellen Straus advocates contracts, and such mutual agreements are needed, so that there are clear, mutually understood expectations on all sides. But no description fits everyone precisely.

After years of talking about career ladders, with volunteers progressing into positions of greater responsibility, in one afternoon last week I was led to question these status terms. Ian Bruce, who has the job in Great Britain most like my own, came to visit. He liked what we say about giving volunteers access to the program and policy development process, particularly in governmental programs. But he rejected the idea of upward steps: he sees instead a continuum of commitment, from almost rather casual (occasional?) to a wholehearted devotion which is dedicated to service continuity, and is based on an ever deepening commitment, rooted in the relationships, accepting obligation to take on more responsibility. This concept allows for the horizontal mobility for volunteers which I see growing as a value. The more volunteers can learn about a variety of programs, the better informed they are to take civic responsibility for policy decision-making (and influence!) Their level of commitment will vary from one assignment to another.

Focus on the people for whose benefit a service is designed has brought us as volunteer directors to see the importance of their potential as volunteers as well as volunteers. The "gift relationship" is so good for self-images that we ought to be much more imaginative about involving consumers not only in decision-making to help determine their own future, but in assuming direct responsibility for improving the prospects for someone else. We know that in our society the older person, the unemployed and the student share a common lack of identity and self esteem. Such a lack contributes to reading difficulties, depression, apathy and hostility to those more fortunate. It is perfectly feasible to create and strengthen a sense of identity for persons in volunteer roles.

At a recent conference in Washington sponsored by the American Association of Junior and Community Colleges on New Uses for Mature Ability, Maggie Kuhn, of Gray Panthers, stressed this identity crisis for the elderly, and volunteering as a way to discover and perfect skills for

new careers. The year 2020 will see an American population in which the over 65 will outnumber the rest of the population. Second and third careers can be explored through volunteering, and the counseling skills we are beginning to develop in volunteer administration are going to be more and more important for all volunteers, since more of them will fall into the older category sooner or later. This means a better quality of learning is needed because it is not only for immediate but long range needs. That conference cited the community college as able and willing to take on such curriculum for volunteers.

The Office of Education will be implementing, at long last, the Life Long Learning Act, recognizing the universal need for continuing education. Volunteering has a learning resource in these progressive institutions. It also represents a method of experiential learning which many believe is the most effective for adults as well as children.

Willard Wirtz, author of The Boundless Resource, of the National Manpower Institute, has accepted this idea, and further points out the need for all persons to "weave work, learning and leisure together throughout the life span, instead of blocking most learning into youth, work into middle years and leisure into an ever more protracted "retirement." This is a challenge to us to shake up staffing patterns to make room for part time volunteers during their leisure hours, and to integrate training for volunteers with vocational education for new careers. Although the ACTION study of 1974 points out only 2% of those volunteers were job seeking, 13% left because they had found jobs. Two questions: why don't more people see volunteering as a route into employment? Second, why do people have to stop volunteering when they take a job? Both of these challenge us as volunteer administrators to do a better job of applying the facts we know to our future planning! Volunteering can inject new enthusiasm and revitalization of a new identity for many persons who desperately need to develop or to renew faith in themselves.

Counseling is an element in our work about which we have much to learn. Not only do we have an obligation to match the present interests and skills of volunteers, but we have to anticipate their future needs and assess aptitudes as resources for services in the future. Let's think of diagnosis and analysis now as a basis for planning for the future. Our job is to help volunteers maximize their learning opportunities, and to build one on another to add up to credentials which will count in the labor market, or for academic credit. The "I Can" tools built by the Council of National Organizations for Adult Education are not only helpful in self assessment, but in planning ways to supplement what a person has learned with what the work he may aspire to will demand.

The Minnesota Governor's office and several scattered individuals have been trying to discover what skills are required for what jobs - or, to turn it around, what learnings can pay off, where. These ramifications of volunteering highlight our obligation as professionals to keep good records, help volunteers to keep their own documentation, and report our accountability for their growth on the job as well as the numbers of hours served. One of our major challenges for the future is to simplify our classification of jobs so that learning in our field is more evidently transferable to another.

The volunteer who has learned a lot from several volunteer experiences has a lot to offer in the program planning and public policy development processes. A major responsibility of our volunteer advisory councils or other feedback structures is to link these wise volunteers into the agency program and even the community planning structure. It seems that program innovation now has its roots in popular specialized causes supported by new legislation, rather than the unique needs of a particular geographic area.

Title XX of the Social Security Act is designed to allow for the participation of citizens in making and adjusting state plans for social services. We can be reasonably sure that consumers with acute needs will make them known to the planners. We can also safely assume that service providers in the voluntary sector will be on hand to tap the public funds available. Someone must set priorities and make the tough decisions. It looks very much as though this could be the informed citizen, not at risk, who will tip the scale. Are we, as professionals, preparing our volunteers for such key roles? Where will they get the facts and broad perspectives to make sound decisions? When will we and they realize the volunteer power they have?

Our economic system is increasingly fragile. Volunteering may come under increasing attack for bandaiding services which are inadequate. We could convince volunteers to go to bat for adequate staffing patterns. As we move from a material, economic growth based on built-in obsolescence to a more simplified, ecologically sound economy, volunteers will be accused of blocking employment opportunities - and like the women's movement accusations, some from economists may be all too true. But we in our discipline are in a position to set priorities, to refer volunteers to the most needful situations where their presence is less likely to be a threat to jobs. With experience in these situations, volunteers can influence public policy to increase support for adequate staff. With the slump which seems to go on and on, increasingly we face hard choices: should a person go unserved, or should we get volunteers to give the service? The key is how many part time volunteers

and coordination time does it really take to meet the need? Never, in my experience, does one volunteer substitute for one paid staff member. But the issues are much less clear cut than when times were better, and there are no simple rights and wrongs! I believe that consistent attention to the consumer needs and wants will help us sort out and rank priorities.

One "simple" factor may be the determinant in our status-seeking as a profession: we will have to earn respect by the way we behave when we produce effective volunteer services. Cliques, gossip, put-downs, personal above professional interests are not part of professional behavior, and every aspiring profession has to overcome these very human impulses in order to practice on a plane which the more experienced professions will respect. The most prestigious professions have all been humanly fallible in these ways: Max Lerner points out that it is the professional providers of medical services who have abused medical care systems far more than the afflicted consumers. Lawyers under no-fault insurance are turning to malpractice of medicine and even of law for the quick buck. Schools seem to be failing to teach, and teacher unions are stronger than professional groups, perhaps because they are more self interested. Social work in its defensiveness of turf has seemed more interested in status than in the many needs newly emerging from closets. Lerner calls it "Watergate on Main Street", but none of these disciplines seems able to police themselves, and are losing influence and respect for the concept of professionalism. Inflation, marriage failure, teenage pregnancy, youth unemployment, child and spouse abuse figures are social indices which bode ill for our whole society.

Whether piecemeal, neighborhood by neighborhood projects can reverse these trends remains to be seen. Certainly, the compassionate element in volunteering is a powerful positive force, and we have "professed" to know how to channel it effectively. If we don't, who will? Our work is cut out for us in broad societal terms for our research, our stimulation of other-centricity, our recognition of true leadership and practical examples of successful efforts to stem the tide of destructive forces. Rigid conformity is more dangerous in these fluid times of sweeping changes than change itself. We are in the position of nurturing or destroying the natural positive impulses of human beings to help one another. Here are some suggestions carrying the earlier recommendations in Leadership for Volunteering into specific activities which I believe will make us more effective professionals:

Voluntary Citizen Participation as now to be led by ACTION must involve our consumers, our volunteers and true representation across the board

from the neighborhood or community units from resource groups and providers of services. Together, we can involve people in planning for their own destiny and the quality of life in their own community. Their plans will succeed if we give the administrative support which gives each participant the feeling that the outcome depends on him.

More realistic assessment of effectiveness of volunteer services means looking at not only impact on consumers and volunteers but also on agency capacity for service, and emerging and changing community needs. This means we have to tell our story to all the interested and affected publics. And that means we need better record systems with better data as a basis for analysis and planning.

More voice for consumers in planning, with volunteers as advocates for those who cannot speak for themselves. Not planning for but with to the greatest possible extent, and convincing the public that every individual has a right to the "least restrictive environment possible."

Advocacy for tax reform which encourages support for charitable giving instead of discourages it. People have to realize that until everyone cares about this, the voluntary sector is in real jeopardy.

Better specialized reporting in language which is clear and not so specialized it has only a narrow public understanding it. Categories for services which apply universally across the spectrum of human services. Until we can talk sound figures about similar concepts, we'll continue to talk only to ourselves, and the public out there will not come to realize the scope and breadth of volunteering which gives us hope for a better future for us all.

Our personal fiscal situation is improving rapidly as the two Association of Volunteer Bureau studies done by Elizabeth Frier have shown: the median salary has risen over 50% in four years. Yet we are still losing some of our best and brightest professionals out the top of the pay ceilings for our work. There are three targets for efforts:

1. U.S. Civil Service and other governmental merit systems;
2. Deans, guidance counsellors, potential employers;
3. Colleges and universities for more upgrading opportunities and a full academic program to prepare people for professional practice of volunteer administration, with life-long education concepts.

Our corporate fiscal situation is not quite so bright, as a professional body. We need a much broader base of support. The strategies for consciousness-raising might include 1) letting classifiers and work analysts know what now is required of community based, client centered assignments with policy and planning organization responsibilities; 2) attaching our learning events to respected academic auspices for raising standards above those of free floating consultants of unknown capacities; 3) individual responsibility for nurturing research, apprenticeships, standardized terminology for record keeping and reporting - in clear non-technical language; 4) encouragement and assistance to professional groups; 5) seeking a better support system than membership fees for AAVS. We have a potential for 100,000 members in our profession. Progress among the fragmented Dovia, national specialist and voluntary organizations can be measured against that goal. It will take one for all and all for one efforts. I hope we are now mature enough to try.