

Daytime Volunteers: An Endangered Species?

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There are many misinformed opinions about volunteering in the United States, but none is so stereotyped as the idea that most volunteers are people--more specifically, women--who do not work outside the home and who therefore have the time to do their public service during the normal workday. The corollary of this image is the belief that because more and more homemakers are entering the workforce in salaried jobs, the number of volunteers is drastically declining.

First of all, the choice as to whether or not to volunteer is not a choice between working for pay or working for free. Every study and poll made in the last 20 years proves that the majority of people who volunteer are indeed employed in paying jobs and therefore volunteer in addition to other responsibilities. Men have managed to be coaches, trustees and firefighters at the same time as they have been bankers, steelworkers, and accountants. So women entering or returning to the workforce are not "lost" to volunteering, but they are perhaps no longer available from 9 to 5, Monday to Friday.

The implication of all of this is that agencies may need to evaluate their hours of operation. More volunteers (male and female) might be attracted to support an organization if there were assignments open during evening or weekend hours. After all, human needs are not suspended when an agency closes and it might

even be more effective to assist clients at times also more convenient to those clients who hold daytime jobs.

The fact is that agencies and organizations have grown complacent over the years in their recruitment of volunteers. Groups that have relied on homemakers as their main source of volunteers are faced with adaptation or dissolution. Groups that diversified their volunteer base long ago are less anxious now about where their pool of volunteers will come from.

On the other hand, homemakers still exist! They can be recruited by active outreach in such obvious places as supermarkets, pediatricians' offices, and in front of elementary schools at 2:30 p.m.! Obvious, maybe ... but all too few agencies actually get out there and ask such women to volunteer. Also, assignments need to be developed to allow women with small children to do their volunteer work together with their child or children. Or, agencies should consider providing some sort of day care (which could be done as a cooperative venture with other agencies) or at least reimbursement for babysitting expenses.

Other sources of daytime volunteers are senior citizens and students. Both these categories have been much discussed in volunteer literature during the past decade and readers are encouraged to seek out the excellent information already

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available about the recruitment of older and younger volunteers.

UNTAPPED DAYTIME VOLUNTEERS

This article, however, will deal with some other very real sources of volunteers available during the day and during the week that have rarely--if ever--been approached by organizations. A number of the ideas were contributed or elaborated upon during the workshop on this topic held at the 1984 National Conference on Volunteerism in Asheville. Once workshop participants began thinking "out of the mold," they were able to generate quite a list of possibilities for daytime volunteer recruitment.

Here is the key to unlocking the entire mystery: it is frequently overlooked that there is a large section of the workforce that simply does not work during "normal" hours. In fact, even a quick overview of common jobs shows that "normal" hours are relative indeed. Think about all the jobs that require: 1) shift work; 2) evening hours; 3) weekend days; and 4) odd or open schedules.

1) Shift Work

A wide variety of institutions and businesses in every size community function twenty-four hours a day or at least on double shift. Here is just a short list of jobs in which some workers (often two-thirds) work hours other than 9 to 5:

hospital staffs (medical to maintenance)

factories operating 24-hours a day

prison wardens

television and radio crews

nursing home and residential

treatment center personnel

police, firefighters, ambulance

corps, etc.

telephone operators

automobile service station attendants

hotel staff

overnight delivery services

highway toll collectors

airport personnel

the military

Postal Service employees (mail sorting, etc.)

public transportation drivers and dispatchers

Recognize that there are often 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. shifts, whereby people could volunteer between 3:30 and 5:00; and there are 3 p.m. to 11 p.m. shifts, leaving people free for most of the morning and early afternoon. Even the 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. shift workers do not run home to go to sleep immediately after work and might be recruited for an early morning volunteer assignment.

2) Evening Workers

The same exercise can be done for people who do not work in the evening at all, but begin much later in the day. This list includes:

dinner hour restaurant personnel

entertainers of all types

newspaper editorial and production staff

movie and theater staff

astronomers

janitorial services

security guards and night watch-people

telephone surveyors

computer services: "off time"

coders, data entry clerks, and service people

Again, since these workers generally work through the evening and perhaps until late night, they might sleep late, but not all day. Assignments in the afternoon are the most logical for this group.

3. Weekend Workers

Then there are jobs that require working on Saturday and/or Sunday, thereby giving employees a full day or two off during the week:

*parks and recreation staff
museum, zoo, or historical house
personnel
again: police, firefighters, etc.
shopping mall employees
hairstylists
church and synagogue staff
professional athletes, coaches,
etc.
librarians
salespeople in any retail store
doctors and dentists
car rental agency employees
sports and country club staff*

These are day workers who happen to be scheduled differently than most agencies--and therefore who are available to volunteer on their week-days off.

4. Odd or "Free-to-Choose" Schedules

Some employed people work on changing, inconsistent, or temporary shifts. While such odd timetables may make it difficult to place these workers into many volunteer assignments, such people are nevertheless excellent resources for volunteering that is results or product-oriented, rather than schedule-oriented. Consider:

*airline and airport personnel
substitute teachers
temporary and "on call" clerical
workers
off-shore oil rig drillers
long distance truck drivers
farmers
shipping industry workers
collection agents
university faculty*

Finally, a large number of people are free to choose their work schedules, either because they are self employed or because their income is dependent on the end result of their work rather than on a fixed schedule. Among potential recruits are:

*artists and craftspeople
consultants
sole practitioners in fields such as
accounting
anyone who works at home
scientists and researchers
top corporate executives
door-to-door salespeople
real estate agents*

HOW TO RECRUIT FROM THESE SOURCES

There is really nothing mysterious about how to recruit the people identified above. All the regular techniques of recruitment apply, except that it requires genuine outreach to spread the word that these individuals are being sought. Too many organizations think that a few posters here and there will suffice to bring in new volunteers. But passive techniques are not enough.

The volunteer recruiter has to go to potential volunteers. This may mean working at night to talk to people while they are on the job (with the permission of the employer, of course).

Notices that are targeted to the particular audience are also effective. For example, a bulletin board flyer near the time clock that says something like: "would you like to do something special on your way to work...?" can raise awareness of the opportunity to volunteer for the evening worker. Too many potential volunteers do not know that organizations are looking for them.

It is also helpful to recruit people who work in geographic proximity to an agency worksite. This means giving potential volunteers the chance to "piggyback" their service onto commuting to and from work. Besides, it is effective to use the we're-in-the-same-neighborhood approach to motivating people to volunteer. By the way, even employees on the "normal" shift might be recruited for volunteer work during their lunch

hour, if they were made aware of an agency or client close enough to their job to make the time available worthwhile.

In the last analysis, the success of volunteer recruitment depends upon three things: having something really worthwhile for volunteers to do; identifying sources of volunteers that have potential for producing the type of volunteer most sought by the agency; and getting the message across by actually asking people to volunteer.

The pool of volunteers is not "drying up" when women go to work at paying jobs. Instead, there are vast talent pools that the nonprofit community has simply never approached ... because it was easier to stick with accessible homemakers. Perhaps the new necessity to go beyond the usual will result in stronger and more diversified volunteer corps for all organizations.