

You Are Invited To A Party In Your Honor

Nancy B. Shafer

As volunteer programs become more and more complex and as volunteer directors learn an increasing amount of technical information, there is a need to keep in mind the basics of volunteer management. One of the most crucial of all the basics is *recognition*. Volunteer programs can add computers, video orientations and decentralized services, but unless volunteer directors properly and frequently recognize volunteers, they will leave through that infamous revolving door. Volunteer directors then will need to spend an increased amount of time recruiting, placing and orienting new volunteers. Anyone willing to donate time and talent deserves to be recognized.

Recognition of volunteers has always been near and dear to my heart. My first cake and punch end of year recognition was in the fall of 1976 when as a Director of Volunteer Services, I invited all my volunteers at Goodwill Industries of Des Moines. Low attendance and low enthusiasm for the event sent me back to the drawing board. My studies combined with twelve years of experience have resulted in the DOSE recognition system (D-daily activities; O-ongoing activities

with staff; S-special events; E-end of year events). This is a system I have taught using experiential methods to numerous volunteer management professionals through classes and workshops in Iowa and, most recently, to those present at the 1987 AVA Conference in Chicago. What follows is an explanation of the system and some reactions to it. So sit back, relax, and imagine all these different ideas and this party given in your honor.

DAILY ACTIVITIES

The first part of the DOSE recognition system is Daily Activities. These are small actions to convey large gratitude. Volunteers deserve to be recognized on a daily basis throughout the year. First of all, you do need a plan for what you will do and when you will do it. Secondly, you need to ask the following questions before you plan any activities:

1. What is the budget? Is it within your recognition budget guidelines?
2. What is the preparation time?
3. What is the implementation time?
4. Will some of the volunteers enjoy the activity?

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Here are some examples of daily recognition activities:

Activity	Explanation
1. Individually wrapped hard candy with photocopied message stapled to it.	1. At holiday times or for National Volunteer Week. In a bowl next to sign-in book.
2. Birthday cards to volunteers.	2. Administrative volunteer tracks all volunteers' birthdays on birthday calendar. Design contest for card once a year. Photocopy in your organization. Birthday volunteer prepares cards and gives them to Volunteer Services staff one week in advance of birthday.
3. Thank You Gram Board and Thank You Gram section in Volunteer Newsletter.	3. Design Thank You Gram using clip art or call on a volunteer for the design. Distribute Thank You Grams to people receiving service from volunteers. Post returned Thank You Grams on bulletin board. Print contents in Volunteer Newsletter.
4. Homemade Cookie Week.	4. Staff from departments assisted by volunteers bring homemade cookies for volunteers.
5. Self Help Tips.	5. Appropriate tips photocopied on one sheet of colored paper. Available at sign-in book or distributed through a mailing.
6. Bookmarks.	6. Volunteer designs bookmark with appropriate quote. Photocopied and distributed to volunteers.
7. Photo display.	7. Volunteer takes pictures of volunteers and then creates bulletin board or Newsletter insert.
8. Flower Give Away.	8. Volunteers bring in garden flowers. Distribution of flowers at an event or during a regular week in volunteer office.
9. Exotic Beverage Week.	9. Pots of hot water are available for volunteers to create their choice of beverage. Choices range from unusual teas to instant soups to flavored coffees.
10. Nifty Notes.	10. Volunteer creates stationery for Director of Volunteer Services. Director sets weekly quota for personal notes to volunteers. (Director may go home Friday evening after quota is completed.)

ONGOING ACTIVITIES WITH STAFF

The second element of the DOSE recognition system is Ongoing Activities with Staff. Activities in this section include arrangements made with staff to develop a good working relationship between staff and volunteers. (Note: In this section the word "staff" refers to staff members within your organization who directly or indirectly work with or are affected by volunteers. Volunteer Services staff are not included in this group.)

It is often assumed that good relationships will exist between staff and volunteers. It is my feeling that nurturing activities are necessary to enhance this not-made-in-heaven relationship. Staff often feel threatened by volunteers and they lack skills in giving feedback to volunteers. The following activities will help you to create a good volunteer/staff working relationship:

Activity	Explanation
1. Inclusion of staff in daily activities (mentioned in the last section).	1. Invite staff to activities. This recognizes volunteers by saying staff cares; recognizes staff by saying the volunteer department cares; and increases staff awareness of volunteers.
2. Staff training session on recognition of volunteers.	2. Plan and develop a ten-minute dog and pony show on methods staff may wish to use to recognize volunteers. Schedule this session with numerous departments. Consider video taping it.
3. Feedback sheets.	3. Administrative volunteer distributes these sheets on a monthly basis to key staff who work with volunteers. Volunteer tallies results. Questions include: With your volunteers— a. What is going well? b. What needs improvement? c. What changes do you recommend? d. Other comments:
4. Recognition ceremony for staff who volunteer in the community.	4. Administrative volunteer coordinates this event. Discovers which staff volunteers. Develops publicity and certifies for event.
5. Host JAVFAH* day (* Join A Volunteer For An Hour).	5. Plan a day where staff shadow volunteers for an hour. Honor staff who participate.

SPECIAL EVENTS

The third section of the DOSE system is Special Events. These are low hassle, low cost events scheduled throughout the year to honor volunteers and to help volunteers build relationships with each other. A Special Events committee (composed of volunteers) plans and implements activities keeping in mind the four

questions mentioned under Daily Activities. During the past eight years when I have had a Special Events Committee, the retention rate has increased in my volunteer program and many volunteers have commented on how many friends they have made in the volunteer program. Special events ideas:

Activity	Explanation
1. Attend existing community activities as a group.	1. Publicize activity. Meet and attend activity as a group. Examples: School concert, travel show, art show, holiday event.
2. Happy Birthday Potluck.	2. Publicize event. Sit according to birthday month. Organization orders cake.
3. Brown bag lunch with administration.	3. Low hassle/low cost way to increase communication between volunteers and administration.
4. Educational event - A Thinking Thank You.	4. Uses education as a means to draw people together and to learn something to benefit their performance as a volunteer. Iowa City Mercy Hospital can provide you with sample programs.
5. Paperback book exchange.	5. Volunteers bring in books to donate one week. Receive card with number of books they brought. Volunteers return next week to cash in their card for different books.
6. Movies and popcorn.	6. Popcorn and check out movies from your library.
7. National Volunteer Week Celebration.	7. Buttons. Ribbons. Signs. Pictures. Celebrate this week with class and charm. (Usually scheduled the 3rd week in April.)

END OF YEAR EVENT

The last element of the DOSE system is the End of the Year event held to honor volunteers. It is important to:

1. host one big event each year.

2. invite to speak briefly: administrator and president of your organization.
3. give a tangible favor.
4. present a meaningful program which will draw crowds. (This is a difficult challenge.)

5. involve key staff who work with volunteers.
6. include a mixer so participants will have yet another chance to meet each other.
7. focus on volunteers using humor.

8. be extremely creative.
9. involve a committee composed of volunteers to complete #1-8.

Ideas for end of year recognitions with themes follow:

Event	Explanation
1. Academy Awards for Volunteers.	1. Based on Hollywood's version, recognize volunteers in a flashy manner with key presentors in black tie garb. Each printed program has paper sunglasses that volunteers put on whenever anyone is honored.
2. Homecoming.	2. Based on high school class reunions, each volunteer sits with the group marked with the year each member joined the organization. Program involves looking back at good memories.
3. Volunteer County Fair.	3. Based on county fairs, volunteers dress accordingly. Booths presenting information about the organization's programs are scattered throughout the room.
4. Holiday Related theme.	4. Based on any holiday, volunteers feel the holiday spirit. Thanksgiving in June is an example.

In order to implement your version of the DOSE recognition system into your program, you need to pick and choose what you like about it, and then plug and chug dates into your already busy calendars. As always, volunteers are our best resource for successful implementation of this program.

After all this information was presented at my workshops, I then staged a cake and punch end of year event, involving workshop participants. Each received a plastic heart favor, a heartfelt handshake, a piece of cake, a cup of punch and a certificate. They heard abbreviated versions of entertainment and the president's speech. They saw a portion of a slide show. And, of course, they were

thanked. Both at Iowa workshops and at the AVA Conference, there were many reactions to the question "How did you feel about each of the variety of ways you were recognized?" Reactions were as follows:

1. It takes more than cake and punch to honor today's volunteers. They need highly creative and meaningful programs.
2. Some love certificates. Some hate certificates. Some talk about a wall filled with framed certificates. Some talk about a drawer crammed full of unwanted certificates.
3. The idea of volunteers planning their own recognition is controver-

sial. Some love the idea. Some feel it is not fair. (Note—my answer to negative reaction to this idea is a question: do you like to be asked what you would like as a birthday gift?)

4. The use of photography throughout the year is appealing.
5. Many agreed that spending more administrative staff time to plan recognition and involving volunteers, both in planning and implementation was food for thought.
6. Many remarked on the wealth of ideas. People left inspired and ready to increase recognition efforts.

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Take some time and decide what DOSE of recognition your volunteer program needs. Talk to your volunteers, your key staff and your boss about recognition. Evaluate what you are currently doing and improve it. Here's hoping you have enjoyed this DOSE system and the description of . . .

A PARTY IN YOUR HONOR.