

Marketing Volunteerism: A Values Exchange

Jeanne H. Bradner

Too often those of us in the social service sector see so many needs in the constituency we serve that we think all volunteers should be ready to drop everything and jump in and help. We clearly see the needs of the constituency and the mission of the agency, and yet we fail to make sure that we understand the needs and values of our volunteers. Rather, we assume that our volunteers have the same values that we do and are frustrated when they don't react in the same way we do.

If marketing is indeed a values exchange or a values enhancement, then the better we understand the needs and values of the volunteer and can match them to the needs and values of the agency, the more successful we will be. I learned long ago in dealing with paid employees that if we can find an employee's definition of success and help him or her see that the job we have can aid on that road to success, the happier the employee will be. How much truer that is for the volunteer who doesn't have a salary to compensate for dissatisfaction!

Recently, I wrote a job description for a director of volunteers. This was motivated by a friend of mine who had taken a job directing volunteers and loved it, but said to me "why isn't there a good job description which indicates how many skills we must hone to be effective?" The job description "want ad" I devised follows:

WANTED: A manager and developer of resources valued at millions of dollars. Good communications skills, oral and written, are required, as well as a

thorough knowledge of community needs and services. *Applicant must have an understanding of marketing principles to promote exchange of implicit and explicit benefits.* Applicant must have the ability to work with people from all racial, economic, ideological, age and social backgrounds. Applicant must have a knowledge of psychology, participatory planning, motivation and human values. Applicant must possess the ability to lead and motivate others; be able to delegate authority; survive ambiguity; and be innovative and creative. Applicants must strive for the highest standards in preservation of human dignity, personal privacy, self determination and social responsibility.

The significance of values is very clear when we serve on boards of directors or public boards. We see that the hardest conflicts to overcome are conflicts of values. A factual question is easy to resolve. Do we have enough money? All we have to do is check the budget. The question of methods for getting more money can be covered by laying out the alternatives: governmental grants and private funds. But it's when we get to the hard values questions and a board member says loudly "I don't believe in accepting government funds; we should raise all our money privately" that the conflict becomes intense. The values inherent in believing government should or should not fund programs are based on a person's background, political beliefs and lessons learned day by day in the struggle to come to terms with life.

Jeanne H. Bradner is Director of the Governor's Office of Voluntary Action in Illinois. Her experience in both the governmental and private nonprofit sectors has contributed to her recognition of the importance of matching the needs and values of an organization with the needs and values of an individual in order to be successful. She is currently an active volunteer in several organizations, including Program Chair of the 1987 National Conference on Volunteerism.

For example, take the following list and rank which five values are the most important to you. Then ask a friend to do the same.

CREATIVITY: having imagination or intellectual inventiveness

RELIGION: belief in divine or super human powers

HEALTH: physical and mental soundness

LOVE: deep personal attachment to a person(s)

HUMANITARIANISM: concern about the welfare of mankind

LOYALTY: faithfulness to a cause, duty, person

ACHIEVEMENT: accomplishing something that is successful

SKILL: ability or proficiency

WISDOM: power to judge rightly

SECURITY: freedom from fear, danger, doubt

POWER: great ability to do, act, or produce

WEALTH: abundance of worldly possessions

PEACE: concord, harmony

INTEGRITY: moral soundness

JUSTICE: equity, fairness, impartiality

LEARNING: to gain knowledge

INDEPENDENCE: freedom from control by others

PLEASURE: gratification of the senses

RECOGNITION: to acknowledge as worthy

BEAUTY: that which is pleasing to the eye, ear and mind

Almost never have I known two people to rank exactly the same values in the same order, for our values system is uniquely US; it reflects those motivations that drive us. It shows those qualities we would like to be honored for on our tombstone and in our eulogy.

If you discuss these values with your friend, you will find that interpretations of these words differ. For example "POWER" to some people means the ability to organize others and mobilize them to solve problems. To another the word POWER means oppressing others and forcing or coercing them to do only as you wish.

This exercise is helpful in permitting us to see that we all have different values. None of those listed is per se "good" or "bad," but different people revere and honor different concepts based on their life experience.

Values are essential to living a meaningful life, and the way we live up to our values increases our self esteem, develops our personal strengths and expands our personal potential. We only have to look back to our elementary psychology courses to remember Maslow and his hierarchy of needs. Once we are guaranteed survival, safety and security, we need to love and belong; to increase our self esteem; to actualize our talents; and to fulfill ourselves.

If we are really managers of people, we want our volunteers to live up to their values, develop their self esteem and fulfill their potential; for then they will do the very best job possible for our agency. While I am certainly not suggesting that we give the values "test" to our volunteers, sensitive directors of volunteers will try to tune in to prospective volunteers' "values" during the interview process. The person who values achievement would not be happy in a job where he or she does not learn. The person who values creativity might help with the newsletter. The person who values beauty might work best at the art institute. The list goes on and on.

When we do needs assessments for volunteer jobs, we should think as we prepare the job descriptions what people with what values might be happiest doing those jobs. We can then do targeted re-

cruitment aimed at those kinds of people.

We talk again and again about recognition in the volunteer field. The greatest recognition we can give people is to understand, from the beginning, their uniqueness and help them to give the gift of themselves to our agencies. If we aren't flexible, creative and open with those we work with, we are shortchanging them and our agency. True leaders are enablers! A marketing approach—values enhancement—can be a powerful way to enable.