

Social Marketing: Get the Credit You Deserve Inside Your Organization

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INTRODUCTION

Marketing through personal communication is an effective tool for publicizing volunteer program successes and improving staff or volunteer attitudes toward the program. The principles of marketing provide volunteer managers with a technique for promoting their programs to the most important customers: staff and volunteers. Marketing, "the art of making selling unnecessary" (Drucker, 1990), provides a plan for taking advantage of every opportunity to communicate the program's strong points to individuals or groups. Successful marketing will make each constituency realize how the volunteer program benefits them. This, in turn, will lead to decision-making which benefits the volunteer program.

SOCIAL MARKETING TO CHANGE BEHAVIOR

Volunteer managers are often put in the position of having to convince people (volunteers) to believe in a cause or even in a particular method for accomplishing a task. This is not done through force, but through personal communication. When new volunteers go through orientation training, they receive a blueprint of the social milieu within the organization. By the end of the training session new volunteers must believe in the mission of the organization. Another facet of the volunteer manager's role is to convince staff of

the value of the volunteer program and to educate them to see the positive aspects of the program. Social marketing provides a basis for understanding how to accomplish these attitude and behavior changes.

Social marketing through personal communication involves three key steps that interact with the marketing plan described below.

First, personal communication entails numerous, diverse, and continuous interactions between the communicator and the recipient, or the target adopter. Thus, two participants in the communication process give and receive immediate and continuing feedback about each other's needs and reactions.

Second, because of the interactive nature of personal communication, the personal communicator has the opportunity to initiate, build, and maintain a full range of relationships with the target adopter. The deeper the relationship, the better the chance that the communicator can achieve the objective of the campaign.

Third, as interactions increase and intensify, the target adopter's sense of obligation "to return the favor" grows and brings him or her closer to adopting the social product. (Kotler, 1989) Because of the extent of personal involvement inherent in these steps, it is critical to convert people so that they will also serve as personal communicators on behalf of the program.

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HOW TO PROMOTE PROGRAM SUCCESS

Prepare to put personal communication marketing to work by describing and quantifying the volunteer program's strong points both formally and informally. Determine which parts of the program are most appealing. These might include: services provided, size and scope of program, number of volunteers, length of service or strength of volunteer commitment, amount of money raised, number of phone calls received, number of visitors, number of clients served, number and type of thank you notes received, number of volunteers responding to recruitment ad, number of volunteer hours, number of volunteers below age 65, number of minority volunteers, etc. By comparing the monetary value of volunteer hours with the volunteer program budget, the volunteer manager can also determine the return on investment for the organization.

These statistics, especially when they counteract negative stereotypes, will help to show others how successful the program really is. Although word of mouth is a very effective means of communication, other methods, such as newsletters, memos, fact sheets, graphics, survey results, or public celebrations of volunteer achievements will enhance the marketing strategy.

Improving the image of the volunteer program inside the organization is reflected in the positive attitudes of both staff and volunteers, which in turn result in an improved public image, easier recruitment, and increased influence with decision-makers.

It is important to look at all facets of the program's image. In a 1975 survey of major American corporations, the most frequently described association with IBM was not computers, but the dress standards and professional image of IBM's representatives. Because 83% of the decisions we make each day are made with our eyes, the people in the survey concluded that "any company that establishes and enforces high standards in the areas of dress and visual image must make superior products." (Gee, 1991) The

image projected by the volunteer program staff and program materials can enhance or contradict the program's effectiveness.

THE EFFECTIVE MARKETING PLAN

Survey/study the market to determine who I need to advertise my success to.

The quality of any program is what the customer/constituent says it is. To find out how the program is viewed, conduct a written or oral survey, research past complaints about the program, listen to others when they talk about the program, look for nonverbal cues. For example, the following people are exhibiting their attitudes toward, and expectations of, volunteers: On Halloween, a staff person comes to work dressed in a 1940s style suit, with a mink stole, white gloves, and a name badge that reads "volunteer." A staff person states: "This is a boring, rote job; let's get a volunteer to do it." A Volunteer Coordinator comes to work in jeans and T-shirts while other volunteers dress more formally.

Areas to survey include staff attitudes toward volunteers, perceived value of the program, expectations of volunteers, familiarity with volunteer accomplishments and skills, and perceptions of the program's goals.

Segment the market to determine how many different groups I should market to.

Based on the survey results from step one, look at each attitude type and consider where their attitudes are coming from. Try to segment people into several defined groups such as: new staff, staff with more than 10 years of service, supervisors or department heads, staff who work directly with volunteers, etc.

Target the groups to market to by assessing resources, potential for success, and where the need is most critical.

Look at the people in each segment and estimate their comfort zone, ego, self-image, and other influences. Because of the "85/15 formula" which says that "we make decisions based 85% on our feelings and only 15% on the . . . facts" (Gee, 1991), it is important to understand why each

segment feels as it does. For example, do they feel that their jobs are threatened by volunteers? What type of daily contact do they have with volunteers? What do they hear from other staff, including the volunteer department? How are volunteers viewed/treated by the organization?

Resources might include other staff, volunteers, an organizational newsletter, a board member, someone who has standing within the organization and/or wants to see the program grow, opportunities for publicity, etc. Explore ways to provide information, increase knowledge, and change attitudes.

Design the marketing strategies by defining goals and tools.

The marketing strategy serves as a road map. It shows how to get where you want to go and helps you to avoid detours that will interfere with your goals. Although goals may not be measurable, there should be a way to appraise and judge your progress. Both the volunteer manager and his/her supervisor may need to be educated to recognize and accept the results of the marketing strategy. For example, the number of staff with positive attitudes will increase from 50 to 80%, staff will no longer refer to volunteers as "blue-haired ladies," increased support from top management, increased staff attendance at volunteer recognition events, increased program credibility reflected in a larger program budget or salary increase for volunteer manager. Plan how to share a "fact of the week" or praiseworthy volunteer story with as many people in your target group as possible. Share the facts that counteract negative stereotypes.

SAMPLE MARKETING PROBLEMS AND STRATEGIES

Problem: Staff view volunteers as old and inept. Volunteers are on duty from 10 A.M. to 9 P.M., with retirees covering the day shifts, and a younger, more dynamic group covering the evening shifts. Since most staff work during the day, they only see the older volunteers. *Strategy:* The volunteer manager made a point of highlighting the activities of younger volun-

teers, and involving them on staff projects whenever possible. Younger volunteers were encouraged to act as representatives at key events. Whenever possible, the volunteer manager emphasized "our younger volunteers work in the evenings and on weekends."

Problem: The boss has a poor image of the volunteer program. She micromanages the volunteer manager and seems to have little respect for the program. *Strategy:* The volunteer manager explored other volunteer programs in order to make favorable comparisons. The volunteer manager determined what the boss needed from the program to make the boss look good in front of peers and superiors, and then provided volunteer program facts and statistics in several different formats, including anecdotes that highlighted the volunteers' commitment. When a complaint arose, the volunteer manager alerted the boss ahead of time with an explanation ready for her to use when talking to superiors or other staff. The volunteer manager offered to handle a problem volunteer and then provided a clear and concise report detailing the positive results. The volunteer manager shared specific knowledge of the volunteers to provide the boss with opportunities to congratulate or praise individual volunteers on their performance or on an event that occurred outside the organization.

Problem: Although the volunteer program budget is smaller than any other, it is a difficult fight each year to maintain the previous year's total. The budget department doesn't understand how the volunteers contribute to the organization. *Strategy:* The volunteer manager began publishing monthly statistical summaries of every volunteer activity. A salary survey of local businesses was done to determine how much it would cost to pay staff to do what the volunteers were providing at a minimal cost. Other staff were recruited to support the program in discussions with the budget department. Following each special event or project, the names of the volunteers and staff who had worked on the project were publicized. A key part of the strategy involved recruiting volunteers to assist with the

budget department's most frustrating and time-consuming tasks. When the new budget department volunteers were unable to work, the staff truly missed them and recognized their value.

Problem: Volunteers are "invisible" to staff. *Strategy:* The volunteer manager publicized a survey of available volunteer skills and educational backgrounds with a note offering to assign these volunteers where needed. In all correspondence, the volunteer manager referred to "volunteer staff and paid staff." The volunteer guidelines and professional standards were shared with staff. At staff meetings, in memos, or informally, the volunteer manager highlighted a special skill or described how a volunteer had resolved a problem.

CONCLUSION

The volunteer manager must acknowledge the stereotypes and misperceptions expressed about the volunteer program in order to devise a strategy to combat them. Promoting the volunteer program is accomplished through a steady campaign of quantifiable data and "sound bites"

communicated to staff and volunteers. The image projected by the volunteer manager and his/her staff must be professional and positive in order to enhance the message.

Unfortunately, many volunteer managers are suffering from varying degrees of burnout, an "I couldn't dare ask for that . . ." mentality, and an inability to overcome staff-volunteer hostility. Although they are skilled in managing volunteers, too many volunteer managers do not attempt to use their skills on staff. By working to promote the quality of their program, volunteer managers and volunteers will reap tremendous benefits. Volunteer managers must take they lead in educating others concerning the value of volunteers.

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