

It Starts With You . . . The Volunteer Administrator

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INTRODUCTION

We know how important our profession is. Yet we are often frustrated in trying to communicate its significance to our bosses, our board chairs, our funders, the not-for-profit and government community and, even, our families and friends. How we cringe when someone says, "we ought to start a volunteer program" and turns to someone on staff and says, "in your spare time, won't you look after the volunteers?"

We cringe, too, when we see that fundraisers, on the average, are paid almost twice as much as volunteer administrators when we know that volunteer administrators are responsible for generating \$176 billion in in-kind human resources—the equivalent of nine million full-time employees. (Source: Independent Sector, 1992 Giving and Volunteering in the United States.)

We know that our jobs take the most delicate and sensitive skills in human resource management because we must give our human resources a "motivational paycheck" that keeps them coming back.

The thesis here is that in order to build the kind of respect we want for our profession, "It starts with us . . . the volunteer administrator"—we need to think about ourselves and how we advocate forcefully for

the profession and its integral role in helping to meet the many needs in our society.

The things we can do are:

- (1) Acknowledge our skills
- (2) Be proud of our job description
- (3) Be a spokesperson for our ethics
- (4) Renew our competencies
- (5) Advocate for our profession

ACKNOWLEDGE OUR SKILLS

Workshop participants looked over the following list of words. Very quickly we checked any that seemed appropriate in describing our work, and we also felt free to add any that were left out:

Resource Developer
Manager
Human Resources Director
Leader
Coordinator
Motivator
Communicator
Psychologist
Community Organizer
Trouble Shooter
Buffer

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Advocate
Planner
Consensus Builder
Needs Assessor
Trainer
Evaluator
Matchmaker
Lobbyist

All agreed that these words are appropriate, and a few more words were added, including Negotiator and Mediator.

We then all agreed that this is a significant list of skills that we have developed in our jobs—many of the same skills that are necessary in top manager/leader positions.

BE PROUD OF YOUR JOB DESCRIPTION

We then reviewed a job description for a volunteer administrator which I had written years ago. This came about because a friend of mine was a new volunteer administrator. She called and told me how much she loved the job but said, "you never told me how difficult it would be." With my tongue slightly in my cheek, I wrote this want ad for a volunteer administrator and sent it to her:

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 an understanding of psychology, participatory planning, motivation and human values. Applicant must possess the ability to lead and inspire others; be able to delegate authority; survive ambiguity; and be innovative and creative. Applicant must strive for the highest standards of human dignity, personal privacy, self determination and social responsibility.

BE A SPOKESPERSON FOR YOUR ETHICS

We then discussed the need to articulate the ethical framework in which we manage our program. Some items to be included in our ethical statement are:

- Our philosophy of volunteerism
- Concern about human dignity: volunteer/paid staff/recipient
- Self determination: involvement of paid staff, volunteers and recipient in decisions affecting them
- Respect for privacy and confidentiality
- Enhancement of volunteer/paid staff relations
- Equal opportunity/cultural diversity

We then discussed how when we have developed and articulated our ethics, we are able to be spokespersons for them in our organizations, thereby gaining more respect for volunteerism and our own roles.

RENEW COMPETENCIES

We reviewed the AVA summary of competencies and acknowledged the need for constant renewal of those competencies through reading, training, observing and joining support groups of peers.

ADVOCACY

We then broke into small groups and discussed things we could do to advocate on behalf of our profession. Some items mentioned were:

- Join professional associations
- Compute the dollar value of volunteer time; give to the board of directors regularly
- Ask to serve on your agency's long-range planning committee
- Have a board member serve as your volunteer development chair

- Find out the dreams of board and staff and implement some through a volunteer program
- Work for legislation that promotes volunteerism
- Encourage others to join the profession through job fairs and career counseling
- Encourage funders to demand proof of volunteer involvement in programs
- Network—not just with other volunteer administrators, but also with journalists, fundraisers, executive directors, foundation executives

- Give workshops and speeches
- Write articles and letters to the editor
- Work on your CVA
- Encourage college courses in volunteer administration

CONCLUSION

If we can do these things, we will gain more respect for our profession and ourselves. But, most important, we will build a stronger vision of and commitment to the capacity volunteers have to make positive changes in our society.

CORRECTION

In Margaret Helman's article, "Volunteers Active and Eager in Australia," published in the Winter 1992-1993 *Journal*, the last sentence of the "History" section (page 22) should have read:

The economic recession, continued with high unemployment, is giving volunteering a new appeal.

The Journal regrets the error.