

# Pulling a Volunteer Out of Your Hat ... Working With Television and Radio to Recruit, Recognize and Retain Volunteers

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In our media-managed world, most of us can recite the 3 Rs of environmental awareness—reduce, reuse and recycle. But what about the 3 Rs of volunteer awareness—recruit, recognize, retain. The media has played a big part in repeating the message “reduce, reuse, recycle:” so much so, in fact, that people of all ages get the environmental message. By learning to work with television and radio, you can get your volunteer message to the masses. Your program will experience magic results.

There are many methods for getting your message to the community and many non-profit volunteer agencies find the electronic media (television and radio) to be challenging and rewarding. Working effectively with local and national electronic media does not have to involve smoke and mirrors—an organized, well thought out media campaign will recruit new volunteers as well as recognize and retain existing volunteers.

## PLAN + ORGANIZE = MAGIC

The magic formula can work only with lots of emphasis on planning and organizing. Sometimes, with all the hours of organizing and planning, even the most thought-out campaigns have no magic! The key to MAKING MEDIA MAGIC is creative, innovative, showstopping planning and organizing. It's all in the cards.

## GETTING STARTED – MAKE A PLAN

David Copperfield had a plan. Before the world famous magician could sell out theatres, he had to learn his craft, practice before mirrors, listen to honest feedback from small audiences and stay dedicated. He was the Rocky Balboa of the magician set—he set a goal and couldn't quit. After Copperfield became successful he had to continually revise his act and keep it current—even if it meant bringing motorcycles on stage. Just because he could make his assistant disappear and motorcycles disappear didn't make him a hit in every theatre. Today, Copperfield succeeds as an innovator, a talented professional who knows his audiences are fickle. It's a recession out there and entertainment dollars are hard to come by—audiences choose their performances carefully; television schedulers are constantly seeing new acts. In today's competitive world, Copperfield is creative, innovative and showstopping.

## LISTEN, LOOK, LEARN

Just like magician David Copperfield, volunteer managers have to look at their media campaign plans with care as well as creative, innovative, showstopping detail. If you are developing a brand new program, start small and learn about the field of volunteer management and what makes your organization special/different/unique/showstopping in your community. Listen to what your clients have

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said or what your volunteers say. All TV and radio stations are looking for an angle—what is unique about this story? What's the hook? (Trick: Read newspaper headlines—there's usually a hook in the headline to get you to read the article. Listen to the documentary show line-up—a teaser line entices you to stay tuned to the show and listen. If you stay tuned, the hook has worked!)

Television and radio producers choose or reject a story based on whether their listeners will stay tuned or not.

### BACK TO SCHOOL

Start with the basics when building your media campaign. You may know everything there is to know about your agency and your need for volunteers but take the blinders off. (Trick: Pretend you know nothing about the program—ask friends who have no connection with your agency what they think is newsworthy about your agency.) Remember, your goal is to work with the electronic media in recruiting, recognizing and retaining volunteers in your agency.

### SET A GOAL

As in any planning exercise it is important to set a goal and to establish steps towards reaching that goal. If you want to recruit 15 new volunteers write that down. Remember that a goal must be specific, measurable, achievable. If you want to retain five volunteers from a specific campaign, write that down, and plan to work towards the successful achievement of that goal. If the goal for your media campaign is to recognize the positive impacts of your volunteer team, write that down and celebrate when you achieve the goal. (Trick: Write goals and objectives and post them in a place where they can easily be seen and reviewed.)

### ORGANIZE IT RIGHT

You've done the brainstorming—you know what your hook is, what your message is, what the goal is of your media campaign. Now you've got to take the time to

set out the steps, mobilize the people and the resources needed to assist you in achieving those goals and get ready to attract the attention of the electronic media.

### HITTING THE BULLSEYE

Target the programs as well as TV and radio people who may be of assistance to you. Call up the stations. Get names of program producers or assignment editors, news editors or hosts. (Trick: Contact names in stations may change—make sure your contact listing is up to date. Always keep an eye and ear open for new shows.)

Send out a media release (trick: media release always answers WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY) and follow it up with a personal phone call. When calling a reporter or news editor, keep your call short and beware of calling too often.

Target stations that feature stories and programs dealing with your agency's clients. For example, if you are recruiting volunteers to work as ushers for the seniors health lecture series, you may not get a lot of response from the campus radio station. (On the other hand the college may have a gerontology program, or there could be a good number of mature students who listen to alternative radio—remember the key to magical media touring is to be creative and innovative!)

Target new and up-and-coming programs that may be looking for something in your area. Write a query letter. Suggest a story outline for a series. Watch the program. Listen to the program. Know their format and how a feature story on your volunteer program might suit the TV or radio broadcast. Broaden the outlook of local stations. If your agency recruits volunteers to work with recovering drug abusers, a profile of your agency may fit in nicely with a week long series during drug awareness week.

Target the players within your agency that can help you with achieving the goals of the campaign. Are there staff people who would make good interview material? Are there dynamic volunteers

whose stories will touch listeners and make them want to volunteer with you? (Trick: Radio and television are emotional media—work with voice, sound, visual effects.)

#### YOU'RE GONNA BE A STAR— TIPS ON PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

As Janis Joplin once said, "Don't compromise yourself baby, you're all I've got." Congratulations! Your media release gathered some attention and the local radio station has invited you to talk with the interviewer in the studio. Nervous? Don't be. Before the interview, be prepared.

*Write all your important points on a piece of paper:*

- WHAT is your message or focus
- WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY about the message
- ALL the positives
- ALL the negatives

*Ask the reporter for his/her questioning line:*

- What questioning line will the reporter pursue? Most interviewers will share their questions with you before the interview so you can prepare.

*Keep in mind:*

- Never assume the reporter knows your job, your agency, your volunteers. Give him/her background and a written fact sheet.

*You're on tape:*

- Think before you talk. If a reporter calls and the tape is rolling, ask if you can clarify the facts and call back.
- We are living in a "global village," so everything that you say to your local media can show up on national or international television screens ... watch what you say and HOW you say it!

*Practice how you sound:*

- A nervous, tense voice comes across on radio. Get your voice warmed up—"red leather yellow leather" repeated aloud several times gets the voice warmed up and ready.
- Tape yourself on a tape recorder.
- If you feel your voice is racing, take a deep breath and slow down.

*Pay attention to how you look:*

- Visual impressions count on TV.
- Wear solid colors or not-too-busy prints—no checked prints or solid black or solid white.
- Avoid jangling bracelets and dangling earrings.
- Keep your hair simple.
- If you're wearing a short skirt, avoid crossing your legs.
- If you are wearing pants, check the length of socks when you are sitting.
- Try not to fidget—hold your hands together in your lap if you are uncomfortable.
- Practice before your interview ... you should be confident in your material so you do not have to hold fact sheets. If fact sheets are important for correct background statistics record them on index cards.
- Keep answers short and to the point.
- Concentrate on avoiding "ums" and "ahs."
- The best way to make the most impact on television is to practice. Ask a friend or a co-worker to tape your mock television interview, concentrate on your message, how you come across, how you look, what you could improve before the real taping at the station.

#### THE GRAND FINALE ...

There's nothing up your sleeve, but media magic can happen with creative, innovative, showstopping planning and organizing. So when you take your Recruit, Recognize, Retain Show out on the road, save the front row seats for your volunteers—they deserve the best seats in the house.