

THE AGENCY BOTTLENECK*

by

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My assigned subject is Public Relations, Recruitment, and Motivational Techniques. But I shall not talk about how agencies can stimulate the mass media to recruit volunteers. Newspapers are willing to give us space. Radio and television stations are willing to give us time. It is we who are unwilling for them to do so.

A National Advertising Council Campaign to recruit volunteers had been contemplated for the fall of 1970. It was postponed to the spring of 1971. Why? Because the agencies could not gear up to receive the large numbers expected to request assignment.

It has been indicated that the campaign would not be ready in the spring. It was announced, in response to recommendations, that the Campaign would be postponed again, to the fall of 1971. Agency representatives greeted this news with sighs of relief, not sighs of regret.

There is a problem in public relations, but the problem is not the reluctance of the media. It is we, the agencies, the professionals, who are reluctant.

I shall not talk about techniques for recruiting the citizenry. They are ready. A poll showed them ready two years ago. We did not need a poll to tell us this. We knew it. Experienced coordinators of volunteer services have long warned the neophyte, "Don't use the media unless you want more volunteers than you can place."

I shall not talk about how to motivate volunteers to share their time and skills on behalf of agency clients. There is motivation enough to help the dependent and the disabled, to reach out to society's rejects. It is the professionals in social agencies who must be motivated to share their time and skills to make voluntary action a reality. It is the agency which must be motivated to create channels for citizen contact and to accept new models for citizen service.

The problem is not that agencies fail to appreciate that volunteers can help their clients. The problem is that professionals fear the untrained volunteer will hurt, rather than help. The problem is that agencies fear a lowering of standards unless they can find the time and energy to select and match, to orient and train, to guide and supervise. The problem is that agencies fear that acceptance of a volunteer means endorsement of that volunteer and one must take time to pretest a product he will endorse.

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Are the fears justified? They are, if the professional seeks to utilize the volunteer in a professional role. They are, if the professional seeks to mold the volunteer into his own image, or into that part of his image which will substitute as his legs, or eyes, or ears. But there are other roles. There are citizen roles, friendship roles, kinship roles.

The fears are justified, too, if the agency, by designating the volunteer as an agency volunteer, invests him with the authority of the agency and requires the agency client to accept an agency service from an untrained volunteer. But volunteers who are to serve as friends need not be given the authority of the agency. Volunteers who perform services often rendered by neighbors, can have their roots outside the agency. Volunteers need not be agency volunteers.

Persons in the affluent, or "option society," normally render and receive many volunteer services from each other. Their adolescents are helped to find jobs. Their children learn to read before they enter school. But the friends and relatives of the deprived and disadvantaged do not have the capacity to render these volunteer services, because in our stratified society they, too, are deprived and disadvantaged. How will the illiterate mother teach her child? How will the inner-city resident meet an employer?

Think for a moment, each of you. How did you get your last job? Did you go through an impersonal agency? Or did someone you know volunteer news about an opening, perhaps paving the way for you, or cluing you to an approach? Did you first meet your present employer at an application interview or were you previously exposed to him through a personal or professional contact?

Three recent surveys in three different urban areas all showed that seventy-five percent of welfare mothers wanted jobs. The Department of Health, Education and Welfare, together with the Department of Labor, has instituted training programs and attempted to place welfare recipients. We have had limited success. We would be more successful if we permitted, let alone encouraged, volunteers to form individual relationships with persons seeking jobs.

Judge Keith Leenhouts reports that when volunteers work with the offenders known to his Royal Oaks, Michigan court, on a one-to-one basis, offering friendship, neighborly or fatherly interest, jobs are found—even for unskilled adolescents, even for persons with court records. Job placement is merely an incident in a gamut of services which volunteers from the "option society" render as a matter of course.

There are many compelling reasons for the use of volunteers. A frightening number of Americans cannot read. Volunteers can teach them. Hunger exists in a land of plenty, but few of the affluent know a hungry person intimately, because when they do, they find ways to assure that he is hungry no more. Some older persons live in isolation, while volunteers would welcome a chance to visit. Divisiveness and polarization exist in a land which grew strong because it was the melting pot of the world, while suburbanites await a chance to extend friendship and help to an inner-city child.

Agencies and professionals have protected their clients from the possible evils of the untrained volunteer, but in doing so, they have also "protected" the non-reader from the magic of books the volunteer can open to him. They have "guarded" the lonesome elder from human contacts. They have "defended" the inner-city child from enriching experiences, from opportunity to scale his encircling walls. They have "shielded" the welfare mother from the right to decide whether she wants a volunteer to help her learn to sew, to find and hold a job, to obtain her high school equivalency certificate, or to show it like it is to someone who is willing to see and help to change it. Clients have been insulated from volunteers who have the power to open closed doors and to allocate resources for meeting human need.

By holding back the youthful volunteer, we have blocked off avenues through which the idealistic energies, which have always characterized youth, can find expression. We have denied youth the chance to help to build up an individual and now we decry their attempts to tear down society.

We have refused older persons who ache to show they still can make a contribution, as volunteers. We have denied the poor the opportunity to help each other, and to derive ego strength from the knowledge that they can give as well as receive. We are denying the "option society" the opportunity to replace its myths and misconceptions about life on welfare with the grim realities of deprivation. We are denying to the poverty sector the chance to see the striving which accompanies success.

These denials have never been the purpose of the social agency, but they are nonetheless the result of the exclusion of the volunteer, the unreadiness to permit client and citizen volunteer to meet.

Join with me now, in exploring avenues for change. Let us identify volunteer services which do not require lengthy orientation and training because they rely on wisdom developed through life experience. Let us experiment with methods of matching volunteer and volunteer which take a minimum of professional time, and are also more democratic. Let us test out what some agencies have already found, that volunteers do as good a job in screening themselves out during orientation as professionals can do in the selection process. Let us be flexible and work as hard at seeking ways to include the citizen as some have worked to exclude him.

We have rarely refused to refer clients to physicians and attorneys who volunteered their services. We have not felt it our duty to teach these citizen volunteers how to give medical care or legal aid. We recognized, instead, that they had a skill to give.

Does not a person who can read have a skill? Does not the parent who has learned how to take his own child to the zoo have a skill? How can we train the grandparent for foster grandparenthood? Or teach friendship to the would-be friend? How does one orient for love and caring—for what President Nixon has called "heart" and for what Senator Harris has called the "human touch"? How will you supervise the banker who

is helping the inner-city resident to launch his own business? Would you unmatch the child and volunteer who may already have found each other?

Oriental parents believed it was their duty and responsibility to find suitable mates for their children. They devoted endless hours and numerous conferences to the activity of matching. Western parents promote parties and picnics and dances so that, through exposure, their children will be able to choose a mate wisely. Some agencies are now willing to show the same democratic faith in the ability of citizen and client to find each other. They are no longer devoting endless hours and numerous conferences to matching.

When potential volunteers and volunteers have come together at parties, or picnics, or discussion groups, some have found each other at the first meeting and continued a satisfying one-to-one relationship. In Chester, Pennsylvania, a volunteer arranged a picnic in which welfare recipients and volunteers, all interested in a family-to-family project, met for the first time, each bringing and sharing food. In the Western culture, which places value on freedom and options, it may be important to the client to know that he has not been robbed of the right to choose his volunteer partner as it is for the child to know that he has chosen his life partner.

In Kalamazoo, Michigan, an assistant county welfare director conducted laborious selection interviews for an ongoing volunteer project. And, then, he experimented. He still conducted laborious interviews, but rejected no one and suggested to all that they feel free to drop out, if during orientation they felt the service was not for them. He kept careful records of those whom he would have turned away. Results? All but one he would have excluded dropped out, and that one proved to be a success. Other agencies, notably courts, are reporting the same experience.

New models in which the volunteer is recruited, oriented, and guided by a community agency are gaining strength. In Denver, Colorado, a community-based agency, known as Partners, receives financial support from the Youth Development and Delinquency Prevention Administration of HEW's Social and Rehabilitation Service to demonstrate such a model. Partners recruits volunteers to serve youthful offenders, orients them, guides them, and holds them responsible for a level of interest and performance. Partners began by offering the services of its volunteers to the probation department of a Juvenile Court and is expanding to serve older offenders. The volunteers of Partners serve as friends. There is a total interest in the child. They learn to know his family, his teacher, his probation officer, and, if he has one, his welfare worker.

In the past we have had welfare volunteers, court volunteers, school volunteers, hospital volunteers, detention home volunteers, and training school volunteers. What we need are people volunteers.

I am not proposing an end to the volunteer who assists the physical therapist, or who stuffs envelopes in a United Way Fund drive. Ag-

encies will continue to use volunteers for these services whether or not I recommend them and I recognize their value.

I am advocating that, in addition, we promote people volunteers who can work in one-to-one, face-to-face relationships, people volunteers who will not be restricted by the artificial barriers of the specific mission of a specified agency. People volunteers visit their volunteers whether they are sick at home or sick in a hospital. They stand beside them in court, and visit them in jail.

People volunteers become Ombudsmen, first for the individual and then for all society. If people volunteers who follow those they serve into all our agencies and institutions, they may become shocked enough at what they find to bring about needed change. The public has too long been unaware of unmet need. It has too long accepted the name for the function. It is only by getting inside the walls of the institution that the citizenry will learn that there are Reformatories that do not reform, Training Schools that neither train nor teach, a Corrections System that is systematic in its failure to correct, and Extended Care Facilities that offer little care and few facilities.

A previous speaker talked about the fear and trembling at City Hall and praised the "ulcer-producing" activities of citizens who ask City Hall to correct inadequacies in service. His message was that City Hall responded when the citizens asked why a burned-out street light was not replaced.

He cited a case in which the residents knew a light was out. My point is that only through volunteer service can the citizenry learn that the lights have gone out for many of the deprived who are groping to tunnel through to a brighter tomorrow for their children, if not for themselves. The volunteers in Judge Burnett's Denver Court have adopted the motto, "It is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness."

Volunteers are lighting candles for individuals. They are also using their clout to obtain basic services for whole neighborhoods.

In Texas, volunteers tirelessly transported persons from a low-income area for appointments with physicians, speech therapists, and caseworkers. Then, at a meeting the coordinator of volunteer services asked whether they had stopped to think why no public transportation served the area. Buses now go in.

Social action produced results in a section of Herndon, Virginia. There were missing street lights. But in addition, there were no paved streets, no sidewalks, no water service, no sewers. There was not even mail delivery. The volunteers changed that. City water has replaced wells. The streets are paved, thanks to the "ulcer-producing" activities of volunteers.

Those who would recruit directly for social action may be disappointed because social action is a product. It is a result of awareness and involvement. We can recruit persons for projects in which they will be intimately and personally involved in face-to-face relationships. We

can give them the opportunity to become emotionally aware of the existence of problems through exposure. Social action is best promoted after one has built up an effective relationship, a personal involvement, with one person who suffers because of a lack of service.

In welfare, we get two kinds of letters. Those which talk in general about the molycoddling of recipients and ask us to do something about it, and those which tell the story of the hardship and suffering of one welfare recipient known to them and ask us to do something about it.

In Massachusetts, volunteers succeeded, where agencies failed, in getting an appropriation for Halfway Houses. The Kalamazoo volunteers, I am told, succeeded after the agency failed, in winning the restoration of a welfare budget cut. City Hall will never be asked to replace street lights which no one knows are out.

The proposed local Voluntary Action Centers offer possibilities for combining the old with the new, the traditional service of the agency volunteer with the new service of the people volunteer. These Centers can centralize recruitment, refer volunteers to meet the specific requirements of agencies, but they can do much more. They can be the vehicle through which people who need people find each other, without an agency assuming responsibility or lending authority to the relationship.

VAC's would include the services given by volunteers to persons known to no agency. One such model, developed under the guidance of a Massachusetts mental hygiene agency, is called Crisis Intervention. Persons over 65, who have lost a spouse, are visited by several volunteers also over 65, who have themselves lost a spouse. These citizen volunteers are well aware of the intricacies of filling out the Social Security forms for death benefits. They have become experts in helping others to unravel insurance benefits. They have had experience in what happens after meager resources are lavished on a beautiful burial. Some have closed their households and joined a son or a son-in-law. Others have taken in roomers. Each volunteer has something to give because of his special experience and he knows this. Referrals come from undertakers, ministers, and Senior Centers. A committee reads the obituaries and identifies persons who may need the neighborly help which can be offered. There is no problem in recruitment because the persons helped become volunteers. I cite this model because I believe that successful recruitment requires the person recruited to be able to visualize the role he will play and to believe that he will be successful in this role. Each volunteer must believe he has the capacity to make an important contribution, that someone needs this contribution and that he will find satisfaction through volunteer service. I cite it also because the volunteers have no authority and because they plan their own "training." They have sought to learn more about bereavement. A mental hygiene agency supplied consultation. They sought to learn more about insurance benefits. An insurance company provided consultation.

In another project, SERVE, which we in HEW supported through the Older Americans Act, senior volunteers were recruited, oriented, and transported by the COS, a private family welfare agency. Currently,

they serve successfully in a number of State institutions. They receive guidance from Project SERVE staff who accompany them to the institution, as well as from the institution professionals.

I cite this model because it is successful, and because it has reduced the hours which the institutions had to give in supervision. The Administration on Aging supported this model because of conviction that volunteering is beneficial to the volunteer. A previous speaker has already made clear that the citizen has the right to volunteer.

To this I would merely add that the person who cannot afford to defray personal expenses incident to voluntary service, also has the right to volunteer, and that it is discriminatory to deny him this right. In implementing the Harris Amendments of 1967 to the Social Security Act, we have required welfare agencies to utilize the services of poor persons and to reimburse them for the costs incident to volunteering.

Voluntary Action Centers can be the means through which persons of all ages, all races, and all economic strata exercise their citizen right to volunteer to meet human need or to raise the level of living. Increasingly, I am told that citizens want to help through personal contact.

In World War I days, volunteers were content to knit woolen socks for the soldiers. In World War II, they were content to roll bandages. But in the war on poverty, they want face-to-face contact. We have become such a complicated society that it is difficult for the individual to see his own part in an end-product which many have helped to create. The individual tends to feel powerless and frustrated because he must function through bureaucracies and hierarchies which were designed to produce "checks and balances" and to assure democracy. But faced with the maze through which he must find his way, the individual sees only that he is being "checked" to such an extent that he faces the "imbalance" born of frustration. And so, whether we are black or white, rich or poor, a member of the affluent or deprived society, we yearn for a single, direct, helping relationship with a human being who wants our help. Through volunteer service citizens hope to find that fulfillment which complicated social structures deny.

Many persons want to help the world, or the nation, but they will settle for the chance to help one person, if they can help directly.

In times gone by, we sometimes rejected persons who wanted to volunteer because we felt they were motivated by personal need. This was the era in which we also customarily refused to place children for adoption when we could see how the child might fulfill the personal needs of the adoptive parent. Time has helped us. We now understand that every human choice is designed to fulfill a human need. And so, in our volunteer programs we now try to build in satisfaction for the volunteer. In the over 65 group it usually means social contact and a chance to prove one's usefulness. Perhaps for the college students it means an opportunity to make dates with other volunteers. Why not? And let me make one more observation about adoptive placements. When agencies operated as barriers, children were adopted without the benefit of their services.

A river will find the sea. What will the media do if citizen pressure mounts and no path for service is opened? One newspaper in California now runs a column, "People Who Need People." One radio station in Albany, New York, now operates program "Tie-Line" through which inner-city mothers find volunteers for their children and volunteers find a deprived child to include in their family outings.

Voluntary Action Centers can ease the burden on the agency by giving general orientation and guidance to volunteers. They can provide consultation. And I offer you here five models which illustrate the role of the volunteer as friend and neighbor. These are (1) Share-a-Trip in which a volunteer includes a child in foster care or on public assistance in a family excursion; (2) Share-a-Meal in which a person who lives alone or in an institution is invited on some regular basis to join in a family meal; (3) Share-a-Skill in which the volunteer teaches such skills as reading, sewing, or driving; (4) Win-a-Job in which the volunteer attempts to help a client remove obstacles to employment and helps the client find and hold a job; (5) Offender's Friend in which the volunteer offers himself as friend to a youth known to the courts or housed in a correctional institution.

These models all require face-to-face and continuing contacts. All offer valuable services, but they also provide channels through which persons who would have no other means of doing so, can come together.

On the podium are copies of the handout which accompanied a recent presentation concerning these models. To agency representatives I say, perhaps your agencies will be motivated to institute one or more of these volunteer services. I urge you to do this, lest the "ulcer-producing" citizenry, encouraged by the news media, conduct a campaign to "recruit" you. Permit volunteers to join you in helping your clients attain a higher level of living. Open your doors so that volunteers may help you to achieve the goals of meeting human need.

Do not be the barrier which prevents the citizen from learning first-hand about social problems. Help him instead to learn by seeing and doing. He may then be the agent for social change who assures that welfare services receive adequate support.

I look to Voluntary Action Centers to encourage a "creative partnership" between professional and volunteer, to be the instrument through which alienated, estranged and sometimes hostile persons may join hands. I believe that Voluntary Action Centers have the power to "bring us together."