

# TRAINING VOLUNTEERS

## How to Train Volunteers to 'Sell' Your Organization

By Joseph R. Schubert

**W**HETHER IT'S RECRUITMENT OR RETENTION of volunteers, there's hardly a volunteer manager who doesn't spend a lot of time figuring out how to improve the process. The method of recruiting volunteers *individually* is almost a tradition, and its effectiveness was reinforced recently by the Gallup Survey on Volunteering, which indicated forty-three percent of the people who volunteer do so because someone asked them.

But if volunteers can recruit other volunteers successfully on a one-to-one basis, they can be just as successful selling the organization's volunteer opportunities to groups through the time-honored "public address." Training volunteers to speak before church bodies, civic clubs, community associations and other potential recruitment sources can be a cost-effective way for an organization to share the recruitment and public relations responsibilities with more of its members. For its volunteers, the training presents an opportunity to improve those communications skills so important to personal growth and career advancement.

A fine way to help even experienced volunteers brush up on their speaking techniques while providing everyone an opportunity to clear up misinformation about the organization, is to conduct a speech-making workshop during a regular volunteer training session.

Joint Action in Community Service, Inc. (JACS) successfully held such a workshop recently with fifty volunteer coordinators in its Southeast region. We stressed four "knowing" steps that would permit almost any JACS volunteer to make an effective presentation before a group of people. The steps are: (1) know your organization, (2) know your audience, (3) know how to organize a talk, and (4) know your platform style.

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**Step 1: Know your organization.** A well-known weekly TV police show popularized the phrase, "Give me the facts, just the facts," and that's exactly what this step is designed to do: Get out all the important facts about the organization, its structure, programs, funding sources, even the correct spelling and pronunciation of its name. (We often see and hear JACS as JACKI) Here is an opportunity for even the veteran volunteer to "get the whole story," as Amway likes to put it.

Begin the workshop with the volunteers calling out spontaneously the dates and events they can remember surrounding the organization's founding, while a facilitator writes them on a board. When the list is completed and checked for accuracy, turn next to a review of all of your organization's current orientations—pamphlets, brochures, newsletters, special promotional pieces (even TV and radio spots, if this can be arranged)—as a way to reinforce the use of these factual resources when preparing a talk about the organization.

Conclude step one by having the participants generate an exhaustive list of the persuasive reasons, arguments and strategies that they personally and successfully have used in recruiting volunteers for the organization. If people have been persuaded to volunteer for the reasons listed when approached individually, they can be persuaded to volunteer when approached in a group.

**Step 2: Know your audience.** It's important to discuss audience analysis *after* the volunteers have identified the facts about their organization and *before* they start to arrange their ideas into a formal plan. This process is based on the marketing principle which says you can't sell anything successfully until you first know the product and the customer for whom the product is intended. A talk about your organization prepared for the members of Mt. Zion Church probably will need to be redesigned to appeal to the Centerville Business Club.

A useful exercise here is to have the volunteers tell what they need to know about any audience prior to get-

## Know Your Audience

- A. What kind of group is it?
- Civic organization
  - Church group
  - Professional group
  - Business group
  - Other
- B. What about the members of the group?
- How many are there?
  - Age range?
  - Male/Female mix?
  - Ethnic background?
  - Volunteer experience?
- Experience with programs like ours?
- Economic situation?
- Other
- C. General
- Does the group have special interest/purposes?
  - Will there be other speakers before or after you?
  - Are any VIP's present?
  - Can you arrive early to chat with individuals?
  - Other

ting up before them. Some will quickly mention size of the audience, the kind of group, the audience's previous knowledge of the subject. However, many more important facts about the audience are likely to be overlooked. So at this point, the facilitator should add any of the items on the checklist below to the list generated by the volunteers and make it available as a handout.

Having researched the facts and knowing their audience, the volunteers are ready to focus on the next step—what they want their audience to think, feel or do as a result of their talk.

**Step 3: Know how to organize a talk.** This step could easily be presented in a separate workshop, but to avoid lengthy lectures and to give the volunteers a quick and useful outline for organizing their ideas, prepare a handout showing the Introduction-Body-Conclusion format of the typical talk. The JACS workshop used an outline that included the following ways to begin a talk. These openers are designed to grab attention and make the audience want to hear what the speaker has to say:

—*Provocative question*: "What would happen if today every volunteer decided to stay home?"

—*Audience compliment*: "I am impressed with this club's public stand on ..."

—*Startling statement or statistic*: "Did you know that 43 percent of the people who volunteer do so because someone asked them?"

—*Personal experience*: "I've just met a young man who was in Job Corps who came to me with this problem ..."

—*Humor* (should be appropriate for this audience and relate to the subject).

—*Reference to occasion or current event in the news*: "In the *Centerville Times* today I read this headline ..."

—*Quotation*: "Many have heard these words spoken by a small boy: 'He ain't heavy, he's my brother.'"

—*Declaration of purpose*: "I'm here tonight to challenge your spirit of volunteerism ..." or "I'm here this evening to tell you about a wonderful organization no one hears much about ..."

—*Historical background*: "Back during those hectic and heroic days of the War on Poverty, a new organization was born ..."

—*Illustration, comparison, or story*: "Picture, for a moment, two young men, both 18 years old and out of work ..."

—*Experts and authorities*: "According to the director of Centerville Youth Services, the main problem facing the youth of our community is ..."

When discussing the body of a speech, stress the importance of preparing a "purpose statement" that briefly explains what the talk is about. Remind the volunteers that when deciding how much to cover in five minutes, a rule of thumb is to present only one or two ideas in a five-minute period. Finally, stress the importance of a strong opening and concluding statement.

After this review of the parts of a speech, have the volunteers work in groups to prepare a five-minute talk. Assign each group an "audience," such as an urban church congregation, a rural Grange meeting, a small town business club, an NAACP chapter meeting. Then instruct each group to elect a member to present the talk to the workshop "audience."

During the JACS workshop, we discovered this work session generated a lot of enthusiasm. Some volunteers pitched in to work out the "purpose statement," others defined more completely their assigned audience, while still others selected the facts, illustrations and persuading arguments that would flesh out the presentation. Fifteen minutes were allotted at the end of the preparation hour for each presenter to rehearse the finished talk before his/her group.

**Step 4: Know your platform style.** This final step in the workshop is easily the most exciting, creative and enjoyable of all. The facilitator asks a group member to describe who the members of the workshop audience are supposed to be, and then to introduce the speaker. At the end of each talk, the facilitator leads the volunteers in a general critique of each presentation. Did the speaker have good eye contact? Was the talk designed for this particular audience and its needs? Did the speaker sound convincing and come across sincerely? Were the reasons why this audience should become involved with the organization persuasive? Did the speaker ask the audience to respond or take some clear action? Given the compressed time of the workshop, the critique session should stress the *positive* elements that contributed to the success of the talks rather than the negative features.

In the JACS workshop we were treated to a series of enthusiastic, colorful and memorable talks that enlightened, entertained and "persuaded" us. Everyone, not just the presenters, came away with practical tips and lots of ideas that could be used in putting together a speech for a local group.

For many volunteer managers, recruiting volunteers person-to-person will always be the first way to bring new people into the organization; but training volunteers to sell the organization's volunteer opportunities to groups of people may just be that variation of an idea whose time has come.