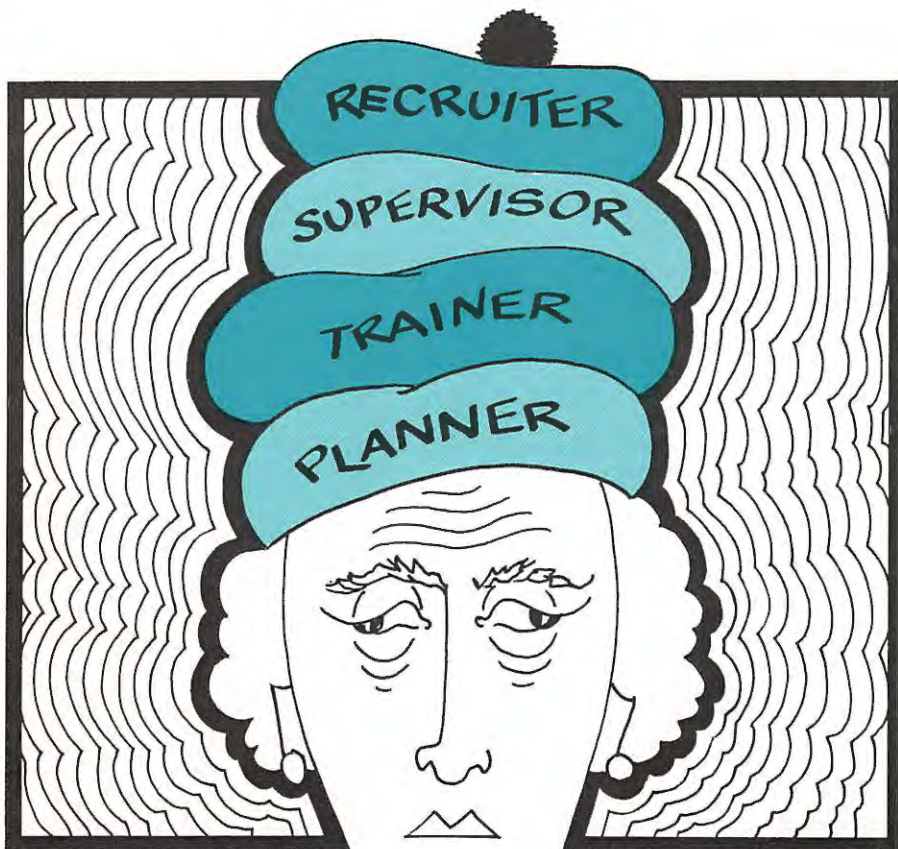


How can a volunteer coordinator recruit, train and supervise often three times as many people as other agency supervisors . . . and still find time to complete a myriad of other necessary tasks? By considering

The Challenge of Delegation

By Ralph G. Navarre, A.C.S.W.



- _____ You work more than 40 hours per week.
- _____ You leave work feeling guilty at the end of the day because you have so much left to do, even though you skipped a coffee break and only took 15 minutes for lunch.
- _____ You haven't provided the orientation or training your volunteers need because you have other more important duties.
- _____ You would like to spend more time planning, but you know you have a report that is overdue.

CAN YOU, AS A VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR, place a checkmark in front of any of the above work conditions? If so, you may not believe it is possible to relieve *all* of the above problems. But there is a solution. It can be found in one word: delegation.

Webster's *New Collegiate Dictionary* defines delegation as "empowering one person to act for another." We all know about delegation and most volunteer coordinators do delegate to some degree. Yet, we frequently hear comments like, "Delegation takes time to train staff and I don't have the time to do that training," or "The paid staff would not accept volunteers doing part of my job," or "My boss would not allow me to delegate any of my responsibilities."

According to the management and supervision literature, some delegation appears to be giving up power. For example, if you delegate visitors' tours to your volunteers, they could look like they are in power. Also, delegation often means giving up parts of your job that are rewarding, stimulating and exciting.

Other volunteer coordinators fear the results of delegation. What if a volunteer makes a mistake or causes a problem? And some volunteer coordinators feel safe in being behind or overworked. Free time for them is scary.

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So Why Delegate?

Let's start by looking at why we should delegate authority or specific job responsibility to others. The literature indicates that executives rarely supervise more than eight to 14 subordinates. Yet volunteer coordinators often attempt to supervise 30, 50 or even hundreds of volunteers. The results are predictable. Some volunteers are not supervised adequately. You can improve your supervision of volunteers by delegation.

A second important reason for delegation is that a volunteer coordinator is actually running a mini-agency within the structure of a larger agency. The reality that the volunteer coordinator does a job that is different from any other supervisor in most agencies means you are usually on your own in terms of planning, training and supervision. You must have time for these functions, and therefore you must delegate.

Finally, small jobs that must be accomplished often don't get done unless you delegate. You, as a volunteer coordinator, simply cannot do it all. You must delegate.

Whom Should I Choose?

You might ask, Where do I find volunteers whom I can delegate responsibility to? They are right there in your agency. It just requires a little bit of looking with a new eye to discover volunteers who will accept and even welcome more responsibility.

Remember that volunteers come to your agency with many different motivations. Volunteers who are candidates for delegation include those who are bored and ask for more responsibility, those who are interested in a career in volunteerism, and those who need more responsibility and experience with authority to become employable.

Some volunteers in every agency are bored, feeling useless and frustrated with the simple tasks they are asked to perform. These volunteers are often the ones you lose to other agencies. Through delegation you often can save a volunteer who otherwise would not remain with your program.

There are also many people who refuse responsibility and authority. Often this is because they really lack the interest. Others, however, are shy, scared or unsure of themselves. With suppor-

tive supervision, they can be given responsibility.

What Should I Delegate?

Now that you have people you can delegate to, let's look at what tasks can be delegated. Small specific tasks or responsibility for very small programs are the first things that are easily delegated. Jobs like laying out volunteer sign-in sheets and collecting them, unlocking rooms volunteers need, and preparing program materials for volunteers are all tasks that responsible volunteers can do easily.

Slightly more complex tasks include leading agency tours and record-keeping. Such tasks can be done by most volunteers with some supervision.

More highly complex tasks that can be delegated to appropriate volunteers include recruitment, orientation and training of new volunteers, as well as the supervision of on-going volunteers. These are jobs that can be done by some volunteers in nearly every agency.

More important, the use of volunteers in the recruitment, orientation, training and supervision of volunteers automatically provides you with a career ladder for your volunteers. Those people who can perform such roles can consider becoming a volunteer coordinator or a manager in private industry.

Perhaps the most intricate jobs to delegate are public speaking and public relations. In this case you are delegating not only responsibility, but also control of your agency's image. Since volunteers have various motivations for and ideas about volunteering in an agency, you retain a responsibility to monitor their activities and assure yourself and your supervisors that accurate information is going out into the community. Nevertheless, there is no simpler way to demonstrate to the community that your volunteers are content. It's often said that satisfied volunteers are the best recruiters for your agency.

Doing It Right

There is no process that can guarantee 100 percent success when you're delegating responsibility to others, but there are a number of steps that can assure you a minimum amount of failure.

The steps that you should use are ones that many volunteer coordinators

employ regularly. The most important step is a well-written job description that clearly delineates the responsibility and authority that goes with a particular position. The job description should be developed with the input of volunteer and paid staff, so both clearly recognize the delegation of authority.

The next step is to ask volunteers and paid staff for candidates to be recommended or to volunteer for this unpaid position. You also can invite qualified candidates to apply who might not do so otherwise.

The process of candidate selection can be a politically traumatic one if it sets up a series of different levels of volunteers. If possible, a number of people might be delegated new authority at the same time. The critical point is that each position should have a job description, and each job description should be modified to meet the skills and abilities of an individual who will be delegated new authority.

At this point, an individual must be oriented and trained to his or her new responsibilities. Remember, since this volunteer already has proven skill and ability, the training should be task-oriented. What special knowledge, skills and abilities does the volunteer need to do that part of your job that you are delegating?

After training your new volunteer delegate, you should offer consultation and support, but *let the volunteer do the job alone*. A volunteer cannot accept responsibility if you are always behind him or her to intercede. Your job is to hold regular supervisory conferences, and evaluate your volunteers regularly.

Benefits

Once you have delegated, there should be some clear-cut payoffs to you and to the agency. There are both immediate and long-range benefits that you will receive.

- By delegating you immediately create a situation where more people can look at and work on the problem. Because you have added another layer of administration, more people can analyze and work on solutions to problems without taking your time.
- As you delegate authority, you also generate interest and concern in the people who accept the responsibility you have given them. This is seen best when volunteers who are assisting

begin to talk about "their" agency and "their" problems.

● As volunteers develop a proprietary interest in the agency, you also will find additional help in terms of community support, new recruits and expanded public relations on both a formal and an informal basis.

● A long-range benefit is the reality that delegation allows you to move your program from what one person can *do* to what one person can *control*. You can answer six or more questions from volunteer supervisors in the same amount of time it takes you to resolve one problem with a volunteer by yourself. A group of volunteer supervisors can make ten or more phone calls, while you can make two or three.

● After you have trained your supervisors, you will have additional time for other responsibilities. You will be able to start those training programs, new recruitment campaigns or new job descriptions that you have promised yourself you should do one of these days.

● Over time you will discover that your volunteers will develop initiative, new skills and competence in new areas. These new abilities will continue to help your agency grow and become more proficient.

Delegation is not a substitute for hard work, nor is it an easy way to eliminate or reduce your responsibility. You can expect a number of problems when you try delegation. These problems are no different from those that are encountered when paid staff are promoted.

When a volunteer is promoted to a supervisory level, for instance, he or she could presume more authority than actually was transferred. Or the new volunteer supervisor could presume his or her domain included paid staff. Just remember that if you, as volunteer coordinator, are proficient at picking good volunteers, you can also choose good volunteer supervisors.

Delegation is *not* abdication. As the volunteer coordinator you are still responsible, accountable and in charge. While you delegate some responsibility, you alone are the paid staff person responsible for the actions and work of volunteers and volunteer supervisors.

A year from now ask yourself if you're still working too hard, still feeling guilty, and still not doing the job you could do if you had more time. The choice is yours. Delegation is an answer.

What is Supervision?

By Dick Hodgkins

IN THE HENNEPIN COUNTY DEPARTMENT of Court Services, supervision remains the key to successful volunteer services. But what exactly is appropriate supervision? And what does it entail?

For volunteers, supervision is the vehicle that conveys what their job is and how to do it best. Supervision offers volunteers the opportunity to grow through self-awareness. It provides constructive feedback on work performance from the people volunteers help (clients, paid staff), which is necessary if they are to feel an integral part of the agency. Supervision also affords volunteers recognition for their work while holding them accountable for providing services. A volunteer once told me, "If I am to be given an important role, I want to be told when I am doing the job well and, more important, when I am not." In essence, this volunteer was defining appropriate supervision.

For professional paid staff, supervision of volunteers is a means by which they can intensify the services of their caseloads. Offering both personal and professional growth, supervision demands skills in the areas of teaching, consultation, brokerage and case management. Most of our probation staff are involved in some form of volunteer supervision and have found great benefit in being able to use a community-wide fund of knowledge, skills and abilities.

In our department's experience, an essential part of the supervisory relationship between paid and unpaid staff is setting up an initial contract. This contract includes addressing several questions.

1. What does each of you expect of the other? What are your personal and

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professional motivations for being here? What do you need to continue? How does the other person influence your decision? How much time, energy, knowledge and skill does each party have? How can each party develop his or her talents? By when? Is the other party available at any time? Who initiates contact? Is each willing to watch and help the other grow?

2. What does each of you have to offer? How much time and energy? How much skill and experience as an interviewer, a diagnostician, a consultant, a supervisor, an educator? How about personal responsibilities? What are your strengths, weaknesses?

3. How do you define your relationship to each other? What words do you use to describe *relationship, volunteers, colleagues, team, supervisor, boss, subordinate, clinician, street-worker, unpaid staff*? What do they mean? Do you have to be personal friends to do the job? Can you respect each other and not socialize or even have many interests in common? Do you need to be liked by your counterpart?

4. How are you going to handle differences or conflict? Can you differ openly? How does each react when another disagrees? How do you avoid win-lose battles? Can you involve third parties as one technique for resolving problems? Should one party be an advocate and when? What factors are important to decision-making? What is consensus? How much are you able to risk? When does one party make a final decision? Who is responsible?

5. How does each handle the authority component in the relationship? When is it important to ask before acting? When can action be taken immediately? What needs to be reported, not reported?

A partnership based on a sound supervisory relationship has been formed by the paid and unpaid staff of our department. This team relationship has developed to the point where on any given day over 500 volunteers are involved in 18 different staff roles serving six operating court service divisions.