

THE IDEAL VOLUNTEER DIRECTOR

By Peter J. Murk, Ph.D.

A volunteer director for the mid-'90s must be a person of wisdom and ambition; a before-and-after dinner speaker; a night owl; a day hawk; and an all-night truck driver who can appear fresh as a daisy the next morning. She must learn to sleep while eating two meals in order to utilize fully the twenty-four hours in a day. She must be able to consume gallons of coffee and have unlimited capacity for sparkling beverages, yet never disclose signs of unsteadiness.

A volunteer director must be able to entertain without becoming overbearing; speak with the certainty of a "world renowned authority," yet be able to listen with the fascination of an entranced child. He must be able to walk through the rain and snow without losing the "razor-like" crease in his suit. In sub-zero weather, he must be able to put on tire chains with a smile, while yelling aloud, "Boy, am I enthusiastic!" In summer's heat, she must be able to work in hot dusty offices or tend to the needs of a playground group without perspiring or losing her sparkling manner and noble temperament.

A volunteer director must love little children, dogs, cats, flowers, idle chatter and parades. He must be a ladies' man, a man's man, a model husband, a good father, a good provider, a faithful churchman, a thrifty spender, a generous host and sometimes serve as a "pool shark." She must be an expert talker, driver, traveler, diplomat, scrounger, salesperson, financier, philanthropist, elocutionist, and she must be skilled at performing mathematical and programmatic gymnastics.

Politically, a community education coordinator must be above reproach and even at times a dialectician. She must be a democrat, a republican, a dixicrat, a new dealer and a fast dealer. He must have a good car with

millions of tire tread left, and definitely have a good friend and confidante. She must be a clairvoyant and heavenly endowed with special powers of extra-sensory perception.

To be a success, a volunteer director must have at least a working knowledge of psychology, criminology, chemistry, geography, religion and a knowledge of and skills in understanding and using community resources, community development, adult education, instructional techniques and effective public relations.

A good volunteer director must be able to diagnose community needs, wants and interests by conducting, tabulating and interpreting community-wide and interest-area programmatic surveys. She should possess a working knowledge of and sensitivity to the interactions and special needs of the various racial, ethnic and socio-economic sub-groups within the community.

Further, a volunteer or activities director must be able to identify resources (services, programs, facilities, instructors, activities, skills, funds and talents) within individuals, groups and the community. He must be able to analyze and utilize the community power structure effectively for the good of the goals and extensive development of the entire community.

A good volunteer director should possess above-average verbal and non-verbal communication skills. He must be able to appear and speak knowledgeably before groups about the merits and benefits of viable volunteer activities and services, philosophies, process and programs. She must be able to articulate and illustrate examples of successful volunteer programs and models, write and publish creative newsletters and brochures, and disseminate information to the appropriate groups; she should utilize the crafty skills of a "Madison Avenue ad person." He must be well-organized and use his time efficiently and effectively through good time management skills and constructive goal-setting abilities, for his own, the agency's and the whole community's good.

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□ Leadership skills development is another important task of the volunteer director. She must understand the concept of community involvement, the various types of community organizations, neighborhood clubs, associations and the inner workings of organizations, in order to assist them in meeting needs and realizing their full potential and organizational effectiveness.

A volunteer director must know when to lead, when to follow, and when to step out of the way of progress. He must hold groups accountable for the results rather than methodologies, but he must also provide the necessary resources, environmental climate, direction, guidance and motivation for change. Leadership skills are vitally important in helping people accomplish their goals and meet their objectives. The volunteer director should be able to accomplish these tasks in a facilitating, non-judgmental manner.

Program planning skills are necessary prerequisites as well, in terms of developing programs to meet the expressed and discovered needs of seniors and adult learners; to determine educational objectives; to prepare meaningful schedules; to use creative and exciting promotional strategies and enrollment procedures; to recruit qualified instructors, volunteers and participants; to administer staff resources; and, finally, to manage budgets carefully.

□ The volunteer director must understand the concepts and processes of supervising facilities, activities and personnel, and possess the ability to delegate and share experiences for assisting others in increasing their abilities for leadership—to develop staff through inservice training procedures and programs, allowing staff to experiment creatively and make mistakes as well.

□ The volunteer director must understand and build trust among individuals, groups and organizations through collaborative efforts and cooperative measures. The volunteer director has to be a “radical,” at times, to effect planned change and to see the notion of creative volunteer work and administration as a challenge; to envision a new beginning and a new day, remembered in the words of the prophet Kahlil Gibran: “For yesterday is but a dream and tomorrow is only a vision. But today well lived makes yesterday a dream of happiness and every tomorrow a vision of hope.”

□ A volunteer director must have an awareness of the future of the community, and carefully formulate plans with the advisory council to support a vision of the future. That is to say, he must be able to translate needs and interests into viable programs and opportunities for the participants. The director must not be perplexed

with the daily societal problems or pressures, but should envision society as the dawn—the new day, the new beginning!

□ The volunteer director must have a high estimation of people. She must be able to work well with people on grandiose projects as well as on the mundane daily tasks. He must not diminish the community by looking at it as it exists now, but should treat the community as it will become . . . then he will ennoble it. The director should be a *secure person*, willing to take the risks necessary to achieve objectives and tasks that people feel couldn't be accomplished without the help of the community—those challenges will become opportunities for growth and development.

□ Further, the volunteer director should be an *open minded person*. There are people of action and then there are those of reaction. She must ask the important question often: “What is right?” and not be concerned with “Who is right?” The director must be an *accessible person* who is a good communicator, ready and willing to lend an ear or advice when asked.

□ Finally, the volunteer director must be an *imaginative person*, who is creative in dealing with the community. The person must seek new and imaginative answers to the old questions of poverty, crime, unemployment and lack of facilities and respond to the new bold challenges of change, technology and human rights. As Robert F. Kennedy once remarked: “Don't see things and ask why, but see things and ask, why not?”

A successful director must have varying degrees of the following: . . . the brilliance of Einstein, the magic of Merlin, the inventiveness of Edison, the creativity of Michelangelo, the literariness of Thomas Jefferson, the sensitivity of Jesus Christ, the humor of Jack Benny, the wisdom of Solomon, the honesty of Robin Hood, the independence of Patrick Henry, the eloquence of Winston Churchill, the business sense of Ebenezer Scrooge, the foresight of Benjamin Franklin, the tranquility of Gandhi, the disposition of Buddha, the knowledge of Plato and the jolliness of Santa Claus, the competitiveness of Vince Lombardi, the dedication of Martin Luther King, the patience of Job, the persistence of Robert Bruce, the optimism of Diogenes, the courage of the astronauts, the sanctimony of Bugs Bunny, faith in convictions, trust in humanity and the help of God, Almighty.

This then is the perceived role of the volunteer director in today's society: a person for *all seasons for all reasons*—a caring person, but also firm and fair—the kind of person needed for the situation: a leader, a guide, a facilitator and a confidante. ■