

VALUING TIME: A Top Priority in the '90s

By Sue Vineyard

My office literally has about two dozen management reports pass across its desk each month, and a recurrent theme is beginning to stand out.

Editor after editor is saying that survival of any company, agency or group in the '90s will be dependent upon customer response time.

At first glance, these articles seem to be pointing at giving customers (or clients, etc.) what they want quickly, but when examined closely, a second, equally critical demand, is uncovered—that of valuing time as the top factor in deciding where to expend energies.

People in the '90s will value time as a precious commodity. Anything—product, service, effort—that saves, manages or enhances their time will be attractive. Demand will be for items and experiences that "cut to the chase" quickly and therefore are able to fit into an already crammed agenda of personal, family and work time schedules.

Volunteer recruiters, product and service creators, conference planners, etc. can all learn from this trend and offer concentrated, to-the-point, easily digestible opportunities for service and learning that are responsive to expressed needs/wants of "consumers."

Needs assessments must become more frequent, targeted and easy/quick to fill out. Responses to these will have to be transferred into practical action ASAP. Long-range planning will need to leave room for change more rapidly, and we may have to give up thoughts of creating a product and thinking it will remain constant for years to come.

Ivory tower thinking of what's "best" for others will be replaced by leaders who encourage and respond to client/volunteer/community input or needs.

Leadership will be redefined as the ability to recognize trends and offer guidance and service to people quickly and sensitively. It will continue to demand skills of remaining aware of the "big picture" or mission of a group while tending to immediate needs as expressed and keeping the delicate balance be-

tween the two perspectives.

Leaders will need to find ways to help people catch sight of a dream without overwhelming them by a timeframe they cannot accept. Volunteer jobs will have to broaden to include more "hit 'n run" jobs—ones that require short time commitments that can be offered to volunteers who cannot give five hours a week for two years for a board position or the like.*

Job sharing, flexspace, flextime and other creative multiple options will emerge and be as common as the more accepted traditional volunteer jobs with one person committed to a job over a long period of time.

Job "puzzles"—where one job is broken down into multiple parts that fit together as a whole—will pop up and demand great coordination and cooperation.

All of these shifts, in response to a major trend in our lives, will necessitate a volunteer and nonprofit management style that encompasses great flexibility, problem solving, creativity, balancing and interpersonal skills.

Volunteer leaders will need to know as much about communication as Recruitment 101, as much about collaborative techniques as those of management. They must be in touch with rapidly changing needs of all involved and new information in the field.

The word "assume" and stereotypical images must be forever laid aside and the measurement of good relationships can no longer be "sameness."

Diversity and uniqueness will become the rule rather than the exception and will need to be part of our recognition efforts. Collaboration will become valued rather than suspected and cooperative and team efforts will be forged between programs and people once considered too divergent or competitive to work together positively.

In my opinion, all of this is the natural extension of truly understanding the two-sided trend in our society that is demanding responsiveness to expressed needs and the highest value placed on time.

Inherent in the trend lies our field's opportunity for growth, expansion and a balance between visionary leadership and practical management.

** (Editor's note: See the article on "episodic volunteers" on page 15.)*

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