

Ensuring Volunteer Success Through EFFECTIVE DELEGATION TECHNIQUES

By Gene Sharratt, Ph.D.

The ability to delegate responsibility is an essential skill demonstrated by effective volunteer managers. Successful volunteer leaders have the capacity to match the strengths of volunteers with the demands and requirements of the workplace. In delegating effectively, volunteer leaders make an important contribution to the advancement of their organization, to the personal and professional growth of their volunteers, and to their own management success.

Correspondingly, volunteer managers who fail to delegate purposefully and efficiently not only stifle the growth of their volunteers but also hamper organizational productivity. For many volunteer leaders, the failure to delegate is seen as their single most significant deficiency.

Volunteer leaders generally fail to delegate for some of the following reasons:

- Personal insecurity or fear of their own weakness being exposed.
- Belief in the "I can do it better myself" fallacy.
- Lack of experience or training in effective delegation techniques.
- Inability to direct, think ahead, or visualize the work requirements and project outcomes.
- Ineffective interpersonal communication skills.
- Fear of criticism from superiors for mistakes.
- Unwillingness to provide the training necessary for volunteers to learn new job skills.

The obstacles to effective delegation can be overcome by understanding some of the steps used by successful volunteer

leaders. These steps are designed for both beginning and experienced volunteer managers.

The following "techniques of effective delegation" will assist volunteer leaders in their search for success:

■ **Assess the work requirements and abilities of volunteers.** Do they have the skills to assume the new responsibility? If not, what must you do to train them? Do their skills provide the right "match" between the tasks required and their abilities to accomplish your demands.

■ **Communicate your expectations clearly.** Specifically state what it is you need accomplished. Is there a time requirement? Describe what it is you want done, by what time, and to what standards. This not only helps you achieve your goals but also provides the necessary guidelines for volunteers to be successful.

■ **Assess their understanding.** Ask volunteers to explain the assignments as they understand them. What areas are still unclear? Have you accurately communicated the tasks to be accomplished?

■ **Build confidence and success.** This can easily be accomplished by providing challenging, yet responsible, work-related projects. Help volunteers gain confidence by giving them tasks in which they can exercise their personal and professional judgment, while enjoying the strong probability of meeting your demands.

■ **Encourage decisions and suggestions.** Volunteers will often avoid taking responsibilities because they are unsure of their skills. To counter this, elicit suggestions and reinforce the initiative they display in making decisions. Remember people support what they help develop.

■ **Be reasonable and flexible.** Effective volunteer leaders keep assignments within reasonable expectations of what can be accomplished, both in time and in quantity.

Anticipate interruptions and obstacles and make adjustments where necessary.

■ **Build openness and accessibility.** Recognize that volunteers may be reluctant to report unfinished projects or failures to you. Encourage them to bring problems to you early.

■ **Provide responsibility.** When you delegate a task, be sure you give the responsibility and authority that goes with it. Without the proper resources and support, volunteers and the delegated projects are doomed to failure. When you provide opportunities for volunteers to contribute to projects, their confidence and enthusiasm for these projects increase.

■ **Monitor progress.** Check with volunteers on the progress of their assignments. Do not wait until the project due date to evaluate their success. Your interest in monitoring the progress of the assignments reflects your concern for their performance. Effective volunteer leaders know that they have to "inspect what they expect."

■ **Expect improvement, not perfection.** If tasks or assignments can only be done one way and that way is your way, then you are much better off to do it yourself. Otherwise, you will continually set volunteers up for failure and stifle their willingness to risk displaying initiative. In addition, it should be remembered that "success is improvement, not perfection."

■ **Provide feedback and recognition.** The most important motivation for people is feedback on their efforts. However, all too often, volunteer leaders forget to compliment their volunteers for specific task completion. Verbal compliments are effective and appreciated, but for some volunteers written messages count double. Remember that when you let those around you shine, you shine with them.

Delegating effectively comes through practice and hard work, but the rewards are well worth the investment of time.

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