



# The Human Energy Crisis

**By Dorothy Kelly**

All of us are energy conscious these days. Leaders of volunteers must be *human-energy* conscious, however, to learn how to get the most mileage out of each volunteer.

Competition for volunteers never has been greater. The number of agencies and organizations using volunteers is skyrocketing. We bemoan the fact that it is becoming harder and harder to recruit volunteers. But that isn't the only problem.

If each of us examines our records carefully, we would have to admit that volunteer turnover or loss is gravely responsible for this human energy crisis. We aren't motivating and retaining volunteers as well as we should. And recruitment—regardless of how successful it is—may end in the volunteer revolving-door syndrome. We are all familiar with the signs and symptoms of that syndrome. It's where a volunteer walks through the door, works briefly for the organization, then walks out the same door—forever!

*Dorothy Kelly is vice chairman of volunteers, Mid-Western Field Office, American Red Cross, St. Louis, Mo. From 1962-72 she was director of volunteers at Barnes Hospital, St. Louis. Her rich background in volunteering spans 30 years of service with the Girl Scouts, Cub Scouts, church youth choir, United Way, Planned Parenthood, St. Louis Hospital Auxiliary, American Cancer Society, St. Louis Voluntary Action Center. Her article is based on a workshop, "Motivating and Retaining Volunteers," she conducted at the Missouri Volunteer Office's Third Annual Conference on Volunteerism.*

The much quoted ACTION statistical study of volunteers in the United States, compiled by the Census Bureau in April 1974, told us more Americans were volunteering for more organizations than ever before. But of the 37 million Americans over 13 years of age who were volunteering, 5.5 million people had decided to discontinue. Many had valid reasons, such as poor health, age, looking for a paying job, or moving away, but others said they had lost interest, found nothing useful to do, had no personal rewards, or found poor supervision in voluntary organizations. Certainly, many of those 5.5 million people still would be volunteers if thought had been given to creating conditions that would have allowed them to experience self-fulfillment and satisfy some basic human needs.

Baroness Bertha Von Suttner, a writer born in 1848 who must have been a volunteer, wrote, "After the verb 'to love,' 'to help' is the most beautiful verb in the world." The Roman poet Terence, who lived 185 years before Christ, wisely said, "As many men, so many minds; every one his own way." If you reflect on those quotations and blend them, you might come to this conclusion: "To help is beautiful, so they say, but let me do it my own way."

Basically, we are all the same biologically and psychologically, though none of us look or act exactly alike. We are designed in two basic shapes, three basic colors and if nature has been kind to us, we have the same number and kinds of "parts." Our reactions, our needs, our emotions are alike unless we are mentally ill. Everyone has basic needs: to survive, to be secure, to belong, to be wanted, and finally, to live better and find self-fulfillment.

Regardless of how much alike people

are, two people looking at the same situation at the same time rarely perceive exactly the same thing. What we see depends on our experiences, our attitudes, knowledge and beliefs which we acquired from one another through different personal experiences. This explains why each volunteer comes to us with his/her own set of attitudes, knowledge, beliefs and needs. Each needs to be treated as a special human being if we are to motivate him/her positively.

Motivation is not mysterious and need not be contrived. Motivation will happen naturally when you let someone find self-fulfillment in a job, satisfying one or more basic needs.

**W**hy do people volunteer? The three most popular reasons given in the ACTION survey were that they wanted to help others, they enjoyed volunteer work, and they had a sense of duty. Each of these can be related to man's basic needs.

If asked by a census taker why he/she volunteers, it is doubtful that many persons would say, "I'm looking for self-fulfillment." Nevertheless, the volunteer has some self-interest motives that, if satisfied, will lead to a better life. These include learning and growing, making new friends, belonging to a group, developing new interests, using particular skills, testing career possibilities, coming to terms with one's own conscience, becoming a part of the community's power structure, using volunteering as a form of recreation.

Thirty-six percent of all persons interviewed in the 1974 census gave enjoyment as their reason for volunteering. The results of a recent study of a Red Cross chapter by Dr. David Adams, assistant professor of sociology at Ohio State University, paralleled those of the



ble IALAC sign to represent good feelings about themselves and the prospect of new experiences as volunteers. In this allegory the director of volunteers is seated behind her desk writing a report when a volunteer, wearing her IALAC sign, arrives for an interview for recruit-

report. I'd like to finish these last pages so I suggest you find a magazine to read and I'll be with you in a little while. I wasn't sure you'd be on time.

PROSPECTIVE VOLUNTEER (*in an aside to herself*). I wonder why she assumed I'd be late for this meeting? She mustn't think I'm very responsible. (*Tears away part of her IALAC sign.*)

DIRECTOR OF VOLUNTEERS (*ten minutes later*). Now, that's completed. These reports are important so I try to get them out on time. Let's see, where were we? Oh, yes, you are here to talk about your new assignment as recruitment chairperson. I thought the best way to get started was to write a job description for (*the telephone rings*). . . . Oh excuse me, Carol, while I get the phone. (*Talks to a friend at great length about plans for a luncheon at the golf club.*)

PROSPECTIVE VOLUNTEER (*aside*). She can't think I'm a very important person. If she did, she'd cut this social call short and stick to business. (*Tears off another piece of her IALAC sign.*)

DIRECTOR OF VOLUNTEERS. Sorry about that call, Carol, but that was a friend of mine who doesn't have enough to keep her busy so she is forever calling—say! she'd be a great person to serve on your committee. Speaking of your committee, I've asked about ten people to serve and some are interested. Here's the list and they are expecting to hear from you. (*Hands list to Carol.*)

PROSPECTIVE VOLUNTEER. Thanks. (*Aside.*) I have my own ideas about the kinds of people I want for my committee. I'm beginning to wonder why I was picked as the new recruitment chairperson. (*Tears off more of her IALAC sign.*)

DIRECTOR OF VOLUNTEERS. As I said before, the most important thing for you to have for your new job is the job description. (*Hands over a very thick stack of papers to Carol.*) Here it is! I gave this job description much thought, researched past recruitment plans and spent days and days writing it.

PROSPECTIVE VOLUNTEER (*while flipping through the many pages of paper*). Only days?!!! (*Aside.*) This job description tells me more than I ever wanted to know about the job. I did have a few ideas of my own but there isn't room for them. (*To volunteer director.*) Thanks a lot for considering me for this important new job, Mrs. Smith, but I

don't think I'm the person you are looking for because I don't think I could cope. (*Drops the last piece of her IALAC sign and walks away.*)

A Ziggy cartoon by Tom Wilson pictures a totally defeated little man saying, "It's not the big failures one minds so much—it's the constant pitter-patter of little defeats!" The prospective recruitment chairperson certainly had her share of little defeats in that interview. That was an exaggerated example of negative motivation but with more than a grain of truth in the message it conveyed.

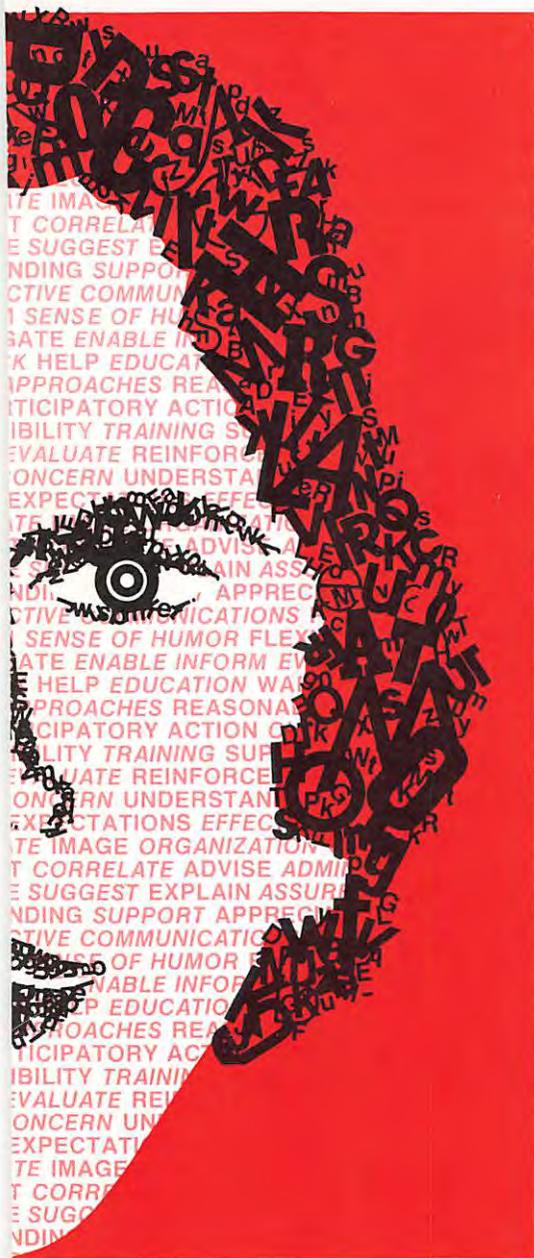
Avoid the put-down when talking with any volunteer. We frequently try to patch pieces of our own IALAC signs back together by ripping off a piece of someone else's. The put-down is one of the quickest and best ways of tearing off a piece of someone's IALAC sign.

Put-downs are as American as apple pie. Many TV comics—Don Rickles, Johnny Carson, Bob Hope—make a fortune by using the put-down form of comedy when they talk about celebrities. The Dean Martin Celebrity Roast is built on the put-down. But for celebrities there is compensation—publicity! Remember the saying, "I don't care what you say about me—just pronounce my name right." Or better still, Liberace's quote when asked if he was upset by some of the things people said about him, "Why no, I laugh all the way to the bank."

But what compensation does a volunteer have for any form of put-down? A person's self-image is perhaps the most important factor in how he or she relates to others. We must help each volunteer build self-esteem. Avoid such phrases as, "We've tried that idea, but it didn't work," or "She's just a volunteer."

**W**hat factors contribute to positive motivation of volunteers, and what characteristics and abilities lead to the personal growth and effectiveness of a director of volunteers? Keep in mind that personal effectiveness is the degree to which people use their potential! Those of us who are directors or leaders of volunteers will motivate volunteers to perform positively if we realize we are coordinators, supporters and growers of volunteers.

Find volunteers to develop and execute programs, services and projects. We develop volunteer commitment



ment chairperson of the volunteer department.

DIRECTOR OF VOLUNTEERS. Come in, Carol, and have a chair. Martha Lippert recommended you for the recruitment job, and I want to get to know you better. I'm running a little late today and am in the middle of writing a monthly service

through sound volunteer department personnel policies. These policies consist of those familiar words—recruitment, interviewing, placement, orientation, training, job descriptions, career development for volunteers, record keeping, recognition and evaluation. In each of these functions volunteers with training and support can do well. Ideally, directors need only correlate, advise and administer most of the policies.

Volunteer directors are responsible for the development of guidelines for good staff/volunteer relationships. As you well know, we may motivate volunteers to the best of our ability only to see staff take away the "I Am Lovable and Capable" feeling we give volunteers. In an excellent article in the Fall 1977 VAL on staff nonsupport of volunteers ("A New Look at an Old Failure"), Dr. Ivan Scheier asks, "Can we really improve recruitment, screening, training and motivation of volunteers if staff doesn't care? It can turn off the best-screened recruit, waste the best volunteer training and demotivate any volunteer."

Who owns the problem? Scheier asks. "We tend to assume staff does," he writes. "Even if it's true, it's unproductive. We had better assume some blame. In other words, we have met the enemy and it is us." We need to plan with staff, rather than for them, regarding all aspects of volunteerism in the agency. A staff advisory board is a good first step to develop better staff/volunteer relationships.

Some directors fail to use maximum feasible volunteer involvement to set goals. We pay no salary, so we can't compel volunteers to accept our goals. Edward Lindaman, educator and writer, said, "Volunteers give obedience to the unenforceable." In other words, they will work for an organization only to the extent they choose. People work harder for a goal they've set, as no one wants to see their own plan fail. Develop the art of participatory action. Business finds this works best because someone is apt to discover something overlooked and a way to do it better.

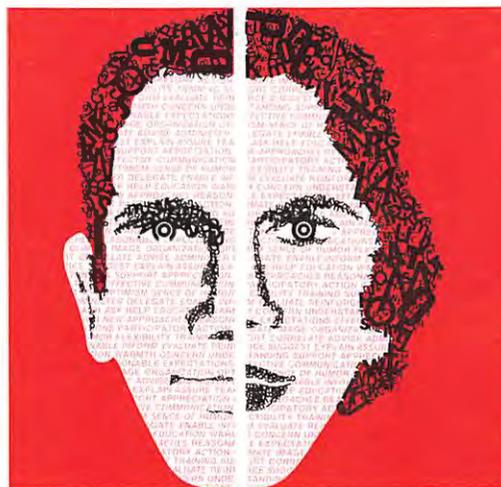
We must learn to use effective communications to motivate and retain volunteers. Keep asking yourself, "What do our volunteers want to hear, and need to learn and read about our organization?" Use every possible form of media to keep them informed regarding organizational structure, activities, policies, training opportunities and future plans.

Many volunteers give service away from the agency and may be the last of staff to receive information which affects them. A well informed volunteer who knows about the policies and activities of the total organization is more apt to be an involved volunteer.

If a study were made to discover what traits of character were most valuable for a director of volunteers to possess, high on the list would be: a sense of organization, a sense of humor, the good sense to be optimistic and above all, flexible. Without organization a director is lost. Without a sense of humor a director is dull. Without optimism a director will despair. Without flexibility a

of court programs in Minneapolis, illustrated this point so well at the 1975 Missouri Conference on Volunteerism. "Mention institute of corrections," he said, "and people think, 'dangerous people.' Say Red Cross and the community thinks, 'disasters, coffee and doughnuts.' Drop the word hospital volunteers and everyone sees 'pink ladies delivering flowers and the mail.' We need to be aware of the stereotypes and clarify and correct them."

What can we do to improve and change the image of our organizations so volunteers will be motivated to work with us? Public education is the answer to stereotyped image problems. And



director shouldn't have accepted the job in the first place.

Anyone working with volunteers will agree with what Eva Schindler-Rainman and Ronald Lippett said in their book, *The Volunteer Community*: "A volunteer administrator wears the following hats: the administrative hat, the public relations hat, the consultant's hat, both within the organization and to organizations in the community, the training hat, both to volunteers and staff." There is another hat that should be added to that list—the free psychiatrist's hat. There are some days a director doesn't have time to wear any of the other hats. Listening is very time consuming, but an important part of the job.

The final motivational factors we want to explore are the image and climate of the organization. Image is visible and invisible when projected through the mental picture people get when your organization's name is mentioned. A poor image is certainly not a positive motivational factor to attract volunteers.

John Stoeckel, when he was director

volunteers can play an impressive role as public information disseminators.

If you are having difficulty motivating volunteers to work with you because your image problems are more tangible ones, such as unattractive surroundings, poor parking facilities, or the community's confused and vague idea of the services your agency provides, try doing what some organizations did, with the help of volunteers, to improve their images.

St. Louis State School and Hospital, for example, improved its surroundings by having high school students and church groups paint buildings and rooms and plant gardens in the yards. Another St. Louis hospital lacked safe and free parking for volunteers. Every time volunteers couldn't find a place to park, even on lots where they were willing to pay, they made a point of telling the administrator, staff or a board member. A year of this action brought free parking across from the hospital for all volunteers and auxiliary members. Pro-

