

the skills could perform this function under the supervision of a staff professional.

If it sounds like training volunteers takes up valuable staff time and energy, that is quite accurate. Any good program of volunteer service requires an investment on the part of the programming staff as well as the volunteers. They should consider the following factors:

Environmental security. Most job assignments that volunteers go into are relatively new to them—not as much as their actual task functions are concerned but in terms of environmental factors (where they work). New systems of management, dealing with groups of professional workers who “speak their own language,” working with clients from differing religious, ethnic, social and cultural backgrounds, and encountering unfamiliar situations (child abuse, drug addiction, homosexuality) can lead to rapid attrition without adequate orientation to the environment the volunteers will work in. Orienting volunteers can be part of the screening process to obtain

volunteers genuinely committed to their assignment.

Staff confidence. A volunteer will not be able to work with professionals if they don't have confidence in the volunteer to do a good job. By training the volunteer in the specific skill areas he/she needs, the likelihood of staff reacting to the volunteer as “just a volunteer” can be reduced.

Performance skills. Learning is a continuing, everyday life process—both in the acquisition of knowledge and the ability to apply it to ongoing experience. Volunteers need to periodically redefine, evaluate and modify their skills. Growth as the renewal and application of skills is a necessary component to successful performance.

A study at the Western Electric Plant in Cicero, Ill., revealed that workers' performances are stimulated by someone interested in them and what they do (called the “Hawthorne Effect”). A primary motivation for people volunteering is the desire to feel good about them-

selves for doing something worthwhile and doing it well. Helping volunteers obtain the skills to perform well is a commitment that volunteer managers need to make—not only to the volunteers but also to the clients, the ultimate recipients of the skills and service.

Volunteer attitude—hygiene factors. If a staff person is training a group of 25 volunteers for some kind of placement in an agency, and he/she begins by asking them to state what they hope to get out of their volunteer experience, he/she most likely will be greeted by a stone wall of silence. The reason is simple: Most people do not like talking about themselves in front of a large group of strangers. The attitude is fear; the hygiene factor is the size of the group.

Hygiene factors are conditions whose presence may not contribute significantly to success, but whose absence most certainly will contribute to failure. This can be true especially when assigning unprepared or ill-prepared volunteers to a particular job as opposed to making the same placement of a well-prepared volunteer. The feeling of a volunteer as a valued member of the staff is a message which needs to be accurately communicated. Actions speak louder than words. For the volunteer to feel important, respected, and valued it is essential that staff relate the message: “You are important, and we are willing to invest our time and energy in you.”

To ignore the needs of the volunteer can, and does, contribute significantly to the failure of programs. Training the volunteer and making the commitment through staff investment of time and energy will add to the overall success of the volunteer's efforts. The attitude is value; the hygiene factor is training.

The success or failure of volunteer programs hinges on a number of factors, such as recruiting the appropriate volunteer, supervision, recognition, evaluation and training. However, training is one variable upon which staff can make a significant impact prior to and during placement. The opportunity for the sharing of experiences between staff persons and volunteers contributes to the ability of volunteers to perform well. If the commitment is to good volunteer programs as opposed to poor ones, then the preparation of the volunteer for work must be regarded as key.

*Do the sights and sounds and smells feel comfortable and inviting to me here?
Does it sound like there's enough in it for me?*

SOME QUESTIONS VOLUNTEERS ASK

1. What community affiliations and financial support does your agency have? What does that mean?
2. Who is the person designated to coordinate your volunteers?
3. How will my responsibilities differ from paid staff? Will I be replacing paid staff?
4. What arrangements do you have for a trial period on my assignments?
5. May I see a written description of my possible volunteer tasks?
6. What are my opportunities for advancement? Variety?
7. What's required of me in the performance of my duties?
8. What are the channels of communication for suggestions, problem solving and evaluation?
9. What kind of orientation, training and supervision will I have?
10. How will records of my service be available if needed?

—Compiled by Kathryn Joiner, executive director of the Volunteer Bureau, South Bay-Harbor, Calif. These questions, adopted by the California Volunteer Network, were printed on a pocket-sized card and distributed to volunteers.