

Setting Achievable Goals in Volunteer Groups

A 1990 Video of Approximately 20 Minutes

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(and some more... check tape to get them
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Chances are you belong to a group where everybody is a volunteer—no paid staff at all to hold things together (or not many, anyhow).

[PHOTO: OVERLAPPING OUTLINE FIGURES]

And darn little money either.

THINK ABOUT IT.

- This includes many religious groups (church, synagogue, temple)
- All those great service clubs
- Support and self-help groups
- Neighborhood organizations

[PHOTO: SMALL GROUP, MEETING]

- Social/recreational clubs
- Educational and political groups
- Boards, committees, and commissions

You might well belong to several such groups and be a leader of at least one of them.

CONGRATULATIONS!

[DRAWING: HAPPY, SMILING HUMAN]

Just don't kill yourself at it.

[LINE DRAWING OF A "FRAZZLED" WOMAN]

Don't kill your group either. Because volunteer groups like these are where quality of life happens in a community; where progress is first made in meeting needs.

So why can't we make these all-volunteer groups work better?

Most of these groups are like roller coasters, up with inspiring dedicated leaders during dramatic crises, down or dead the rest of the time.

[FIGURE ON A HOBBY HORSE]

The amazing thing about many volunteer groups is how such GOOD individuals combine to make such AWFUL groups!

[CARTOON: MAN POINTING GUN AT TABLE MATE SAYING "PASS THE MUSTARD"]

One main reason is because we set unrealistically high goals, and therefore, set ourselves up for failure. Eventually, such failure becomes a habit, an expectation, and demoralization sets in.

We're proposing here a tested way of avoiding that trap. Our logic is this — In any VOLUNTEER GROUP, the rule is: If volunteers won't do it, it won't get done. Therefore, our first job is to find out what volunteers or members will do. Then we set goals only on that basis.

Most of the time, we start from the other end. We set group goals in terms of what our hearts would like to see rather than what our hands can do. We set goals as if we had all kinds of people to follow through on unattractive tasks because they're paid to and/or have to. But,

what we ACTUALLY HAVE is volunteers who, in the long run, will mainly do what they want to.

So, because we want so badly for it to happen, we might target to wipe out adult literacy in one year flat. Never mind that we have almost no money, no staff, and only 10 volunteers (two of whom do 90 percent of the work). Because we have good hearts and because we fantasize paid staff to delegate to, where none actually exist, we act like we want to change the world in a day.

Everybody KNOWS it take AT LEAST a week!

Enter the member-input process to deal with this kind of problem and some other related ones, too. What the member-input process can do for your volunteer group is:

- Convert passive membership to active participation;
- Promote ownership of the organization's program by its members;
- Avoid over-extending the organization, to the point where it effectively accomplishes nothing;
- Prevent people "dumping" goals on the organization while doing nothing to help accomplish those goals. [The "goal dumper" is eloquent/persuasive in proposing goals but disappears when it's time to implement them.]

Here's how it works:

First, you decide who qualifies for participation. We suggest the broadest possible base of membership (in good standing) and even people with good potential for membership. Each qualified participant gets one "goal vote" in terms of their independent response to the following three items:

1. What are the three top subjects or topics you think our group should be working on (this year, this month, etc.). Be as specific as you can, but keep it somewhere within the general purpose and mission of this program or organization.
2. For each topic, list at least three do-able steps to implement progress in this subject area. These must be things which are realistically within the capabilities of our organization.
Note: No topic suggestion will be considered unless accompanied by at least three do-able steps. [The idea here is to force people to think through their suggestions.]
3. Put a check mark next to any do-able step in which you would personally be willing to invest significant amounts of your time. [This is your "participation promise" check, a good safeguard against the dismal situation in which a few martyrs try to move the whole organization all by themselves.]

[PHOTO OF TWO PEOPLE TRYING TO PUSH AN ELEPHANT THROUGH A SMALL DOOR]

Here's an abbreviated example of how a process like this might evolve, adapted from work with Latin-American volunteers in the summer of 1988.

One of Maria's (M) goals was:

THE RECOVERED VIDEO STARTS HERE

I think we ought to be teaching children to read and write. Her steps to the goal and "participation promise" checks were:

- ☐ Find volunteers willing to teach the children
- ☒ Get books and other learning materials
- ☐ Get cooperation of school teachers
- ☒ Get small gifts to reward children who do good work

One of César's (C) goals was: I think we ought to teach children to add and subtract. His steps to that goal and his "participation promise" checks were:

- ☒ Get cooperation of school teachers
- ☐ Get cooperation of children and their parents
- ☐ Raise _____ money (about \$3,000 in U.S. equivalent)

Among other participant responses, a goal-review committee found a significant pattern supporting the same kind of goal. Moreover, there seemed quite realistic breakdown of steps needed to achieve the goal, with hopeful coverage of "participation promise" checks indicating that this group could, in fact, achieve this goal.

The goal—actually a combination of Maria's and César's—was, therefore, accepted for further development, which included thinking through the steps-to-goal in even greater detail and bringing in a larger group to sign off on these steps with "participation promise" checks. In addition to Maria (M) and César (C), whose "participation promise" checks are carried forward in the more complete goal-achievement design, we now also have Rosa (R) and Juan (J). To distinguish among them, each now signs on in terms of their own initial.

TEACH CHILDREN (10-15 years old) TO READ AND WRITE AND ALSO ADD AND SUBTRACT

- R Find out how many children need this
- R Identify who these children are
- J Get cooperation of their parents, family
- ? Get cooperation of the children
- X Get cooperation of the church
- C Get cooperation of school teachers
- C Train the volunteers in how to teach reading and arithmetic to children
- M Get books, writing and other materials to use in teaching the children
- X Match volunteers with children
- J Raise _____ money (about \$3,000 U.S.)
- M Get small gifts to reward children who do good work in the program
- M Get small gifts for volunteers
- ? Coordinate the overall effort

The object, of course, is to get all steps "covered", if possible by people who are glad to do this ("glad gifts") or at least willing. It is also good to have some back-up or redundancy in the system, in case one person doesn't come through on one piece of the action.

What can be done with steps that are over-covered, too many people want to do the task? One frequent good move here is to team the work; another is to take the person who is busiest elsewhere and relieve them of that particular task.

What can be done with steps that are not covered well enough or at all?

- Look for OTHER people, not involved now, who might be willing to do it.
- Team it.
- Rotate people in and out of it.
- Pay somebody to do it.
- Hate it, but do it anyhow.

In all of this, the cardinal principle is: The people who'll have to DO the work should decide WHAT THAT WORK WILL BE. This principle allows our volunteer group to concentrate on good goals our group can get. . .

TOGETHER.

[SYMBOLIC LINE DRAWING SHOWING SEPARATE PATHS MERGING INTO ONE]

D R A F T — for review

Study Guide for

Setting Achievable Goals in Volunteer Groups: Loading for Success

Introduction: The Tape and the Study Guide

The educational video tape was prepared in 1990 by the Center for Volunteer Development, Dr. Delwyn A. Dyer, Director, and the Learning Resource Center at Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Virginia. Material was developed by Dr. Ivan H. Scheier, Visiting Scholar, and by Dr. Dyer. Presentation is by Dr. Scheier.

The intent was to be relevant to grassroots community volunteer groups, with also some significant applications to staff-supervised volunteer programs in agencies.

For loan copies of the tape, application can currently be made to the Center for Volunteer Development; Virginia Tech; Donaldson Brown CEC, CVD Suite; Blacksburg, VA 24061-0150; (703) 231-7966 [toll-free in Virginia (800) 572-2180].

This study guide is primarily for the use of trainers, teachers, or other learning facilitators in guiding discussion after viewing of the tapes. Ordinarily, we would not give copies of this guide to students/trainers/learners.

Script Outlines

A script outline is provided for the tape. This is the actual outline from which Dr. Scheier worked as presenter, though, of course, the actual video includes some additional extemporizing and elaboration. Video stills/"slides" are indicated in parentheses, only, in cases where the visual image substantially enhances textual meaning.

Reference to the outline script will enable the trainer to develop her or his own questions, ranging from detailed/factual to "thought" issues.

Setting Achievable Goals in Volunteer Groups

1. AS USED IN THIS VIDEO, WHAT IS THE DEFINITION OF "A VOLUNTEER GROUP"? GIVE SOME EXAMPLES, PLEASE. [See script outline.]
2. (A) WHAT IS ONE OF THE MAIN REASONS VOLUNTEER GROUPS FAIL? [They tend to set unachievable goals.]
(B) WHY DO THEY DO THIS? [Naive idealism; implicit assumption that you can operate as if you had staff, etc. See script outline.]
3. WHAT ARE THE MAIN PURPOSES OF THE MEMBER-INPUT PROCESS? [Convert passive membership to active participation; promote ownership of the organization's program by its members; avoid over-extending the organization, to the point where it effectively accomplishes nothing; prevent people dumping goals on the organization while doing nothing to help accomplish these goals.]
4. HOW DO YOU DECIDE WHO GETS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE MEMBER-INPUT PROCESS? [See outline script.]
5. WHAT IS A "GOAL-DUMPER"? [A person who comes in and enthusiastically persuades an organization to set certain (ambitious) goals, then walks away...]
6. HOW CAN WE PROTECT OUR GROUP AGAINST GOAL-DUMPERS? [The member-input process, generally, particularly its "participation promise" feature.]
7. SELECT A VOLUNTEER GROUP YOU KNOW QUITE WELL AND HAVE EACH PERSON ROLE-PLAY A MEMBER OF THAT GROUP AS PART OF ITS MEMBER-INPUT PROCESS. (YOU SHOULD HAVE AT LEAST 6 OR 7 PEOPLE TO MAKE THIS REASONABLY REALISTIC.) [Script has one example of a "completed" member-input process.]
8. DO YOU THINK YOU MIGHT USE THE MEMBER-INPUT PROCESS IN A VOLUNTEER GROUP YOU BELONG TO? PART OR ALL OF THE PROCESS? WITH WHAT ADAPTATIONS? WHY OR WHY NOT?