

Developing ISA Volunteers for Organizational Success

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Introduction

Employed and professional people always have volunteered in order to challenge talents and skills untapped on the job and because it's "good business". According to a Gallup Poll, 52% of all U.S. citizens over 13 volunteer in some manner. 84 million are associated with structured programs such as Scouting and Red Cross. The higher the education level, the higher the number of hours.

The Essence of Supervision

The essence of supervising volunteers is *empowering them to be successful* in their work. Supervision of volunteers is based on five principles:

1: Volunteers are real staff

Volunteers, like paid staff, need to be linked into the organization in ways that ensure they're productive, that they do good work, that they're challenged and given an opportunity to grow, and that they know they're valued for what they do and who they are.

2: Volunteers aren't free

While organizations don't pay a salary to volunteers, they do have to invest time and other resources to ensure that volunteers are effective. Costs include recruitment, interviewing and screening, training, supervision, evaluation, and recognition.

3: Supervision is about forming and maintaining relationships

Good relationships in a work setting are characterized by mutual trust, mutual respect, and mutual recognition of each person's competency and professionalism.

4: The function of a supervisor can be shared

All workers need supervisors, but not all supervision needs to be done by one person, nor by those formally ranked as such. However, keep in mind that dividing the tasks of supervision among several people may create confusion and frustration for volunteers and, for sure, it will erode the central notion that supervision is a relationship between two people. The word "supervisor" is part of the problem because it connotes authority and superiority. While there may be better terms (coach, team leader, mentor, chairperson, etc.), someone needs to coordinate work and be "in the know".

5: Supervision cannot be isolated from other aspects of volunteer program management

Supervision is distinct from, but related to, job design, screening, training, placement, evaluation and recognition. If you design inappropriate positions, recruit inappropriate volunteers, or fail to screen out inappropriate applicants, all the great supervision in the world won't solve your problems. Keep in mind that you don't "use" volunteers. We use tools, but not people. Better phrases would be; rely on, ask, delegate to, entrust, involve, enlist, etc.

Using volunteers due to "lack of funds" is one of the worst reasons for recruitment because it makes volunteers a second choice.

Empowering Volunteers for Success

Here are ten significant ways that you as a supervisor can empower your volunteers to be successful in their work:

1: Express your passion for the mission of the organization and the goals of the work unit

All workers, and volunteers especially, need to see that their supervisor is committed to the purpose of the organization. Your ability to express enthusiastically your excitement about the whole organization and its mission is contagious and helps to give the work meaning. You need to help the whole team see the big picture: how their work furthers the mission of the organization.

Imagine if your team was cutting stones for a cathedral and a visitor asked one of your workers, “What are you doing?” Would you want them to reply, “I’m cutting stones” or “I’m building a cathedral”?

2: Demonstrate your competency

Workers often count on their supervisors to be experts in the work being done. The key is to serve as a positive role model.

3: Reflect a caring attitude toward the whole team – individually and collectively

Paid staff may have to tolerate an uncaring supervisor, but volunteers won’t.

4: Be accessible and approachable

Be careful to monitor your mood. Avoid looking harried or annoyed if a volunteer comes to you with a question. Volunteers may be reluctant to report unfinished projects or failures to you. Encourage them to bring problems to you early.

5: Aim for consistency

Inconsistency can cause confusion, frustration, be unproductive, and have a negative affect on workers. It may cause volunteers to feel so overwhelmed that they simply quit with a “who needs this?” attitude. Supervisors need to create stability: a balance between the need for change and growth and the need for consistency.

6: Provide a job description

Without a clear job description, volunteers won’t know what their responsibilities are. The work your organization creates for volunteers should give volunteers something to be responsible for, the authority to think, responsibility for results, and ways to measure whether the results are being achieved.

7: Offer top-notch training

Training volunteers reflects your belief in their potential and prepares them for the actual work. Without it, learning will be, at best, inefficient and, at worst, incorrect. The consequences may include serious mistakes. There are three types of training: orientation, initial training, and continuing education/support.

8: Provide feedback

Your obligation to provide feedback is perhaps the most important. It is the easiest to do and the least likely to be done. Put simply, giving volunteers feedback is providing simple and frequent comments on the work. Imagine how frustrating bowling would be if there

was a curtain in front of the pins preventing you from seeing the results of your accomplishments. How quickly might you simply give up the game under such circumstances?

9: Share information

Whether you supervise many volunteers, they work only once or twice a week, or they are in the field and you rarely if ever see them, you'll need to develop efficient systems for sharing information. A misinformed or uninformed volunteer may make mistakes, feel isolated or devalued, experience loss of commitment, and not be motivated to give their best.

10: Express your appreciation

Have some sort of annual event (e.g., a dinner) to celebrate and thank volunteers. While formal expressions are essential, continual and informal words of appreciation are equally valuable. Giving recognition sustains volunteer enthusiasm.

Supervising Volunteers

Dos and Taboos

Supervisors must do the following:

- Keep things running smoothly
- Organize work schedules
- Assess the quality of other people's work
- Resolve systems problems
- Plan and lead team meetings
- Be an advocate for the team
- Facilitate communication
- Ensure compliance with policies and procedures
- Praise
- Promote team spirit
- Ensure adherence to deadlines
- See the big picture
- Help workers connect their tasks to the goals
- Serve as a role model
- Eliminate obstacles
- Give feedback on performance
- Help others grow

However, supervision is not just a matter of performing these tasks. Your *attitude* is critical to success. There must be trust and respect of others.

Supervision is not bossing people around, not constantly telling people what to do, not frequently checking up on them, and not doubting their willingness and ability to do a good job. Volunteers will be attracted to, and stay with, an organization that takes their desire and ability to do a good job seriously. Perhaps the greatest mistake in working with volunteers is to assign work that is boring or too easy.

Management vs. Leadership

Management may be viewed as the science of getting things done by allocating resources. The focus is on *results*. *Leadership* may be viewed as the art of stimulating (motivating) people to do things. The focus is on the *people*.

The Center for Creative Management cites five important points for administrators:

1. Create an environment where each person finds the work for which they are best suited and want most to do
2. Give people the tools they need to do their jobs
3. Challenge them to do their best while giving them the opportunity to do it
4. Reward them equitably for their efforts
5. Offer them an opportunity to learn, grow and advance

Adjusting Your Supervisory Style to the Individual or Group

Volunteers need to feel the security of a knowledgeable leader who has the ability to give them guidance and feedback. However, leadership must be appropriate for the situation. One style of leadership is not necessarily better than another. For example, General Patton would not have been the appropriate leader for a sensitivity group, just as Gandhi would not have been a suitable military commander. Leaders need to integrate the needs of followers with the goals of the organization by integrating people with tasks.

The manager who manages everyone alike is in deep trouble. What distinguished a great supervisor from a mediocre one is their ability to adapt the principle of good supervision to the uniqueness of each individual and situation.

Don't assume that people know how to work with each other as volunteers. Few volunteers ever receive training about volunteering as a subject unto itself. Complicating the volunteer-to-volunteer relationship is the desire to be liked. The least you should do is train volunteers who will supervise others (e.g., have them read books on the subject).

Coaching and Encouraging Your Team

Volunteer managers are more of a coach than a supervisor. A coach is someone who can help you do something that you cannot do by yourself. The coaching relationship is one of equals. The goal of a coach is to develop each player to their highest ability, and a team to function at its highest level. Also, when volunteers are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions (as opposed to having a supervisor be responsible) they do tend to act more responsibly.

Provide the freedom to try new ways of performing tasks. Build a feeling of individual control over what is to be done and how it might best be done by encouraging individuals to have choices and involving them in goal-setting and decision-making processes.

Defining Expectations

Volunteers – like all workers – need to know what is expected of them. No one volunteers in order to do a bad job. Therefore, an important part of your responsibility is to define what doing a good job is. Success is improvement, not perfection.

Moderately difficult work is more motivating than work that is too easy. (That's why a bowling lane is sixty feet long, not five.) Set goals and objectives with the volunteers and periodically evaluate their progress toward meeting these goals.

Let your volunteers know how much you are counting on them and be sure they understand why their work is important. When discussing your expectations with volunteers, don't forget to ask about *their* expectations, too.

A Fresh Look at Volunteer Job Design

Volunteer job design is a challenge of 'task analysis', since almost by definition volunteer work is done in limited chunks of time. Examine the services your organization provides and carve out meaningful assignments that can be accomplished in two to four hour intervals. Your aim is to develop a series of specific jobs for which you can recruit different types of volunteers.

Volunteer time is carved out of a busy schedule and is precious. Volunteers hope that their contributed time will have real meaning, have an impact or make a difference.

The leader of volunteers cannot and should not develop volunteer assignments alone. This responsibility is shared with everyone in the organization, particularly with those paid staff members who will ultimately work side-by-side with volunteers to get the work done.

Think about:

- Continuous, ongoing volunteer assignments, as well as short-term and one-time work projects.
- Things individual volunteers can do, and also what teams of two or three volunteers, or larger groups of people, can do.
- Periodic assignments that allow the volunteer to be 'on call' to help as necessary.
- Work that can be done on-site or off-site.
- Assignments dealing with people, with things, or with ideas.

Most people prefer to ease into a new situation. A short-term timeframe, or even some one-day projects, can help people 'get their feet wet' before taking the full plunge. One-day group projects need not be as formal nor as structured as ongoing assignments, but they do need to be *organized*. Some volunteers may not want direct client or public contact, while others might want this above all else. Some people love variety each time they come in to volunteer, some prefer consistency of tasks.

What *benefits* do you offer to volunteers? Intangibles are important, too.

- A new understanding of your cause, group, or issue.
- Training in a specific skill.
- The opportunity to interact with many different people.
- The pleasure of being part of a team.
- Insight into one's own abilities and beliefs.
- Something to put on a resume.

Motivation

Dale Carnegie said, “If you want to gather honey, don’t kick over the beehive.” You *can’t* motivate others. Motivation must come from *within*. Any attempt to motivate others will be met with the same frustration experienced when you attempt to push a string.

To inspire motivation within others, be supportive, clarify your expectations, give constructive, ongoing feedback and ask opinions. It might be useful to periodically present an opportunity for your members to express *why* they belong to your group. Do you *really* know? It may seem obvious, but then again, it may produce some surprises. Consider having your members answer the following questions on index cards, or some type of survey:

- Why did you join this group?
- Are you finding what you hoped to find?
- How satisfying do you find the experience?
- Why do you continue to belong?
- How could the group be better for you?

Post the responses and tally the most frequently mentioned responses. Consider what you might need to do to make the group more satisfying to most members.

Volunteer Job Descriptions

Conflict, confusion and duplication of effort can be forestalled by a clear job description. It’s very important to put the volunteer job description in writing. Some resist doing this because it sounds too bureaucratic or because they’re afraid the description will scare prospective volunteers away. Here are a few reasons why written descriptions are worthwhile:

- The process of writing each description makes everyone think about the work to be done. Is it too much work for one assignment? What training and supervision will be necessary?
- It allows prospective volunteers to ‘self-screen’ their willingness and/or ability to do the work.
- It becomes the basis of ongoing supervision and evaluation of the volunteer – is the person doing what was agreed to at the start.

A job description has seven essential parts and two optional ones. Keep in mind that people support what they help develop.

Title

Note that the word “volunteer” is *not* a title, it’s a pay category.

Goals of the Work Unit

Specify the broad goals or purposes of the unit or team. This helps the volunteer see the connection between his or her work and the work of the rest of the team.

Purpose/Goals of the Volunteer’s Position

State succinctly why the position exists – what is it that the volunteer is supposed to accomplish. If a worker does not understand why he is doing something, he probably won’t

do it very well. Volunteers will ultimately and consistently do only that which they perceive as meaningful.

Responsibilities

List all tasks and activities. Most major jobs can be broken down into several manageable tasks.

Training and Supervision Plan

Describe how the volunteer will be prepared to do the work and then supported while doing it.

Requirements

Specify the skills, background, experience, training and personal attributes a volunteer would need in order to be qualified for the position. If regular participation in team meetings or a support group is required, state that, too. Describe what *progress reports* will be expected, in what form, and how often. This is especially important for those working off-site or virtually. Specify what you want the volunteer's time commitment to be.

Benefits

Identify what the volunteer will gain. Some benefits are tangible, others are more abstract but nevertheless important (e.g., learning new skills, contributing to a cause, opportunities for input, etc.).

Optional parts to a job description would be **restrictions** and **length of appointment**.

It is often helpful to have instruction sheets. The instructions for a job should be separate from description of the role. Detailed checklists will be very beneficial for one-time special events.

Training and Support

Success Won't Happen Automatically

While a supervisor needs to empower their volunteers for everyone to be successful, one still needs to pay attention to the *relationships*. It's like owning a car so you can make trips. But if the car has no engine or the tires are flat, you won't be going anywhere.

First off, you have to know everyone's name, no matter how many volunteers you supervise or how rarely you see them. Concentrate on maintaining a relationship with each volunteer. It's a terrible mistake to simply let volunteers fade away. If necessary, set up periodic meetings with those you see rarely, or contact people on the phone. Remind those you see rarely that they are a valued part of the team. Volunteers must not feel isolated or like an irrelevant extra.

New volunteers need training, and that takes time and effort. Just as you wouldn't give your 16-year old your car keys and say, "Good luck! I hope you figure out how to be a good driver!", you shouldn't throw volunteers into the fray without proper training, either. New volunteers will make mistakes, but proper training will minimize the frequency and severity of those mistakes. Good training should also let volunteers know *why* they are doing what they are doing. Training also provides continuity, in that one volunteer may be able to pick up where another left off.

Volunteers are people with feelings. Working with them is *not* like going to the shoe store and trying on one pair of shoes after another until you find one that fits right.

Board Training

All too often money is not allocated for board training, nor is time. A board can't work as a team if they don't *feel* like a team. To assure effective leadership, at least have an annual orientation program when new officers are elected. This formality assures a sense of belonging and understanding. It gives each member an opportunity to develop a sense of team and to understand assignments, policies and expectations. Cover the following:

- **Allow time to get to know one another.** Offer some form of icebreaker appropriate for the makeup of the group (as not everyone is outgoing enough to meet new people on their own).
- **Discuss your purpose and policies.** There is often a discrepancy between members as to the exact purpose of both the organization and the board. For this reason, it is important to establish agreement among the board members early in their association.
- **Explain committee structure and responsibilities.** Some committees may no longer serve a useful purpose, yet others may be identified that should be formed.
- **Clarify goals and agree upon objectives.** What is the purpose and goal of the committee? What realistic objectives are measurable? What money, manpower and time will be needed? What skills will be required? What obstacles need to be overcome?

Early orientation for new members can greatly influence later enthusiasm within your group. Preplanning a clear-cut set of objectives for what you hope to accomplish and within what time period can assure you of a larger percentage of happy volunteers in years to come.

Your initial considerations should include:

- What is your mission or purpose?
- What key result areas do you want to address?
- What realistic goals can be established?
- What reasonable, measurable, objectives could be proposed?
- What time frames should be attached to each objective?
- Whom should be assigned the authority to make things happen?
- How will progress be measured toward each objective?
- Who will be responsible for evaluating the success, and by when?

Have a meeting with your committee and devote it to identifying "Key Results Areas". These are areas of consideration in which it is absolutely essential that a high level of performance be assured. Identify what is truly important *before* writing objectives. The focus of "Key Results" is on *ultimate accomplishments*. Think in positive terms and identify the results sought:

- Results – *not* procedures, or the process, or the activities
- What – *not* how
- Ends – *not* means

- Output – *not* input

One word of caution: avoid considering any measurement as it would be premature at this stage. Instead, measurements should be specified in your objectives.

Specifying objectives at the outset ensures that the entire organization, committee, or board knows what it is trying to do. It enables decisions, policies and priorities to be made in the light of what the group is trying to accomplish.

Plan of Action

Once you have a clear objective with a time frame and measurement, planning involves walking through the experience *backward*. You know *what* you want to have happen at the other end. So how are you going to *make* it happen? Planning a blueprint is necessary to achieve your objectives. Inherent in any good plan are four basic considerations:

1. Decide what overall strategy the group will use to accomplish the task
2. Allocate the various resources as needed
3. Establish a monitoring system to warn of impending failure
4. Formulate alternative plans for use when the control system indicates performance is not meeting expectation

Goals are open-ended statements of hopes for the group or committee. **Objectives** should be specific and measurable and consist of three parts:

1. *What* will be different or accomplished?
2. *By when?*
3. How will they be *measured?*

Objectives do not state *how* you are going to accomplish something, but instead, *what* you will accomplish.

Time invested in planning pays off in the end.

Board Manual

A board manual is a notebook that provides the board member with an easy resource for understanding and clarification. It should be distributed during the board orientation and contain the following:

- Organization's purpose statement
- Constitution and bylaws
- Organization's goals and current plans
- Annual report
- Budget and financial report
- Organization chart / roster (with names, addresses & phone numbers)
- Committees
- Personnel policies and expectations
- Minutes from prior meetings

- Lessons learned. (Learn from your mistakes and keep useful records for your successor.)

Virtual Volunteering

Some volunteers may work remotely and never attend a physical meeting. Have regular online reporting for your virtual volunteers. Provide clear and concise guidelines on the frequency and type of communications, format and content. Reply to progress reports promptly to acknowledge receipt. If people don't report in, check in with them on their progress. Keep off-site volunteers informed of team, project, and organization information. Celebrate success and honor volunteers both offline and online. Make periodic telephone contact as this personal touch is the only way to really assess tone.

Leadership Development

Ongoing skill training is one of the best ways to develop the leadership potential of your members. Studies have shown that a chance to learn and to grow provides strong motivation for continued involvement by volunteers.

Unless you develop the leadership potential within those with whom you work, you are destined to work too hard yourself! In your absence things will come to a virtual halt. Until you develop a competent replacement, you may be cast in your current position indefinitely. This is an engraved invitation for burnout. In order to develop a capable understudy:

- Keep him thoroughly posted on your plans and the progress of those plans.
- Place responsibility on him gradually. Add one new assignment at a time.
- Build up his sense of responsibility. Delegate complete responsibility for specific tasks.
- Teach him the habit of giving you frequent progress reports.
- Hold him accountable for his responsibilities.

Volunteer Retention

Volunteer retention is an *outcome*, not an activity. Retention occurs when all the pieces are in place. It's a result of having meaningful volunteer work done by the right volunteer in a welcoming environment.

Some ways to improve volunteer retention are:

- Provide ongoing training
- Have procedures for explicitly crediting volunteers for the work that was done.
- Have procedures for documenting to volunteers the value of their work.
- Train paid staff on how to work with volunteers.
- Make volunteering an upwardly mobile occupation (for those that want it).

If things are *not* going well, you may need to consider (and possibly have exit interviews to check on):

- How realistic are job descriptions
- Working conditions
- Meaning or value of the work

- Degree of difficulty of the work (as people do need to be challenged)
- Quality of training
- Whether they felt appreciated
- Feedback they may have received on the quality of their work

Ask people how the work differed from their expectations. Perhaps it's time to change the job description(s).

Conducting Evaluations

What Needs Evaluating and Why

As a supervisor you should periodically evaluate all aspects of your program: systems, paid and volunteer staff, facilities, training and continuing education, as well as your own performance. Evaluation helps you and others identify what is going well (so you can determine how to keep it going that way), as well as areas that need improvement. Evaluation aids decision making; without it you can't set goals, plan how to reach them, or determine if you have met them. The purpose is *not* to lay blame if problems or weaknesses are identified.

Failing to evaluate a volunteer sends a clear message that you don't care about their quality of work, or about volunteers in general. Those who know they *are* doing well, as well as those who think they should be congratulated for good work, will think less of the volunteer effort, and of you, if evaluations are *not* conducted.

A critical element in a job design is how to measure whether results are being achieved. First off, if people can't tell how well they are doing, if they can't tell if they're succeeding or failing, they'll get bored. Second, there is no incentive to try anything different if you don't even know if the present course is failing. Finally, if you and the volunteer have not agreed – at the start – about the work to be done, how can you later comment on its completion or effectiveness?

Ask people a simple question, "Do you think you're doing a good job?" That can often be quite a discussion starter. Ask people if their work is interesting. Do they have the necessary tools? Are they having any difficulties or do they need help?

For exit interviews, consider having people answer the following:

1. What did you like about what you've done?
2. What would you do differently if there were a next time?
3. What help did you need and who did you ask?

Don't assume that all volunteers will be content with the same job forever, or the converse that volunteers will want to do something new or different each year.

Monitor volunteer attendance closely because high absenteeism usually indicates problems.

Invite current volunteers to help assess how they are utilized now. Be prepared to act on their recommendations, including the possibility of eliminating some roles.

Solving Performance Problems

Poor performers can affect the morale of the whole team. You'll lose the respect of other volunteers if you don't deal with volunteer performance problems. Your organization may even be liable if a volunteer mistake causes harm.

Not all performance problems are the fault of the performer. For example, has the volunteer received good training? Is it their first day on the job?

Performance problems are generally of four types:

1. Quality of work
2. Quantity of work
3. Timeliness
4. Rate of improvement

Do not assume knowledge. Provide proper instruction. Develop written checklists for tasks that occur regularly, but with time in between during which people can forget.

Items to consider when analyzing performance problems are:

1. Is the problem worth your time and effort?
If not, don't bother.
2. Does the subordinate know their performance is unsatisfactory?
Let them know and provide feedback.
3. Does the subordinate know what is supposed to be done and when?
Let them know – work planning.
4. Are there any obstacles beyond the subordinate's control?
Remove the obstacles.
5. Does the subordinate know how to accomplish the task?
Provide training and or practice.
6. Do negative consequences follow nonperformance?
Change the consequences or transfer the subordinate.
7. Do positive consequences follow nonperformance?
Change the consequences
8. Could the subordinate do the tasks if they wanted to?
If not, transfer or terminate the subordinate.

Failing to deal with a performance problem is in itself a performance problem! After all, problems won't disappear if ignored. If serious reprimands are required, do them privately. (Sit face-to-face, not behind a desk.) Use the job description to identify expected behavior and actions. Indicate a shared commitment to finding a solution to the problem. Finally, arrange for follow-up.

Focus on the *problem*, not the person. The purpose for discussing performance problems is to prevent them from recurring, *not* to punish or make someone feel bad.

Volunteer Recruitment

Success as a volunteer recruiter is highly dependent on attitude. Recruiting is not hard. People *will* come forward and offer their help if you actively spread the word about your organization's needs. The typical problem many have is different – *having meaningful work for people to do once they've joined up* If you're constantly recruiting new people because current volunteers are departing, *stop* recruiting until you've analyzed *why* retention is a problem.

Another problem is often: *eliciting applications from the most qualified prospective volunteers*. The most successful volunteer recruiters are those who can *focus* so specifically on vacant assignments that only qualified candidates come forward.

Some volunteer roles are naturally more attractive than others and you may have to expend more energy on those that seem less desirable.

A volunteer leader has a double mandate:

1. To identify the needs of the organization's members and paid staff, and
2. To mobilize non-cash resources (i.e., volunteers) to meet those needs.

All of the concepts of volunteer recruitment are meaningful for all-volunteer efforts who want to expand their membership rolls, and who want to transform 'members' into active *workers*.

Your goal is not necessarily to 'sign up' a hundred people as volunteers. The only true measure of your success is whether or not necessary work gets done.

It takes time for a recruitment message to flourish. It's like sowing seeds. Don't get discouraged when you hit a dry spell.

Recruitment is the *Third Step*

The *first* step is: *know why your organization wants volunteers*. This is not a foolish question and the answer is often not self-evident. An organization that has not articulated *why* it wants volunteers in the first place may find recruiting difficult.

The *second* step is: *design valuable volunteer assignments*. Design assignments that accomplish real work and that are attractive to prospective volunteers.

The *third* step is: develop and implement your recruitment plan. This consists of four tasks:

1. For *each* volunteer job description, brainstorm potential sources of people having the necessary qualifications.
2. For each potential source of volunteers, select the most appropriate technique to communicate your message.
3. Do it! Go out and ask people to volunteer.
4. Be prepared for applicants to contact you and develop a welcoming system for interviewing, screening, and putting new volunteers to work.

Keep volunteers motivated with training, ongoing communication, supervision, evaluation, and recognition.

Never conduct an industry or community-wide, cast-the-net, general, “we need volunteers” recruitment campaign. Instead, do a series of min-campaigns focused on *each* volunteer assignment or on whatever special needs you have. The more you *focus*, the greater your chances of success.

Trends and Issues in Volunteerism

The world is changing and volunteerism is changing with it. This truism is only a ‘problem’ is you want to fight the tide. Volunteerism never occurs in a vacuum. If the economy or population shifts, volunteering will reflect the changes just as does the job market.

- People are stressed more with less time to fill traditional volunteer roles.
- Perhaps you can ‘buddy up’ volunteers so two or more can ‘job share’, allowing them to cover for one another when necessary.
- Might you be able to recruit middle-aged divorced people by offering them a safe and appealing social outlet?
- Our population is aging and there is a growing pool of younger seniors with skills, mobility and time that you might be able to utilize.

Volunteers today want flexibility in *when* they can contribute their time. Many prefer assignments that are results oriented and short-term in nature. Experience has shown that many who seek short-term assignments ‘re-up’ for new assignments if the first one was satisfying.

Why People Do Volunteer

There are naturally many different motivators for volunteering. Few people are motivated by only one thing. More often it is a cluster of motivations that eventually make them select your opportunity over others. As a recruiter, the fact that volunteers have multiple motivations means that you won’t be able to rely on one or two standard ‘grabbers’ to turn prospects into recruits.

The most successful form of volunteering is an *exchange* – when the giver and the receiver both come away with something positive. This does *not* mean that people have to ‘burn’ or be passionate in supporting your cause before joining.

Here are just a few reasons why people may join:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| - To feel needed | - To have an impact |
| - To share skills | - To learn something new |
| - To gain leadership skills | - To become an ‘insider’ |
| - To earn academic credit | - To be a change agent |
| - To demonstrate commitment | - To be part of a team |
| - For fun | - To gain status |
| - To repay a debt | - To test themselves |
| - To assure progress | - Because they were asked |

Note that ‘fun’ is on the list. Remember that volunteering is essentially a *recreational* activity. People can only volunteer in their discretionary time, when they are not committed

to their livelihood, family, or other obligations. Therefore, volunteering better have *some* social, enjoyable aspect to it.

Why People Don't Volunteer

The number one reason people do not volunteer is: they don't feel they were asked! Publicity is *not* recruitment. Publicizing your volunteer needs in a newsletter may inform people of your volunteer needs, but people may not realize that they themselves are candidates. (Strange, but true.) Most people don't say 'no', they simply didn't know you wanted them to say 'yes'.

When people don't want to join your effort, they may be telling you something about your organization. Fix the real problem and recruitment may take care of itself!

In order to recruit new volunteers, you have to *ask people to volunteer* or to join your group.

An organization's commitment to the value of volunteer efforts is demonstrated by the readiness to budget appropriately for such participation.

Volunteer Interest

The reasons why people *remain* on the job are often quite different from what grabbed them in the first place. Some reasons why people remain committed include:

- They feel appreciated
- They can see their presence does make a difference
- There is a chance for advancement
- There is opportunity for personal growth
- They receive private and public recognition
- They feel capable of handling the tasks offered
- There is a sense of belonging and teamwork among co-workers
- They are involved in the administrative process: problem-solving, decision-making and objective-setting
- They recognize that something significant is happening because the group exists
- Their personal needs are being met

Here are some reasons why volunteers *lose* interest:

- Discrepancies between their expectations of members or the task, and the reality of the situation.
- No feeling of making a difference – no praise or reward
- Assignments too routine with no variety
- Lack of support from co-workers
- Little prestige related to the task or group
- No chance for personal growth
- No chance to meet personal needs

- Too little chance to demonstrate initiative or creativity
- Tension among co-workers

Where to Look for Volunteers

The ability to understand *where* to find prospective volunteers is at the heart of successful recruitment. In general, there are no rules for where you can (or can't) recruit. It's essentially a given that within ISA we look for volunteers within our membership, but we can easily do the reverse (i.e., find qualified and interested candidates, and then recruit them as both society members *and* volunteers).

Just because people know what you do, never assume they know that they can become involved as volunteers, nor that you need them.

While there are no perfect, right or wrong ways to recruit, it is important to match the technique to the source. Just as one may swear by bulletin boards, another may swear *at* them. While some recruitment efforts elicit immediate reaction from volunteers, don't be daunted by an initial lack of response. Recruitment is a process of 'sowing seeds' and takes time.

The most common method of publicity and recruitment within ISA are division and section newsletters. These are not always effective as readers do not feel the message is necessarily directed at them. Never forget to *ask* people one-to-one. Make use of e-mail, list servers (broadcast systems) and the telephone. There are also plenty of public speaking opportunities and chances to give a plug. However, when doing so, do *not* bill yourself as speaking about volunteer opportunities! Instead, speak about the organization and its work, with the goal of being an informative and even provocative presenter. Then, *within the context* of your remarks, mention the things volunteers are doing. If your audience is not interested in the information you have to share, then it's unlikely that you'll find prospective volunteer candidates. A speaking engagement allows audience members to self-screen their interest.

Do *not* waste time and money on unfocused recruitment tools. Also, concentrate on one volunteer job description at a time. When using printed materials, avoid the word 'volunteer' in the headline (as it will interfere with getting your message across). Instead, use phrases like 'get involved', or 'become a part of...'. Have a title that grabs the reader's attention. Do not imply that all candidates will be accepted. Instead, ask people to 'apply' or 'call to talk about it'. Be upbeat and stress what the volunteer will get as well as give. Books have a variety of examples. One great example is, "Life is like a ten speed bike. Most of us have gears we never use. *Subtitle*: Find you missing gear – Volunteer." (Even though that one violates the rule and uses the word 'volunteer'!)

Inviting, Not Pleading

A common, but very poor, message for volunteer recruitment is, "We need help." The truth is, *everyone* needs help. Whether you are recruiting in person or through written materials, the manner in which you present the invitation to become involved is very important. You are trying to strike a balance between providing enough information to interest a prospective volunteer and furnishing too much data that oversells your case. Remember that your initial goal is to encourage people to express interest in volunteering with your organization. At the recruitment stage, explain only the basics:

- Introduce your organization as succinctly and clearly as possible. What do you do? Whom do you serve? What have been your successes? Mention where you are located.
- Explain how volunteers contribute to the work of the organization. What have volunteers achieved in the past? What kinds of people volunteer?
- Explain the work that needs to be done and why a volunteer is suited to do it. Go over the main elements of the job description.

Speak to your successes because people like to join enterprises that accomplish something.

You want people to self-screen themselves. As clearly – and truthfully – as possible, describe:

- The tasks that need to be done.
- The context of the work, or what will be accomplished. Will the person work alone or with others?
- Time considerations. How long will the tasks take per week or month, and how long of a commitment in terms of duration.
- Highlight the training you offer.
- Explain what the ideal qualifications or characteristics would be.
- Indicate the benefits, both tangible and intangible, the volunteer can expect in return.

Avoid the following:

- Speaking with forked tongue (i.e., not telling the whole truth and fudging a little to make volunteering sound more appealing).
- Playing on guilt. You should *not* have to shame people into volunteering.
- Asking for a favor. People should want to volunteer because the work itself is worthwhile, *not* to help you personally. This is connected to playing on guilt.

Recruiting is *never* asking people to do a favor. Instead, you are *offering them an opportunity* to do something important and you don't want to see them left out!

If a candidate seems hesitant, but interested, suggest a way they can 'test the water' by offer a one-time or short-term assignment. This is one reason having a variety of job descriptions is useful.

Outreach in Cyberspace - If Not Your Home Page, Then Where?

If someone were to search your organization's web site right now, would they immediately see – on your home page – that volunteers are involved in your work? Would they find information on what positions are open and how to apply if they were interested? Is a name and contact information provided of someone to contact for volunteering? If not, there *should* be! Your organization's web site is the most effective recruitment tool at your disposal.

Home page: Mention volunteer involvement and provide a link for "more information about volunteers".

Volunteer main page: An introduction to volunteers at your organization; what they do, who they are, how they are chosen, etc. From each point, offer the choice “to learn more”.

Further clicking might show:

- Actual job descriptions for available positions
- A wish list of skills or schedules needed
- Photos of volunteers at work
- Data on volunteer achievements
- Personal testimonials from volunteers in current assignments

However, do *not* expect your web master to know what to say or how to recruit. Present your material to him, as all you really want the web master to do is page design and posting.

The Power of Image

Does your organization’s materials mention that volunteers are part of the service delivery team? Or are volunteers an ‘invisible’ resource? If the latter, don’t assume members even know that you *have* volunteers. Some items to consider are:

- Has your history been one of continuous success and growth, or have there been public setbacks, funding problems, and changes in administration?
- Are you perceived as rich or as struggling?
- What is the age, sex and ethnic makeup of your members and volunteers?
- What professions do you represent and serve?
- How visible are volunteers currently to the public?

Consider working with your newsletter editor to see if you can develop a regular column about volunteers, or possibly a feature story.

The Image of Volunteering

Our culture has contradictory views as to the value of volunteering. We honor those who come forward in times of crisis. Good Samaritan efforts are universally praised. But we also denigrate a person who ‘works for nothing’ as a ‘sucker’. Because we often measure personal worth by criteria such as earning power, volunteer activities may be seen as nice, but really a diversion from the road to success.

Sometimes it is actually easier to get volunteer cooperation when things are bad. The pitch of ‘we need you to help turn things around’ can be very effective.

A Continuous Process

Recruitment is a constant, year-round process of keeping your organization’s name and its available volunteer opportunities in front of people. Repetition is important for a variety of reasons:

- *Readiness of the prospect.* People may not be available when you need them.
- *Changing audiences.* People change jobs and may not have heard of your needs.

- *The general value of repetition.* Advertising people know that it takes at least three contacts to make an impact.

Sincerity wins out over technique every time.

Membership Development

There are some special issues when your challenge is encouraging people to ‘join’ a group or motivating inactive members to participate more. The similarities between recruiting volunteers to work in an organization and recruiting members to join are greater than the differences. For predominantly-volunteer groups like ISA there is the additional issue of transforming ‘members’ into active workers – people willing to do a necessary project, hold office, chair committees, etc. In fact, this is one of the distinctions between the *voluntary* act of joining an organization and becoming a *volunteer* on behalf of that organization. Having many names of the membership rolls does *not* necessarily mean having enough help to achieve goals.

Listen to the needs of your general membership. For example, you may proceed to change your meeting time, having decided people aren’t coming because of the hour, but you may find you still have low attendance. In fact, people may not be coming because they had expected great programs and you’re no longer providing them. Part of the solution may be found in simply *listening* to what your members are saying.

Getting People to Join

Membership development is a process that follows the same sequence of steps as any other form of volunteer recruitment.

1. Define your membership goals.
 - a. Do you need sheer numbers, or do you want to find members who will contribute their time and talents in an active way?
 - b. Are there any special target audiences from whom you most want to draw new members?
 - c. How many members do you want?
 - d. Does it matter whether your members are active or not?
2. Define what ‘membership’ means in your organization.
 - a. What are the benefits and responsibilities of members?
 - b. What are the qualifications for becoming a member?
 - c. Why would someone want to join?
 - d. What should a new member expect from you in terms of meetings, communications, opportunities to meet others, etc.?
 - e. How long do you expect people to remain members?
3. Brainstorm on where to find people that meet your profile. As far as ISA is concerned, we already know who and where our potential sources are.
4. Select a technique to match the source. Within ISA that would typically be newsletters, meetings and speaking engagements. However, that’s little more

than preaching to the choir. We need to be more creative and proactive and also communicate with people in industry who are *not* already members.

Do *not* assume that people know about your organization or that you are looking for new members.

Getting Members to Work

For some organizations, the problem is not so much recruiting new members, but rather that too many current members are inactive, do not participate in meetings or projects, and resist committing to leadership roles.

Few things are more frustrating than watching (or being one of) a small group of members burning themselves out doing all the work of an organization, growing increasingly upset at the ungrateful, apathetic majority. The key to organizational health is member participation. But how can you mobilize members from passivity into action?

The truth is that many people join a group without ever *intending* to be active or to do any work – and they have absolutely *no* idea that you expect something of them. They may consider their dues as a form of contribution. Others join just to receive your publication and feel connected simply by staying informed that way. If someone joins up solely for discounts, insurance, or group travel, do *not* be surprised if you never see this person at a planning meeting. For some organizations, the way to get a stronger core of active volunteers may be to *reduce* the external benefits and thus weed the rolls of nonproductive members.

Define what you expect from a member in return for the benefits received. For example; attendance at meetings. Do you *want* attendance at meetings? *Why?* (This is not self-evident.) If meetings are basically social events, or listening to committee reports or a guest speaker, such an event will naturally only appeal to a limited percentage of your members. Others may feel such meetings are a total waste of their time. However, if your meetings are the times where you engage members in discussing future projects, reach collective decisions, assign tasks, and perhaps conduct some training, then attendance may be important for everyone.

Job Design Issues

How long has it been since you questioned the purpose of some of your committees, the job descriptions of key positions, or how needed tasks are distributed? Many all-volunteer organizations tend to stick with ‘tradition’. What has worked for years becomes fixed in stone, even if there is evidence of erosion. Over time, job descriptions lapse because ‘everybody knows’ what everyone else is doing. Leaders become surprised to discover that newcomers feel left out of the insider clique.

Leaders need to be rotated through positions. Lack of rotation can have serious consequences. First, people burnout and lose enthusiasm for the work. They become typecast into their roles and may not know how to graciously extricate themselves. Second, newcomers have no way in. They quickly learn that all prime roles are taken and may never become available.

One element of job design is how much work is really involved. You may have descriptions that are simply too much for today’s members. Can two members share one position? Can one member volunteer as a support person for another? Develop ways for new

members to test the waters before accepting a major responsibility. Allow newcomers to buddy up with an experienced member in a sort of apprenticeship.

Who Gets Asked

Whenever you see a group of officers sitting around a table considering how to find help on a project, invariably someone asks, “Who do we know who can do this?” This is *always* a poor question. Why? Because the answer is limited to whom you know! In any association of more than fifty members, it’s unlikely that even the officers really know *everyone*.

A much better question would be, “Whom *don’t* we know that we might discover to do this?” And since you’re talking about recruiting the involvement of someone who is already a member, this question is even more important. Most new applicants and many veterans have no idea what options are available to them – or can’t judge by the name of a committee whether or not it might interest them.

Nominating Committees

Most organizations use a “Nominating Committee” to develop a ballot of candidates for office or to recommend prospective board members. Usually such a committee is mandated by the bylaws. Unfortunately, Nominating Committees too often convene themselves at the last minute, scramble around for names of people to select, and breathe a sigh of relief when the ballot is in the mail. In line with the ‘whom you ask’ thoughts above, a more effective idea would be to make the work of the committee a year-round, proactive function.

A good first step would be to change the committee’s name to something like Leadership Development Committee. Among the tasks that could be handled within a broader capacity are:

- Keeping job descriptions updated for all board members and office positions, committee chair positions, and project roles.
- Monitoring recognition needed and received (which often is an indicator of when a member is ready to be asked to assume a new position).
- Assuring training of new officers.

How You Ask

There’s a big difference between publicizing an opportunity to volunteer and actually recruiting a candidate to apply for it. By all means use newsletters or other publications, as well as make announcements at meetings, but don’t stop there. If I read about your call for help, I know there are several hundred other people reading the same article, so you probably don’t really mean *me*. But if you have a personal conversation with me about the task, I definitely understand that *I* am wanted.

Be cautious on *how* you ask for help during meetings, especially during full membership sessions. Never say from the podium, “Who wants to do this?”, because you set up two immediate problems. First, peer pressure tends to work against someone raising their hand (i.e., few want to ‘go out on the limb’). Second, often times the people who raise their hands are the one you had wished stayed home that night!

For larger organizations, it might be a good idea to create an ‘application form’ for leadership positions or even for committee selection. This makes members consider their involvement more consciously and gives you a paper trail to track whether offers of help are indeed being utilized.

What Stops Members from Accepting Leadership Roles

Positive reasons for volunteering for leadership roles are:

- Great experience
- A way to be in control
- Commitment to the cause
- Feel it's their turn to serve
- Love the adrenaline flow
- Gain status

Negative factors are:

- Have watched others before them become burned out
- Know exactly how much time it takes and are afraid
- Concerned that they'll be left holding the bag when others don't do their jobs
- Afraid they'll become unpopular with their friends
- Won't know how to extricate themselves once in

What About Past Leaders?

Consider how your group treats outgoing or past leaders. What happens to past presidents and other retiring officers? Do some of them drop off into oblivion, even lapsing their membership after a time? Might there be a way to channel those leaders' commitment and vital knowledge into further work on behalf of the organization? This is naturally a balancing act. You want to provide recognition for past contributions plus hold on to the talents these people possess. *But*, you also want to move such outgoing officers into *new* involvement, not maintain their power and influence to the detriment of the next set of officers. The best advice is to plan for and structure 'emeritus' rank participation.

Some organizations have a past-presidents council, which is a fine idea – providing that it has *tasks to perform*. Other retiring officers might be utilized as trainers or as the nucleus of a new member welcoming committee. Experienced leaders can also be tapped as individual mentors or advisors. In general, never assume what an outgoing leader wishes to do.

Meetings

Make sure your meetings are productive. Do *not* waste a volunteer's time. A volunteer generally volunteers to do a job, not to go to meetings about doing the job. Keep people focused on their goals. People need to find meaning in their work. It's important for all workers, especially volunteers, to see the results of their work.

Some basic guidelines for calling a meeting:

- State the reason for the meeting (on an agenda)
- Set the standard (by arriving on time and being prepared). The only way to start a meeting on time is to *start* it when you *said* you would!

- Develop an awareness of group dynamics (seek to make everyone comfortable and feel a part)
- Arrange for a written report of the transactions. Minutes should record what was *done*, not what was *said*.

Before ever calling a meeting, give serious thought as to *why* the meeting is needed and what needs to be accomplished. For example:

- What are the needs, interests, and expectations for the participants?
- What is the agreed-upon purpose of the meeting?
- What materials are needed to facilitate the meeting?
- Is there enough time beforehand for everyone to prepare adequately?
- How much time will be needed to deal with the issues?
- What commitments do you seek and from whom?
- Where could the meeting most effectively take place?
- Who will be responsible for room arrangements, refreshments, clean up, etc?

If you thought the meeting was important enough to attend, then attend to it when you are there.

A well-planned agenda is essential, but success depends on the participants having the information in advance, with time to prepare. An agenda should:

- Allow time for unfinished business
- List reports and who is responsible
- Schedule time with flexibility
- Carefully consider the order in which you place business on the agenda

The chairperson should open the meeting with a review of the meeting's purpose. Define and clarify goals during the meeting. Without a clear understanding of the direction the meeting is to take, problems are likely to develop. Members may become bogged down in unrelated discussion.

Characteristics of Effective Groups

The following points are worth considering. None is easy, nor comes without conscious effort. However, each is important to the effectiveness of group efforts:

- The leadership is appropriate to the needs of the group, and members have confidence in their leader
- Growth and welfare of all members are considered
- Goals are clear and shared by all
- Group goals are compatible with individual goals
- A definable timetable is used
- Communication is open, frank and non-threatening

- There is a sense of agreed priorities
- The resources of each member are used satisfactorily
- Goals are high but achievable
- Members are capable of handling the tasks
- Decision-making procedures and authority are appropriate
- Conflict is dealt with openly
- Processes are routinely evaluated and results of those evaluations used

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