Motivating Volunteers

If you want to build a ship, don't herd people together to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.

Antoine de Saint-Exupery

The key to volunteer motivation is for them to feel needed by the organization and to believe that they are making a difference.

Volunteer programs are fueled by the motivation of the volunteers and the staff. When there is a problem retaining volunteers, it can usually be traced back to motivational factors. Understanding the different motivating factors that affect a person’s decision to give their time allows the volunteer administrator to work with them more effectively. Motivating volunteers is also about making sure they know they are needed and that they are an important part of the group. Volunteer motivation is heavily dependent on acceptance and being part of the group.

Volunteers need to feel appreciated and like the work they do to truly contribute to the organization. If others involved in the organization do not make an effort to reach out and encourage them, they are likely to lose their motivation and enthusiasm. However, if others are enthusiastic and motivated, it will have a positive effect on the volunteer’s attitude.

McClelland’s Needs Theory

In the 1960s, David McClelland proposed that people have three basic needs and will seek to satisfy the need that is the strongest at that moment. The three needs are the need for achievement, the need for affiliation, and the need for power.

Need for Achievement
The need for achievement is the drive to excel, to set a higher goal, to seek
greater responsibility, and strive to succeed. High achievers seek personal responsibility, feedback on their performance, and set goals with a moderate risk level.

In working with the high achiever:
? Ask for their help in setting the work pace and methods.
? Give them challenging tasks that require efficiency.
? Rotate tasks to avoid routine.
? Allow them to learn new skills or gain new knowledge.
? Give them clear feedback on their performance. Feedback helps them measure their success.

Good jobs for achievement-motivated volunteers include:
? Fund-raising activities
? Organizing events
? Membership campaigns
? Filling leadership roles

Need for Power
Volunteers with power motivation have the desire to have an impact on, and to influence and control the behavior of others. Power itself is neither good nor bad. It is the application of that power that makes it so. There are two forms of power at work: socialized power and personalized power. Socialized power is used for social benefits, to gain prestige and status. Personalized power is used for personal gain. The volunteer administrator’s job is to direct this desire for power to useful ends.

To direct power-motivated volunteers:
? Give them opportunities to direct other volunteers.
? Include them on the planning of events; ask their opinions.
? Allow them to plan their own work or implement changes in their volunteer job.
? Provide them with opportunities to interact with paid staff and supervisors.

Jobs that are good for power-motivated volunteers include:
? Representing the organization before the public and other groups.
? Chairing committees, especially those that bring publicity to the organization.
? Serving on the board of directors or advisory board.
? Directing groups of people, as in a middle-management role.

Need for Affiliation
Volunteers with the need for affiliation have the desire to be liked and accepted by others. This volunteer thrives on frequent contact and a close relationship with the volunteer administrator (VA). The VA should take time to talk to these volunteers and regularly make contact with them.

For success with affiliation-oriented volunteers:
- Let them work with clientele or other volunteers.
- Find tasks that require cooperation.
- Give them off-task time to interact with their coworkers.
- Allow plenty of relationship-building time and activities.

Tasks that are appropriate for this group of volunteers are:
- Greeters, receptionist
- Table hosts at dinners and banquets
- Docents at museums, parks, or educational exhibits
- Social work such as youth organizations and senior centers
- Work on social/hospitality committees

**Herzberg’s Two-factor Theory:**

Frederick Herzberg’s study of what employees liked and disliked about their jobs resulted in the identification of two categories of factors that affect motivation: hygiene factors and motivating factors. Even though Herzberg studied two specific groups of employees, these factors have been found to apply to all types of workers, including volunteers.

**Hygiene Factors**

Hygiene factors are mostly extrinsic factors such as company policy and administration, relationship with the supervisor, relationships with co-workers and family, clean and safe working conditions, feelings of job security, and adequate salary. If these things are inadequate, the volunteer or employee may become dissatisfied. The volunteer administrator (VA) should address as many of these factors as possible.

- The work environment should be clean, comfortable, and free from any hazards. Volunteers should have the proper space and resources in which to perform their jobs.

- To provide quality supervision, the VA should make efforts to interact with the volunteers and develop a friendly relationship with them. Being a good listener is a key skill in developing this relationship. Volunteers need
someone that they can go to with questions or concerns and know that they will be heard.

? The VA should work to foster an organizational culture where volunteers are valued by all employees in the organization, not just the volunteer administrator. Having a common break room where paid staff and volunteers can mingle would assist in developing good relationships between the paid and volunteer staff.

? Organizational policies should be adequate to protect the agency, its clientele, as well as volunteer, yet not be so restrictive that they hamper volunteers from doing their jobs. Having volunteers help develop the policies can help achieve this balance and contribute to a positive organizational culture.

Motivation Factors

Motivation factors are those factors that lead to job satisfaction. They are intrinsic factors such as achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, advancement, and growth. As these factors increase, so does motivation. By focusing on the motivational factors, the volunteer administrator (VA) not only motivates volunteers to higher levels of performance, but also takes a big step toward retaining them as long-term volunteers.

? The volunteer must be provided a challenging and stimulating job. This factor is key to motivating and retaining volunteers.

? Volunteers must be empowered to carry out all facets of their job, as well as the ability to improve or enlarge it. This level of responsibility brings satisfaction.

? The work itself must be stimulating and worthwhile. Volunteers must see how their job contributes to the agency’s vision. The VA must take time to help the volunteer see this connection.

? Recognizing volunteers for their work ranges from simply saying thank you to public recognition at a banquet or through the organization’s newsletter. The type of recognition given should be unique to the volunteer to have the most impact.

? Volunteer administrators can offer volunteers opportunities to advance in the agency by giving them additional responsibilities such as chairing a committee, supervising other volunteers, or assisting with training new volunteers. Using volunteers as middle managers can take some of the
work-load off of the volunteer administrator. Volunteers cannot only advance in responsibility, but also in job title.

Providing additional responsibilities can help the volunteers grow in self-confidence, but volunteers should also be given the opportunity for growth through advanced training. This training may be related to their volunteer job or simply for the volunteer’s personal growth or self-interest. For example, Master Gardener Volunteers may be given additional training in diagnosing plant problems to improve their skills in that area. A photography class for these volunteers would provide them with a new or improved skill that may or may not be used as part of their volunteer position.

Volunteers who are motivated typically produce higher quality work and seek to become even more involved. If volunteers are not placed in a position that allows their needs to be met, they will eventually choose to leave the organization. Good volunteer administrators allow, and even encourage, personal growth for their volunteers. Volunteers’ needs do not remain static. To accommodate changes in the volunteers’ expectations, volunteer administrators must talk with the volunteers regularly to stay on top of their changing needs.

References


Skelly, JoAnne, Motivating Volunteers, Fact Sheet 00-30, University of Nevada-Reno.