Shared Leadership

Strong leadership is necessary for systems to work properly. Shared leadership strengthens the overall leadership of a system. This leadership style involves shifting the mantel of leadership to others when the task calls for specific expertise. To use shared leadership effectively, you must recognize the strengths and weakness of those involved. Mary Merrill notes, “There is increasing awareness that shared leadership, (i.e., leaders at all level - policy making, executive and middle management) is the most effective model for encouraging and facilitating high impact volunteer involvement within organizations” (Merrill, 2003).

One tool for sharing leadership is delegation. DuBrin (1998) defines delegation as the assignment of formal authority and responsibility for a specific task to another person. Delegation has been shown to improve employee satisfaction, motivate employees, and improve organizational effectiveness. Delegating important tasks to volunteers not only gives volunteers a feeling of connectedness to the agency, but also develops their skills. Involving volunteers in the decision-making process also gives them a better overall picture of the agency and its vision.

Rules for Delegation

Not every task can be delegated to volunteers. Questions to ask yourself before delegating a task include:

- Is the task part of the volunteer administrator’s job description? Tasks such as developing the budget and disciplining staff or volunteers are part of the leader’s job and should not be delegated.
- Does the volunteer have the knowledge/skill to do the job? Is there time to train the volunteer? If the answer is no to both of these questions, then the task should not be delegated.
- Does the volunteer have the time or motivation to do the job? If not, the delegation will probably not be successful.

Stages of Delegation

Successful delegation involves five stages. Skipping any of these stages could result in an unsuccessful delegation.

1. Preparation Stage
   a. Establish goals – what do you hope to accomplish?
   b. Specify task to be delegated
   c. Determine who should be delegated the task.
2. Planning Stage
   a. Meet with the volunteer and explain the task.
   b. Explain why they were chosen to carry out the task.
   c. Ask them to develop a plan for accomplishing the task and set a time to meet to discuss their plan.

3. Discussion Stage
   a. Inform others who may interact with the volunteer that the volunteer has been delegated this task. This will pave the way for the volunteer’s interactions with others.
   b. Explain the volunteer’s authority in carrying out the task. Outline any guidelines they are to follow and what resources they have available for the task.
   c. Acknowledge any obstacles the volunteer may encounter.
   d. Set checkpoints at logical times during the process. This allows you to check progress of the volunteer and to address any unforeseen barriers that the volunteer might have encountered. Checkpoints allow you to get the volunteer back on track if they have strayed. You do not want to revoke the delegation, but want the volunteer to succeed.

4. Audit Stage
   a. Monitor the volunteer’s progress at the checkpoints you previously set with the volunteer.
   b. Make adjustments to the plan as necessary.
   c. Respond to unforeseen problems.

5. Appreciation Stage
   a. Accept the final product. Do not accept incomplete work.
   b. Celebrate the volunteer’s success. Recognizing their efforts may motivate the volunteer to work at a higher level for the agency.
   c. Evaluate the process. How can the process used to accomplish the task be improved?

Summary

Successful delegation not only extends the efforts of the volunteer administrator, but also builds the knowledge, skills, and confidence of the volunteers. Volunteers are more motivated when they are making a real contribution to the agency.

References