

ORGANIZING AND LEADING VOLUNTEERS

“Some Basic Principles of Organizing and Leading Volunteers.”

What this is....

This material gives hints for effective leadership of volunteers in seniors' activity. By applying these hints you can do much to encourage participation in your own local group. They are all things you can do. Give them a try. They will make you a better leader – we assume that you already know what work needs to be done and how to divide it up among volunteers.

Where these principles come from....

They are based upon years of scientific research in voluntary organizations. Effective committees have been compared with ineffective ones, and these are some of the major findings. These findings have been tested – and you can use them with confidence.

Some basic principles....

This information is a tool to help you carry out your program. The basic principles are few – but they are vital. All suggestions herein are based upon these central ideas:

1. Talking face to face is more effective than any other form of communication.
2. Group decisions and reinforcement are the necessities of effective leadership.
3. People have reasons for what they do, or fail to do. You must understand these reasons before you can lead effectively.
4. Personal interest makes big difference in people. They like logic and efficiency, too, but their loyalty goes to leaders who know and care about their needs, problems and accomplishments.
5. Effective groups must be built and maintained. Good group work requires organization, and that means records, clear assignments, regular meetings and periodic reviews of results.

How to use this information....

Read it through and study it to help plan your work. Keep it constantly at hand and check it through before you start each activity. Refer to it to solve problems as they arise. Review it at least once a month and see how you are doing.

1. HOW DO I GET PEOPLE TO DO A JOB?

Ask them. Few people will volunteer their services. This does not mean that they don't want to be active, however. People wait to be asked. Asking builds activity.

2. WHO SHOULD ASK THEM?

If possible, someone they know and trust, someone whose influence they respond to – a friend, a neighbor, a senior in the same seniors centre, and a person with prestige in the community. But, if you cannot arrange for someone else, do it yourself. Remember that the act of asking is itself important.

After this has been done, be sure that the new recruit is welcomed by the leader of the group, she or he will work with the most effective combination is therefore being asked by someone he already knows and being welcomed by whomever is heading up the activity.

3. WHAT DO I TELL THEM?

- a) Make clear what job you are asking them to do, and be sure it has a definite beginning and end. People do not want to sign up for life, so do not get them to over-commit themselves.
- b) Ask people to do things they can do well, especially in the beginning. People are more willing to begin things they know they can do. Later, when they are really a part of your group, they will be more willing to try new things.
- c) Tell each person how her or his job fits in with the rest. People want to understand things that they are part of, and they work best when they know that others are depending on them.
- d) Let each person know that her or her or his help is needed. If she or he feels that you are just "looking for people" she or he will also feel easily replaceable and less responsible for doing a job.

- e) Discuss their own goals and how they fit into those of the organization.
People have their own reasons for volunteering, and you need to know them in order to lead effectively. Also, you must help people keep their expectations realistic; otherwise you will not be able to meet them.
- f) Ask what they would like to know, and give them plenty of time and help in raising questions. Many people are reluctant to ask questions, but they will work better after they have done so.
- g) Do these things in person; do not rely only on printed circulars, letters and phone calls. There is no substitute for talking face to face. It lets the person know that you consider the discussion important, and it gives you a chance to get acquainted with him or her.
- h) You have a right to be enthusiastic about the importance of your work.

4. HOW DO I BUILD AN ACTIVE COMMITTEE?

- a) Keep records; you cannot keep it all in your head. Have a list of members, with names and up-to-date addresses and phone numbers. Keep minutes or notes of jobs to do and decisions made. Keep a list of each person's assignments. Keep a list of each person's skills and "strong suits."
- b) Keep your committee together. Call meetings regularly, do not just keep in touch with each person separately. People need to see and feel that they are part of something big, not just hear about it from you. Call each person before a meeting to make sure he or she will be there, and knows you care that she or he comes. Give each member a list of names, addresses, and special jobs or skills of committee members. People are interested in these things, and they will feel more responsible to each other. Give each member a copy of minutes or notes about what was decided at the meetings. It will remind him or her of their job, and she or he will know that others are expecting things of him or her. Let members share in deciding what jobs to do, how they can best be done, and who can do them best. They know some things you do not, and they will work harder for things they decide on themselves.

5. HOW CAN I KEEP PEOPLE MOTIVATED?

- a) Set high standards of activity. Members will take their cue from you. And remember, you won't get more than you ask for.
- b) For each activity get agreement on group goals. Achieving them will give you a real feeling of accomplishment. Where there are no challenging goals, members feel that activity is unimportant.
- c) Get enough people to do the job. Overworked volunteers stop volunteering, and besides, the extra lift of the group really begins when you have at least 7 or 8 people involved.
- d) Get the spouse involved in your activity in some way. If nothing else, make sure that what is being done is understood and appreciated. The most active volunteers have the support of their families.
- e) Be sure each member knows his or her job and position in the group. It is not enough for you to know ask him or her and listen to make sure she or he knows, too.
- f) Do things at meetings. Transact business, make decisions, review past work, plan new things. People will be more committed to things that have been agreed upon in the group. They will feel on record with the others. Besides, they won't keep coming to meetings unless they accomplish something.
- g) Invite seniors leaders to your meetings. People want to hear directly from them, and to make sure that their own views are carried on to higher levels.
- h) Make your meetings interesting. Hold the work and "mechanics" to an hour or so. Leave time for informal discussion. Add spice by reporting "inside information" from other levels in the organization.
- i) Keep your group active the year round. If months go by without meeting or activity, it is like starting all over again. It takes at least a meeting a month for members to feel they are "regular."
- j) Encourage people to help each other out on jobs. "Every one for himself" is not good group work.
- k) Pay attention to people who do not meet group standards and expectations. If you ignore their failure, other members will follow them. If a member does

not live up to your committee standards, speak to him or her personally, asking frankly what the trouble is, encouraging him or her, offering help. Encourage other members to speak to him or her, and show interest. Re-assign her or his job, if necessary. This will show other members that the job is important.

- l) Recognize good work, and reward it. What you can do will depend on the local situation, of course, but you can always commend good workers at meetings, express your appreciation in person, and write letters of thanks.

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