

concepts in volunteer management

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Extension programs, especially 4-H, depend on volunteer efforts to accomplish program goals. Extension agents must be good managers to fully use the talent and energy the volunteer has to offer. Let's consider concepts in volunteer management that create an effective working relationship between volunteers and Extension professionals.

Volunteers—Who Are They?

One author said: "A volunteer is someone who gives his/her time, ideals, and resources to something he/she believes in."¹ Volunteers have changed over the past few years from a middle-aged, middle-income, white, female group to include people of all ages and all economic, ethnic, religious, and educational backgrounds. The varied population of volunteers is helping to narrow the gap between groups, black and white, professional and nonprofessional, young and old, as they work for a common goal—to serve others.

Volunteers have needs, abilities, and desires of their own. The skilled and caring Extension agent will use the management and supervision principles discussed here to fully use all of those needs and abilities. . . .

Management Concepts

A manager is someone who works with and through others to accomplish organizational goals. Therefore, a good manager is an enabler of human resources. There are times when a manager finds it appropriate to be the leader of a group, a member with his/her peers, a teacher, decision maker, disciplinarian, helper, consultant, or simply an observer. Experience and adherence to basic management skills will help the Extension agent decide when each role is appropriate.²

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Maslow's Theory

Managers must realize that certain factors affect the basic behavior of people. Maslow's human behavior theory, the "hierarchy of needs," concludes that each person has various levels of need and as we satisfy one level, we move up to the next. He categorizes the five levels of needs from most basic to the highest level, as follows:

Physiological—the basic need for food, water, air, sex, etc.

Safety—to be safe from harm, have security and shelter.

Social—the need to associate with others; to be liked.

Esteem—to be recognized as a person of value; to be rewarded.

Self-actualization—a person will not be ultimately happy until doing what he/she is fitted for.

Example: an artist must paint, a vocalist must sing.

Two important observations: (1) each need must be met in turn to move up the hierarchy and (2) a need met is no longer a motivator.³

Herzberg's Theory

Another management concept is Herzberg's "Motivation-Hygiene Theory." He separates factors affecting people and how they work into two categories: hygiene factors and motivators. Herzberg refers to satisfying factors as motivators. These factors tie in with the top three of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. The five motivators include:

Achievement—do well in the job and pride in accomplishment

Recognition—someone else recognizes the good work done

The work itself—the tasks are some that are liked.

Increased responsibility—the job is done with little supervision or carries the supervisory role.

Growth and development—promotion in responsibility, advancement, self-fulfillment, and development.

While achievement and recognition rank highest as motivators, the work itself, responsibility, and development (advancement) seem to have the most long-term effect.⁴ Therefore, the motivators must be used in proper balance to keep a volunteer enthusiastically involved.

An Extension agent who uses both management concepts can have a better understanding of each person he/she works with. He/she can see where the person is in the hierarchy of needs and determine what motivators can be used to involve the volunteer in an upward movement while accomplishing the goals of Extension at the same time.

Principles of Supervision

Management of a volunteer program offers unique challenges because of the nature of time and effort given. Remembering that volunteers can leave the organization without a loss of income creates the need to develop a job or environment that's highly motivating to the volunteer. Here are seven basic principles in supervision and how they relate to volunteer management.⁵

Understand What's Expected

The volunteer needs to know Extension's goals, ideals, history, policies, and reward system. He/she must know the specifics of this particular job, how he/she relates to others in the organization, and whom he/she reports to. Volunteers must also know where supplies come from and what physical resources are available to them. Essentially, volunteers must understand how they fit in, their responsibility to the organization, and what support they'll receive.

Have Guidance

Training depends on the skills necessary to do the job and the skills and expertise the volunteer brings to the program. A real key here is to match the job to the skills of the volunteer.

Guidance must include *current* information and any new techniques that can be used. The updating of information must be constant so the new skills learned make the volunteer more qualified and proficient in his/her work and help develop him/her as an individual. This is included in the self-actualization level of needs and, when dealt with correctly, becomes a high motivator.

Mutual support between staff and volunteers is an important part of guidance. When support and respect exist, guidance will be more readily understood, and accepted, and flexibility to demands will be present.

Be Recognized for Good Work

A good supervisor builds confidence in volunteers by showing sincere appreciation of the unique strengths each brings to Extension. Here are a few ideas for giving recognition ranging from simple to more formal and costly:

- Tell the volunteers, on the spot, they've done a good job.
- Write a letter and tell them that their efforts are appreciated.
- Give a certificate of merit, appreciation, or achievement.
- Give a cash award or sponsor a trip to a training conference.
- Give a medallion, trophy, or plaque that might include the length of time as a volunteer.

- Promote to a better job or one with more responsibility. (This is a concrete vote of confidence in the volunteer's ability.)
- Make the recognition *public* through dinners or news media.

Some are costly, but realize the investment of time and interest of the long-term volunteer to Extension. Remember, recognition was indicated as one of the important motivators in Herzberg's "Motivation-Hygiene Theory."

*Receive
Constructive
Criticism*

Just as good work deserves recognition, a volunteer deserves realistic assessment of weaknesses, with offers of advice and resources. However, a great deal of caution should be used in criticism for it's *very* easy to overdo. To keep the criticism constructive, do it in private and make the comments positive ways to improve. Use positive follow-through to aid the implementation of the suggestions. Build on the volunteer's strengths and shift the responsibilities of the volunteer if evaluation shows it to be the wisest choice. Remember, the person involved is a volunteer, *donating* his/her time and energy to something he/she believes in.

*Receive
Responsibility*

Extension uses volunteers to spread its influence further than could be done by the paid staff alone. Therefore, the Extension agent must be willing to release responsibility to volunteers.

Opportunity for volunteers to train for and accept additional responsibility should be provided often. Ways to provide greater experience include:

- Allow the volunteer a part in establishing and evaluating the organization goals.
- Involve the person in planning, problem solving, and decision making. (Those affected should be involved in the planning.)
- Involve the volunteers and staff on an ongoing basis through regular meetings to provide volunteer feedback.
- Collaborate with other agencies that have similar programs to share ideas and resources.
- Let the volunteer know of other roles available that he/she might want to carry.⁶

Volunteers who can handle and want additional responsibility should be given it. They can gain self-actualization and personal esteem.

Be Encouraged To Improve Ways that volunteers can improve themselves are simply a continuation of initial training and guidance. Providing updated materials and training sessions keeps the volunteer current on needs and resources. These can be included in the regular planning meetings and special seminars. They should provide for informal "idea sharing" as well as new techniques, evaluation skills, and other program possibilities. Teach "teaching skills" to volunteers so they can teach others. The Extension agent then has volunteers training volunteers and expanding the resources of Extension even further.

Work in Good Environment Seemingly, the Extension agent wouldn't have much control over the environment a volunteer might work in, but there are some controls he/she can have. Any office space, equipment, or activity areas provided, as well as special assignments given to a volunteer, must protect his/her physical and mental health. Remember, volunteers are involved because they want to be—not because they're paid. Therefore, the experience must be positive and safe.

Conclusion Volunteers appreciate good supervision. Without a salary reward system, good supervision requires great skill and genuine compassion to help volunteers progress toward greater responsibility. Supervision produces commitment if it's good. When people who share goals and objectives can enjoy their work together, each improves job performance because he/she has mutual respect and trust.

Volunteers have needs, abilities, and desires of their own. The skilled and caring Extension agent will use the management and supervision principles discussed here to fully use all of those needs and abilities. The agent must remember that the volunteer is human and *giving* his/her time and energy. Therefore, the job must help fulfill his/her own desires as well as those of Extension.

- Footnotes**
1. Clara L. Collette, *Volunteers—How To Find, Train, and Utilize Volunteers* (Corvallis: Oregon State University, Continuing Education Publications, 1973), p. 2.
 2. Marlene Wilson, *The Effective Management of Volunteer Programs* (Boulder, Colorado: Volunteer Management Associates, 1976), pp. 25-27.
 3. *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.
 4. William R. Van Dersal, *The Successful Supervisor in Government and Business*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1974), pp. 62-64.
 5. *Ibid.*, pp. 10-21.
 6. Eva Schindler-Rainman and Ronald Lippitt, *The Volunteer Community—Creative Use of Human Resources*, 2nd ed. (San Diego, California: University Associates, 1975), pp. 105-106.