

Care and Feeding of Volunteers: the Foundation for Effective Leadership in AFS

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AFS and Volunteers

- AFS units are all volunteer organizations
- The “real work” of AFS is done by committees of volunteers
- In general, only a small percentage of members become “active” members (volunteers)

Why do people volunteer?

- According to an old saying quoted by Linda Greenlaw (author and the woman sword boat captain in “The Perfect Storm”), a volunteer is someone who didn’t understand the question



What Prevents People From Volunteering Their Time?

- They feel that they lack the capacity to help the organization achieve its goals
- They lack the motivation to volunteer
- They feel they are just too busy
- They haven’t been asked

Verba, S., K. L. Schlozman, and H. E. Brady. 1995. *Voice and Equality: Volunteerism in American Politics*. Harvard University Press.

So What Can You do to Encourage More People to Volunteer Their Time?

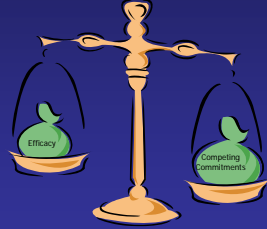
- First, you have to ask!
- Draw out new volunteers
- Encourage new unit members, students to take an active role—build capacity!
- Be wary of overcommitted people—unless they have a history of producing!

Some Research Findings on Motivations of Volunteers

- People volunteer their time to organizations for many reasons but two factors outweigh others in making their decisions
- Efficacy: will their participation make a difference?
- Competing commitments: does their desire to participate and the social pressure to do so outweigh other commitments?

Appeal to Efficacy

- Every potential volunteer balances his/her sense of efficacy (Can I make a difference?) with competing commitments—focus on how he/she can help the AFS unit & the profession



Competing Commitments

- People who volunteer often have more competing commitments than those who don't—they belong to more organizations, donate more time to other organizations than nonactive members
- But their desire to make a difference outweighs the competing commitments

Martinez, T. A. and S. L. McMullin. 2004. Factors affecting decisions to volunteer in nongovernmental organizations. *Environment and Behavior* 36: 112-126.

For Whom Will the Volunteer Work?

- Volunteers also must decide to which organizations they will donate their time
 - Professional?
 - Civic?
 - Kids' activities?



Don't Give Up

- Timing of the request is important—don't write off a person because of one negative response
 - A person who is too busy to help this year might be willing to help next year



Keeping Volunteers Involved

- Recognition is the only reward we have to offer volunteers
- Recognize them at annual meetings
- Award prizes
- Write letters
- Reinforce efficacy
- Thank them every time you talk to them



Being an effective leader in the AFS...

- Is more than being a visionary
 - It includes developing followers (volunteers) to achieve the vision even after the leader is gone
- In an all-volunteer organization requires extra attention to caring for people—you have no authority, but you do have the ability to inspire people to action

Being an effective leader in the AFS...

- Be selective, strategic—decide on a few, important things you want to accomplish
- Be prepared to work in spurts of activity (intense activity before meetings with periods of inactivity is normal—with exceptions)
- Plan ahead—the people you ask to do things have regular jobs
- Make expectations clear, follow up