Mobilizing Members, Volunteers, and Leaders in Extension: The Call to Action

Abstract

Mobilizing members, volunteers, and leaders is the all-important component of a volunteer program and consists of three steps, including engage, motivate, and supervise. Providing service to an organization cannot occur without engaging its volunteers and leaders. Engaging in the performance of tasks and roles too quickly will generally result in frustration, poor performance, and a poor retention rate. Administrators of volunteer programs should understand the motives that contribute to beginning, continuing, and discontinuing volunteer service. During the supervising phase, Extension professionals and volunteer administrators determine how well the volunteer is using the available resources to perform the assigned task.

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"Vision without action is only a dream. Action without vision is merely keeping busy."

Introduction

Mobilizing, the third category of the GEMS Model of Volunteer Administration (Culp, 2012; Culp, Deppe, Castillo, & Wells, 1998) consists of three steps, including engage, motivate, and supervise. Mobilizing members, volunteers, and leaders is the all-important component of a volunteer program that the Extension professional has been working toward. After devoting considerable time, energy, and resources to generating and educating members, volunteers, and leaders, new recruits are actually mobilized to perform the role for which they have been selected. All too often, Extension professionals and community volunteer program coordinators are in such a hurry to engage new recruits that insufficient time is spent generating and educating them. Engaging members, volunteers, and leaders in the performance of tasks and roles that they have agreed to fulfill too quickly will generally result in frustration, poor performance, and a poor retention rate.

In order to effectively serve identified needs, members, volunteers, and leaders must be mobilized to action. Mobilizing is the point at which participation, service, leadership, and action all begin. The three steps involved in mobilizing members, volunteers and leaders include engage, motivate, and supervise.

Engage: Serving the Organization

The initial step in mobilizing a member, volunteer, or leader is engage. After potential volunteers, leaders, and members have been generated and educated, they are given the opportunity to engage in the task or activity they have been selected to perform and are given the resources to do so. It is important to note that service to the organization and its programs cannot occur without the engagement of its volunteers and leadership. Not all members or program participants will choose to serve by becoming a volunteer or a leader. Likewise, most community organizations could benefit by involving a broader cadre of volunteers, rather than simply limiting the volunteer pool to the organization's membership. Positioning volunteers in roles that provide them personal satisfaction and enjoyment will be a reward and a meaningful source of recognition in and of itself, and should also improve volunteer retention and enhance longevity (Culp & Schwartz, 1999).

Motivate: Understanding Why We Do What We Do

Individuals are motivated to participate in volunteer activities for a variety of reasons. Administrators of volunteer programs should understand the motives that contribute to beginning, continuing, and discontinuing volunteer service. Understanding what motivates volunteers when they are recruited contributes to the success of volunteer recruitment initiatives. Understanding what keeps the volunteer motivated helps Extension professionals and volunteer administrators to enhance the volunteer's experience. This generally improves retention rates and longevity (Culp & Doyle, in revision). Being aware of discontinuation motives allows the Extension professional and volunteer administrator to avoid those factors, which will also contribute to improved volunteer retention.

Understanding what motivates individuals to volunteer is a key component of volunteer administration (Murk & Stephan, 1990). The relationship between volunteers and the organizations they serve is defined by two elements: volunteer motivations and the needs of the organization. The point of contact between volunteer motivations and organizational needs is the actual volunteer experience, which has the potential to satisfy the needs of the organization and the volunteer, leader, and member (Balenger, Sedlacek, & Guenzler, 1989).

Volunteers give their service to an organization because they expect certain motivational needs to be met during the act of service (Balenger et al., 1989). Clarifying the motives prompting volunteerism is one means of attempting to stimulate volunteer involvement. Each volunteer experience and engagement opportunity is accompanied by the individual's own expectations and is precipitated by unique personal motivators (Henderson, 1980). Determining these unique personal motivators and expectations can contribute to providing volunteers, members, and leaders with a satisfactory and rewarding experience (Culp, 1997). Organizations encountering difficult volunteers, leaders, or members often have not taken the time to identify the individual's motivation to serve. The result is an inappropriate placement.

Atkinson and Feather (1966) and McClelland (1955, 1962) identified three categories of human motivation, including achievement, affiliation, and power. Atkinson and Birch (1978) defined and expanded these three categories. Achievement motives are those that influence individuals to take pride in accomplishments and have a desire to achieve excellence. Affiliation motives influence people to be most concerned about their relationships with other people or groups. Power motives drive a desire for control and influence. Maehr and Braskamp (1986) determined that achievement, affiliation, and power motives were important determinants of performance and success in work and volunteering for community organizations.

Supervise: Helping Others to Be Their Best

The needs, skills, and knowledge of the individual volunteer will determine how much and how often supervision is needed. During the *supervising* phase, Extension professionals and volunteer administrators determine how well the volunteer is utilizing the available resources to perform the assigned task. On-going guidance, support, and advice from the professional or a middle management volunteer can help lead to a positive and productive experience.

For some Extension professionals, volunteer administrators, and program managers, working with volunteers can be a daunting, difficult, or challenging task. Involving volunteers is difficult for the new volunteer administrator, program manager, or anyone who has difficulty delegating tasks (Cassill, Culp, Hettmansperger, Stillwell, & Sublett, 2010). Kemptom (1980) describes a good supervisor as an enabler of human resources. Kemptom believes the supervision process needs both an individual who receives responsibility and a supervisor who must be willing to delegate responsibility to the volunteer, leader, or member. Schwertz (1978) suggests delegating the task that the Extension profession likes to do the best because this is the job that he or she would be best at supervising and feels the most comfortable with supervising.

Conclusion

Mobilizing members, volunteers, and leaders to engage in their role and serve the organization and its programs is beneficial not only to any community organization, but also to its staff, clientele, and the volunteers, leaders, and members who serve it as well. Mobilizing adds the "hands" and "feet" to community organizations and enables and empowers its membership, leadership, and volunteers to more effectively represent, lead, and serve. The engagement of community-based organizations cannot happen without mobilizing volunteers, leaders, and members to action. No matter how many names are shown on an organization's membership roster, without engaged, mobilized members, volunteers, and leaders, the benefit and outreach of the organization cannot be extended to audiences and communities.

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