

# HOW TO DEAL WITH A CHALLENGING VOLUNTEER?

## Factsheet 3



It's very rare that a volunteer becomes a challenge to the organisation, but as with paid staff it can sometimes happen. When it does, it can often be a time consuming and perplexing issue which needs handling with sensitivity and pragmatism. The one thing that you cannot afford to do is ignore it.....

### Why You Can't Ignore It

If you want a healthy organisation, the best way to handle conflict and unmet expectations are up front and directly. The consequences are huge and costly if you do not.

- People become marginalised and resentful
- People become frustrated and evidence low morale which affects their work
- The organisations reputation will ultimately suffer
- You will lose the potential of your volunteers
- You may fail to recruit volunteers moving forward

More importantly, the Gossip exchange is set in motion the more the situation is left untended. This can have disastrous consequences and should be avoided at all costs.



## 5 Ways to Handle a Challenging Volunteer

While dealing with a challenging volunteer is the last thing anyone wants to be doing, it is important to note that each situation is different, and your approach to the situation will therefore be different based upon the circumstances. Having said that, here are 5 Principles that apply in most situations, and could help in your thinking and planning.

### Define the Issue



Before you deal with a situation, you need to understand it accurately. Do this before you meet with the individual involved. If you need to, work with someone who is also familiar with the situation in order to obtain an alternative perspective. Their judgement and wisdom could be crucial.

Take some time to figure out what the problem might be. Is it:

A character issue—he or she lacks moral judgment, a strong work ethic or can't be trusted?

A competency issue—he or she lacks the skills set required to do the job?

A chemistry issue—he or she is a good and competent person, but the organisational fit just isn't right?

It's way too easy just to say, 'he's the problem' or 'she's the problem', but by simply doing this you never solve the problem.

By defining the Problem, you solve the Problem.

Also, own everything you can. It's almost never 100% them.

Find out what you've done wrong or where the organisation has failed to deliver and be right up front about that. Occasionally you'll even realize it's not them. It's you (or the organisation).

## Separate the Person from the Problem



Affirm the person. Deal with the problem. How do you do that? Never get personal. Accept that people have differing character traits and ways of doing things. It's not their character that's in question, it's the way they challenge or undertake their business within your organisation. Make sure you concentrate on the latter and deal with the specific issues which have become a problem.

If the situation becomes personal it will be so much harder to deal with effectively. It could also bring the organisation into disrepute, which could be both costly and time consuming to deal with.

## Go Direct



Have the difficult conversation face to face. Resist an E Mail or a standard cover all letter across the organisation. If its an individual problem it stands to reason that its an individual conversation.

Have the conversation over coffee, or in your office.

Try an affirmation sandwich. Begin with praise. Deal with the issue (the meat). Then end with affirmation.

Whilst this can be difficult and challenging to do, it is the best approach, and on many occasions the individual concerned will respect that approach, although they may not always agree with it.

## Follow Up



Do not finish the relationship when you finish the conversation. Whilst you may end up ultimately terminating the organisational relationship with the volunteer, (it does happen), they are still individuals, and a simple follow up 4 or 6 weeks later to see how they are doing or what they are doing will normally be welcomed.

Remember, you separated the person from the problem, and by so doing its still acceptable to care for that individual's health and welfare, even though they may no longer be volunteering for your particular organisation.

## Evaluate



Its always useful to evaluate the root causes that led to the challenging situation which arose. In this way the organisation grows, and any past mistakes will be rectified as part of that evaluation process. Volunteers are such a vital resource that losing one (for whatever reason) is damaging. The organisation therefore needs to evaluate the situation, how it arose and how it was dealt with to protect other volunteers and its own reputation moving forward. Do not ignore the Evaluation Process. It will provide you with vital insights into Policy, Protocols, Processes and Human Behaviour which might be important.

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