

# Expectations for Behavior

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Key elements include:

1. Examine expectations you have for behavior. Are they realistic? Do you have people on your paid staff or among your long term volunteer corps who feel that volunteers should all look and act alike? You will need to correct their incorrect conclusions-quickly.
2. Ask volunteers and staff to brainstorm expectations. Then ask them to divide them into "healthy," "unhealthy," or "not sure" headings. Discuss ways to strengthen healthy expectations and eliminate unhealthy ones.
3. Identify expectations you are not sure of that can be ambivalent: when are they good, when bad and what makes them so?

Let's look at some examples of unhealthy expectations:

- All volunteers will come to our program with a deep understanding of what we do and why we exist.
- All volunteers will be well educated and therefore articulate in expressing our message to groups to which they belong; they will, of course, understand that this is one of the things we will ask them to do.
- All volunteers are signing on for the long haul; they will be with us for many years and give us many hours of work every week.
- Everyone will adapt to our normal fast pace of work and constantly changing instructions on how we do that work; they will understand and accept that their work will probably change on a regular basis.

All of these expectations are assumptions and if you are over the age of 12, you already know what assuming really means: disaster!

Always "check out" different people's understanding of your program, its clients and services, their educational background, their willingness to speak before any group, their time commitments and demands, their normal "pace" and energy level and ability to adapt to change.

The following expectations usually promote retention. Expectations which are:

- *Realistic in terms of time and energy.* Assignments given to seniors may be done at a different pace from those of teenagers. (Beware of an assumption buried into that sentence - the seniors may be more likely to get something done than into-everything, hormonal-guided teens!)

- *Applied to everyone fairly.* Nothing is more unsettling than finding that "rules" that apply to you do not apply to everyone. Keep things fair and even.
- *Considerate of other demands on volunteers.* Extend great consideration around time demands that pop up in other parts of their lives. Expect seasonal demands from parents of school-age children who are very busy at the start of the school year and at its end. holidays demand more from people as well, especially Christmas and Hannukah. Be understanding and respectful, demonstrating that you understand they have more going on in their lives than just working with you.
- *Spelled out at the time of job placement.* I always thought there should be several more commandments to guide us in our lives, among them: "Thou shalt not hide elephants in closets." Be sure to be clear about what a job entails at the time you are talking with a volunteer about possible assignments. Never hide parts of a job that might be uninviting. I always preferred to be honest with a person about what is going to be expected of them at the very start of our relationship rather than "springing" anything on them after they have said yes. Why would anyone trust someone who has not been truthful with them in the first place.
- *Flexible, so that the job and the volunteer "fit."* I've seen some very creative solutions to removing roadblocks in front of a volunteer's placement including job sharing, alternate site for work, etc. If you need table decorations for a banquet, why does it matter if a volunteer does the work with two others in her home rather than alone at your office? Bend without sacrificing the goal of the work.
- *Openly shared with everyone involved.* Keep people "up" on what is going on so that they are not "down" on anything. I suggest a time-lined worksheet that everyone has. It lists who does what, when, and contact information for everyone, so there can be direct contact between working volunteers. this tool becomes a way to hold everyone accountable and underlines to worker A why it is critical that they write the copy for the new brochure before a specific date that worker B has to have it typeset and to the printer.
- *Openly focused on the mission of the organization.* For work to be truly understood, those involved must see the reason for the work and that it leads to the ultimate goal for the organization. this can get tricky if the volunteers are stuffing envelopes and don't understand why that's important. Making clear that what they are doing is part of a public awareness effort that will help raise the money to serve clients clarifies the connection to the organizational mission.
- *Measurable.* Be sure that folks understand what success is. Set measurable, attainable goals for any assignment. Avoid vague goals. Making the church "more friendly" is too vague: express the same goal in measurable objectives, such as "Make a point to greet at least two newcomers to the service every week, recording their name, etc., for future contacts."

- *Matching skill levels and interests to work assignments.* Giving folks work that they are capable of doing and like to do, simply makes for a happy match for all involved.
- *Leading to success as defined by the volunteer.* Find out what the volunteer would consider success in a specific assignment. Redirect their thinking if it is unrealistic ("I want to work for you to wipe out poverty in our city in the next year.") or if you discover they have misinformation about what you do.

Excerpted from Best Practices for Volunteer Programs:

Best Ideas from Best Programs, pages 58-59, by Sue Vineyard and Steve McCurley Found in the Energize website library at: <http://www.energizeinc.com/art.html>