

Reprimanding Volunteers

Steve McCurley and Sue Vineyard

If the evaluation does deal with some unsatisfactory performance by the volunteer, follow these simple guidelines when giving a reprimand:

1. Don't smile. This is a serious subject, and you will simply confuse the volunteer if you are saying one thing and acting in a different manner.
2. Don't gunny sack; i.e. don't save up a lot of small criticisms and drop them all on the volunteer at the same time. These should be dealt with in smaller segments during regular volunteer/supervisor conversations.
3. Be specific. Talk about what the volunteer is not doing in the way you want them to. Avoid vague comments, particularly if they are about the volunteer's attitude or motivations as opposed to the volunteer's action or behavior.
4. Let the volunteer know how you feel. Indicate that both you and program expect quality performance and that you are disappointed by the unsatisfactory work.
5. Put the reprimand in perspective. If the volunteer has done good work in other areas or at other times, remind them of that good performance.
6. Don't repeat the reprimand. Cover the area that needs improvement and move on.

It is important to consider the possibility that the reprimand will not solve your problem. You would optimistically like to think so, and in many cases minor corrective action can achieve positive results.

In case, however, that problems do continue, it is important to begin developing a case history of the Problem Situation. This case history will be important both in tracking what you are doing to correct the problem and also to develop a record of the problem for use if more harsh measures become necessary.

Following the reprimand, write a memo to the file that indicates the following:

- The specific facts of the incident, including dates, parties involved, and the specific nature of the misperformance for which the reprimand was given.
- The nature of the conversation with the volunteer about the incident or situation, including their own explanation of the reasons for their performance.
- Any corrective actions that were identified with the volunteer, including any timeline for their implementation.

While regrettable, this will both help you to determine what you need to do and potentially establish for others the history of the situation.

Conclusion

These types of volunteers are a question mark - they may be savable and they may not. They may be worth the effort of redirecting and they may be more trouble than they're worth.

The goal of the manager is to identify which are worth the effort and to determine how these volunteers can be returned to productivity.

Excerpted from Handling Problem Volunteers, By Steve McCurley and Sue Vineyard, Heritage Arts Publishing/VMSystems.

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