

What's in a Name?

Volunteer Vancouver

Have you ever heard anyone say “just a volunteer”? It does nothing for the image. In the same vein, how we go about position design, naming our roles and advertising our available opportunities goes a long way in attracting the right people to move our organization forward.

Think of the word “assistant”. Who do you think of? What skills come to mind? At what level in a hierarchy does an assistant sit? For the most part, it’s a bit lower on the totem pole that you’ll find an assistant. It’s a position that executes, rather than plans, right?

Now think of the word “consultant” and what comes to mind? Most will agree that this person is higher up on the food chain. More of a strategist than a do-er. Someone with high-level expertise and experience to bring to a position.

So if you’re recruiting for someone to redesign your marketing materials are you looking for a marketing assistant or a marketing consultant? To a volunteer browsing available volunteer positions, there is a world of difference in those two titles.

Naming the volunteer position you’re recruiting for deserves time and thought. What are you really looking for? WHO are you really looking for? If you want someone to do the menial tasks associated with a project use titles that reflect that type of work. If you’re looking for someone with a lot of experience who can lead a project use titles more appropriate for that level of person. Don’t forget that the volunteer position you post is your marketing effort for a role. You must get someone—and not just anyone—to find enough interesting about that position to respond.

Another item to note is the type of expertise you’re looking for. Without making too many stereotypical statements, it’s safe to say that an information technology (IT) expert might prefer a very straightforward title: “database programmer,” for example. But think about a typical human resources (HR) expert. Perhaps their title should reflect values common in HR practitioners: “people performance expert”. Or what about those creative types—marketers, graphic designers and the like? How about “branding guru”. See the difference?

Who has *that* job?!

We’ve all done it. Thought of a generic role we wish we could fill at our organization and wished for that mythical volunteer to materialize and fill the gap. And that’s entirely possible, if an organization can approach recruitment strategically. And strategically means by thinking like the volunteer. A recent search of volunteer postings on www.govolunteer.ca with the term “marketing” found four postings for “marketing and communications”. The problem is that the term describes a *department*, not a position. And most volunteers are looking for a project to work on, not a department’s worth of never-ending commitment.

Think of the largest corporation in your community— possibly a consumer products or telecommunications company. Whatever it is, it likely has an incredibly talented pool of employees who would make superb volunteers. And that company probably has a marketing department. Within that marketing *department* might be public relations experts, graphic designers, advertising specialists, strategists, and much more. But no one person in that department would likely see a posting for “marketing and communications” and know that it applies to them. They have very niche expertise within that broad category. So if you want assistance with your marketing campaign—advertise five different positions that will appeal to someone who actually holds that job: expert copywriter, graphic designer, new product strategist, public relations coordinator and publishing layout expert. Those are all jobs you can find at that large company—and thus are all positions that potential volunteers understand. Any volunteer position you seek should correlate to a job that actually exists. The volunteers will understand what you seek and whether or not they can deliver it.

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