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COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES

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#### Editorial Team

Carol Anne Clarke  
Joan Cox  
Chris Jarvis  
Sheila Jenkins  
Rachel Stoparczyk  
Lynne Whitehead  
Joan Wyatt

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The Journal of Volunteer Resources Management  
RR#3, Woodlawn, Ont.  
K0A 3M0  
Fax: 613-832-8230

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## EDITORIAL

Recently I conducted a volunteer satisfaction survey for my employer, a multi-site organization with urban and rural components. Although the results were extremely positive, the aspect that provoked the greatest response was communication. Most respondents wanted more communication, but the suggestions for enhanced communication were all over the map – email, web site, newsletters, bulletin boards and face-to-face. It emphasized that the preferred style of communication is a personal choice.

This issue of CJVRM is dedicated to the important topic of communication strategies. Judy Lister's contribution on keeping volunteers in the know confirms the need to consider communication options which meet the various needs and preferences of volunteers. The idea of mini-newsletters caught my attention.

Marion Lorden offers her perspective on communication in a virtual volunteer environment. She stresses the importance of a communication plan and provides tips for building relationships in virtual communication.

Carol Dixon outlines ideas and discusses the pitfalls on newsletter preparation in a multi-site environment. Heather Hastie uses humour to provide information and tips on writing interesting newsletters.

*Reaching new Canadian volunteers – Communicating in a multicultural environment* outlines research conducted with new immigrants which provides 'food for thought' on the means to enhance the inclusion of new Canadians.

Diane-Allison Palma contributes a delightful and insightful article on the four golden rules of communication from a youth volunteer perspective. This article will be required reading for staff who supervise volunteers in my agency.

It was a delight to edit this issue. Each review of the articles contributed more ideas to my 'to do' list. In fact, I became so enthused that I signed up for a communication styles workshop. Hope that this issue also energizes you.

Joan Wyatt  
Ottawa

## **KEEPING VOLUNTEERS IN THE KNOW: THE ELEMENTS AND THE CHALLENGES OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION**

by Judy Lister

If you are a volunteer at the Vancouver Aquarium Marine Science Centre, every Friday afternoon you can look forward to receiving a short e-mail message from the Volunteer Services Department. The weekly update typically includes three short paragraphs on what has happened at the Aquarium during that week or information on upcoming training sessions or events. Just recently, staff has added a fourth element called 'Policies and Perks', which they use to remind volunteers about benefits and expectations. Karen Howe, Manager of Volunteer Services, says the weekly updates do triple duty as a communication, retention and recruitment tool. She cites the example of a volunteer whose file had been deactivated based on low hours and attendance. When his Friday update stopped coming, he contacted the volunteer office and is back as an active volunteer.

Experienced managers of volunteer programs like Karen understand how important it is to keep volunteers informed. Have you ever considered how many aspects of the field of volunteer management deal with communication? We prepare recruitment materials for our websites and the community. We provide information sessions and packages to potential volunteers to let them know what types of volunteer opportunities we have. We conduct interviews to find out more about applicants and see if we can make a good match between what they have to offer and what our organization needs. We provide volunteers with position descriptions so they clearly understand their roles. We provide orientation sessions and handbooks so volunteers become more familiar with our organizations and their roles within them. We ensure that supervising staff members provide thorough training so volunteers have the tools they need to fulfill their roles. We contact volunteers in person, by telephone or by e-mail to schedule them for shifts. We ask supervisors to complete evaluations to let volunteers (and us) know how they are doing. We write reference letters for volunteers. When disciplinary measures are necessary, we provide verbal and written comments to the volunteers and back it up with documentation in their files. We write letters or e-mails to confirm when we have closed a volunteer's file.

Effective communication is vital for making volunteers feel that they are an important part of your organization but it must be at least a two-way street. We also need to provide opportunities for volunteers to give us their input. We all collect quantitative data from our volunteers when we ask them to record their hours, how many visitors they spoke to or other outputs. It is also important to encourage volunteers to provide us with their input on issues that affect them.

The Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement makes several indirect references to communication issues but the clearest statements are under Sections 8 and 9 in the Organization Standards Checklist:

1. Volunteers are given and encouraged to use mechanisms for providing input to the organization. (Section 8, clause 5)
2. Input from volunteers is welcomed and is solicited for the organization's planning and evaluation. (Section 9 clause 2)

Two statements in the CAVR Standards of Practice also remind us to provide volunteers with communication opportunities:

1. Administration, staff, volunteers and clients have participation in the design of the volunteer program. (1.4)
2. There are appropriate opportunities for volunteers to share opinions, make suggestions and participate in the decision-making process. ((9.2)

There are several mechanisms that organizations can use to facilitate volunteer input. Some volunteer programs distribute annual surveys to their volunteers, on paper or electronically. Others provide suggestion boxes, bulletin boards or even chat rooms to give their volunteers a voice.

Last Fall, I established a Volunteer Resources Advisory Team, to act as a sounding board for decisions involving our volunteers. Our team is made up of nine volunteers who between them have over 100 years of volunteer experience in nine different departments here at The Manitoba Museum. We meet several times a year to discuss issues like recognition events, awards and parking. One of the first issues to come up was communication. Members of the team talked about sometimes feeling 'out of the loop'. I mentioned Karen's weekly updates and they loved the idea, but many of our volunteers do not have e-mail. The team suggested instead that I post a copy of the weekly mini-newsletter in a few key areas, such as by the elevators. I also post a copy on the door of the Volunteer Lounge and in the front of the Volunteer Log Book. I follow the same idea as Karen - three short items each week. I use it to advertise training or orientation sessions, as a recruitment tool for special events or to praise volunteers who have achieved a significant outcome. The results have been dramatic. Attendance at my monthly orientation sessions has gone up 40% since the newsletter started. Volunteers have responded with more offers of help with tasks advertised in the newsletter. A positive but unexpected side benefit is that staff members are now also kept better informed of issues affecting our volunteers.

Communication sometimes works in more than two directions. Our museum has a hands-on exhibit area called the Discovery Room. The theme in the Discovery Room changes twice a year. We hold group and individual training sessions each time the theme changes to teach about the new content but there are always a few questions that come up that we have not foreseen. We use a logbook for volunteers in the Discovery Room so they can record questions that visitors have asked that they could

not answer. Staff members monitor the book and provide the answers, which benefits all of the volunteers. Some of the younger volunteers started using the logbook for more personal entries so we provided them with a separate 'babble book' for sharing thoughts and ideas. Both books have proven to be great team-building tools for all the Discovery Room volunteers and their staff supervisors. The logbook serves as a continuing education tool and the babble book provides a welcome opportunity for peer-to-peer communication.

Communication is an important part of recognition events. We want to say thank you to our volunteers but we also want to provide a chance for volunteers to meet and talk with staff members and each other.

As the examples above illustrate, we need to tailor our methods of communication to suit our volunteers. An electronic newsletter works well for Karen Howe's volunteers but a paper system works better for mine. Many volunteer programs use an electronic information system for logging hours and communicating with their volunteers. There are probably even some volunteer programs with the ability to text message their volunteers. Websites have become one of the most effective recruitment and communication tools for some organizations. Volunteers should have easy access to us by telephone or e-mail. But I still think the most important communication tool is an open door to the Volunteer Resources office so volunteers feel welcome to drop by with concerns or ideas.

*Judy Lister, CAVR, is the Volunteer Resources Manager at The Manitoba Museum, a position she has held for the past five years. She has been in the field of volunteer resources management for over fifteen years. She is a past president of Manitoba Association for Volunteer Administration and served three years on the board of Canadian Administrators of Volunteer Resources.*

## **COMMUNICATION WITH VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERS**

by Marion Lorden

Increasingly in our personal and work life we are interacting with family, friends, service providers and co-workers in a virtual environment. Long distance phone calls, cell phones, e-mail, net meetings and video cams are part of our daily lives. This is also happening in the volunteer community. With leaps in communication technology volunteer groups and volunteers in remote locations can now be part of larger groups. The availability of this technology makes the need of face to face volunteer membership meetings less frequent and support services can have a global reach.

Your group of volunteers needs mentoring, training and team building whether

they are close to home or in a remote location. It is essential to meet these needs so your group can be as effective as possible. It is also necessary to communicate effectively with your sponsors. The number one reason for volunteer efforts failing is lack of good, effective communication. Communication is essential to gather information so you understand the needs of your volunteers and sponsors and to send messages to them to fulfill these needs. Having virtual volunteer members and sponsors adds a layer of complexity to your communication plan. You need to understand the issues involved when communicating with these virtual members.

Did you know that people sitting 40 meters apart have a five percent chance of communicating once a week (we need a reference here Marion)? That means, even if you are in the same building but on different floors, you may not bump into that person for months. The frequency of communication increases only once people are within eight meters of each other. When communicating with your volunteers or sponsors, it is unlikely that you are within an eight meter radius on a regular basis. This elevates most of your communication into the virtual realm.

You need to educate your volunteers, managers and sponsors on their responsibilities in a virtual communication environment. Managers need to have a communication plan and share it with the group. It would include its purpose, scope, method and execution of the communication plan for the group or project. Volunteers and sponsors need to be educated about the plan and understand the importance of communicating as well as the need to communicate responsibly.

What communication issues are identified with virtual members? The remote volunteer or sponsor can feel isolated. You may identify this by noting a lack of or minimal communication from that person. Making regular contact with the volunteers and sponsors, asking questions, getting to know them and soliciting their input when appropriate can increase their participation and therefore increase their feeling of being valuable and needed. It is necessary to note that the time spent in communication increases in relation to the increased size of the group.

Now the communication plan is in place and you are ready to send a message.

1. understand the message you are sending and the best way to send it;
2. identify who the message is for;
3. what they need to know;
4. in what order;
5. how do they expect or what is the best way for them to receive this communication; and
6. how to confirm they understood it.

A verbal message is received in three ways: words, voice and body language. Words make up only seven percent of message receipt; voice 38% and body language a whopping 55% (these totals need to add up to 100% - we also need a reference).

Just think, on a phone call you lose 55% of your message before you even start. If you are sending an e-mail you lose 97% (does this relate the 7% - words received - if so, should it be 93%) of your message impact.

By not having face to face interactions it is necessary to understand that you lose control of how that message is received. You cannot see facial expressions, body language or posture. People can choose to ignore you or ask someone else for clarification. They can have selective hearing. Have you noticed that what a person focuses on in a message is the part most important to them? Have the recipient tell you what they heard.

People can choose not to read an e-mail, read it later or deem it unimportant. Not everyone reads, understands or uses information in the same way. It is hard to determine if the message is in need of expansion. Again, you need confirmation that the message was understood so you can make clarification if necessary.

What can be done to increase message receipt? With virtual communications it is even more important to build relationships. You need to make connections on a personal level. Encourage small talk in working group (teleconferences) and when communicating one on one. Obtain feedback often to determine if there are any issues so that they can then be resolved as early as possible. Have your group understand that not responding to phone calls or e-mail indicates a lack of respect and could show a lack of commitment. Communication needs to be precise, clear, direct and succinct without being disrespectful. Our culture sometimes takes silence as consent. This is not true. Get confirmation. Put due dates or expected response dates in your message. Stay away from slang or acronyms as these can cause confusion. Create a communication plan and distribute it.

Virtual volunteers create multiple communication challenges for managers of volunteer resources. Minimize these challenges by incorporating enhanced communication techniques into the virtual environment.

*Also, could you please give us a brief (3 sentence bio) to add onto the end of your article and complete the attached release form, sign it and send it back to me by mail.*

**TRANSLATION OF MAIN ARTICLE AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST**

## **COMMUNICATION IN A MULTI-ENVIRONMENTAL SITE**

by Carol Dixon

Newsletters for a multi-site organization are difficult things. It is best to consider carefully: do you really want one newsletter? Why? It is easy at first glance to include communication as one of the savings or efficiencies with multi-sites. You just make the newsletter a little longer, realize savings on photocopying this new increased number, maybe save some time not having to write as many articles - hey it is even an opportunity for the volunteers to get to know one another a little better and educate themselves on what is happening in other places. But... maybe you should think again. Who is the newsletter for? What purpose does it serve? If it gets too long or does not really concern them why would the volunteers read it? If most of the volunteers do not read it, then are you really saving money?

My idea for your consideration is to have a standard front page. This sheet would have to feature the new logo, slogan, colour and addresses of all the sites. It could also include a seasonal message from an important person such as the president of the volunteer group, the communications chair of the board, the executive director or you. If you have many sites this 'leader sheet' could cover the front and back of the newsletter. The message should include news on program development, funding, new sites as well as appreciation of voluntary efforts. The rest of the newsletter could be site specific. This accomplishes the branding of the logo, the sharing of information of mutual interest and still carries specific enough 'news' that the volunteers at each site would read and enjoy it. Many of you, however, are already committed to a single newsletter. There are a couple of pitfalls I would like you to watch out for such as language and ensuring that each and every article speaks to where any activities take place. For example, if you state that an event will take place on Tuesday at 2:00 in the auditorium. What if there two auditoriums or worse, what if a particular site does not have an auditorium and envies those that do? I personally wrote one time 'here at the hospital' when there were two sites - you do not want to do that, take my word for it. Words like patient, client, consumer, customer and resident also vary from site to site. If it is to be a multi-site newsletter perhaps you should write resident/patient even if it is awkward. Be careful about generic terms like 'everyone is welcome'. Are they really? Is there a parking spot for them or a phone number (not just an extension) to call for more information? I know someone who was caught with the comment 'use your photo I.D. badge as identification' and only one site had photos; the other sites just had names on their badges.

Be very equitable about articles from all sites. The truth may be that 'all the action' is contained at one site, but the work that the volunteers do at the other site is also

important.

Very specific articles about the role of the volunteer vis a vis individual clients work well. It does give you an opportunity to highlight knitters or librarians or the cash register tape collectors, positions that do not always get a lot of fanfare.

Be careful about photos. To get a quality newsletter photo done is beyond the capacity of many of our copiers. A photo that I thought worthy of printing was seen to only feature multiple chins by the volunteer. Make sure you double check. Your risk management person would advise you to get a signature on an authorization form.

I mail my newsletter out to everyone. I know they get it and it keeps my addresses up to date. I have to manually catch the husband/wife teams, as we cannot make the software print only one. Plus, I have a list of volunteers that for environmental, frugal or other reasons object to the mail out. I take these off manually. It is also helpful to have one copy of the newsletter available at the office. Your group may actually read notices that are posted. You may also have a list to do a mass distribution by email.

Multi-site communication is a challenge. I still get in the car and drive over there if really want to talk to the volunteers about something.....

*Carol Dixon is the Director of Volunteer Resources at Providence Health Care in Vancouver. This is a six site health care facility where Carol tries to communicate with all 1600 volunteers equitably.*

## **TAKING THE ANGST OUT OF NEWSLETTER WRITING**

by Heather Hastie

Groan, crumple crumple, swish, thud. The latest copy of your next newsletter has just landed in the recycling bin.

Everyone knows that newsletters can be a great way for your organization to communicate with stakeholders. The question remains: how do you make your newsletter effective?

The first place to start, whether you are developing the first edition of your newsletter or overhauling an old one, is to examine its purpose. Is your newsletter a piece that comes out frequently with timely information on upcoming events or is it meant to be a reference piece with topics readers can look back on after some time and still find the information relevant? Answering these questions will set the stage

for your method of communication.

Once you have decided on the purpose of your newsletter, the next decision concerns distribution. Believe it or not, the method of distribution is an important factor in deciding what information to include and how to write the newsletter's contents.

Volunteer Calgary has two newsletters, the monthly *Volunteer Voice*, which is distributed by e-mail, and the hard copy *Volunteers Connecting Community*, which is mailed to readers. Both pieces are very different.

*Volunteer Voice* comes out during the second half of every month and is meant to inform readers of information that must be published quickly to be relevant. Since readers access the information on screen, articles are kept short, usually no more than four or five paragraphs.

Hyperlinks to websites and e-mail addresses are embedded within the *Volunteer Voice* to allow immediate access to more detailed information. Links are set to open in new windows, ensuring that when they are closed, the newsletter still remains on the reader's screen. At the beginning of the newsletter, hyperlinks to each article are listed to give readers a sense of the contents and the ability to quickly navigate articles.

The design of the *Volunteer Voice* matches Volunteer Calgary's website. We did this on purpose to keep the look of our online materials consistent. When the reader opens the *Volunteer Voice*, he or she understands immediately that they are looking at Volunteer Calgary information.

*Volunteers Connecting Community* is an entirely different kettle of fish. A reader skimming through an issue printed three years ago will not find a list of outdated workshops and events. Rather, they will find topics of broad concern like how to use technology to recruit volunteers, risk management practices and volunteer programs and how to start social enterprise initiatives.

Articles in *Volunteers Connecting Community* are much longer than those found in an e-mailed newsletter. We try to include enough information in each article to assist the reader in taking the first steps to address the topic within their organization. We also include lists of resources for a more in-depth read on the subject.

Understanding the purpose of your newsletter and determining the mode of delivery are the first steps to developing an effective newsletter. Now comes the fun part - throwing out almost every piece of wisdom your grade eight English teacher had for you!

When it comes to paragraphs, save the topic and concluding sentences for your doctorate thesis. Paragraphs should be kept short, no more than three sentences. In fact, one sentence paragraphs are perfectly acceptable.

Why keep paragraphs short? Because most people cannot read blocks of text without falling asleep. Your job as the newsletter editor is to inform your readers, not put them through an academic grinder.

Set your stories up using a pyramid model. Explain 'who, what, where, when and why' in the first paragraph and then use the body of your article to explain in greater detail.

Do not worry about starting sentences with words like and, but, because. While English teachers everywhere may cringe, fractured sentences can be an effective way to drill home your point.

Use action words in your titles to capture your readers' attention. Take this one step further and avoid passivity throughout your entire article. This means developing phrases like 'the members approved the new bylaws' as opposed to 'the new bylaws were approved by the members'.

When it comes to design, white space is never a bad thing. Try to keep your newsletter uncluttered and easy to look at. If you cannot afford a designer to lay out each edition, invest in the development of templates that you can apply for a consistent look across your newsletters.

Want an easy way to highlight an important point? Use 'pull quotes' to bring out key information on a page. Effective titles and 'pull quotes' might be enough to make the reader, who is pressed for time, pick up your newsletter and read it more thoroughly at a later date.

Find people to interview and break up your text with quotes. Information is always more interesting to take in if it is told in a story format. Newspapers understood this concept long ago!

Do not forget to include pictures, especially of the people you have interviewed. Pictures break up the text and make it less daunting to read as well as add information that cannot be conveyed by text.

And finally, remember the words of the esteemed science fiction writer, Cherry Janice Cherryh: "It's okay to write garbage as long as you edit brilliantly." The best way to cure writer's block is to write, even if the topic concerns what you had for breakfast. Once you put words to paper, you will find that what you really want to say is soon flowing from your fingertips.

*Heather Hastie is Manager of Communications at Volunteer Calgary. She has more than seven years experience in the field of communications, and has worked for organizations like the Greater Vancouver Regional District, the Calgary Board of Education, and the University of Calgary. She holds a master's degree in Communications Studies, and shares her communications expertise with several nonprofits as a volunteer. In her previous life, she taught high school for three years.*

## **REACHING NEW CANADIAN VOLUNTEERS ~ COMMUNICATING IN A MULTICULTURAL ENVIRONMENT**

by Christine Wilde and Michelle Baldwin

From 1991 to 2000, 2.2 million new immigrants came to Canada. One fifth of Canada's population is foreign born (Statistics Canada, 2003).

Earlier this year, Pillar Nonprofit Network published *The Meaning of Volunteering*, a research report that examines the meaning of volunteering to new Canadians. With funding from the Ontario Canadian Volunteerism Initiative, Pillar researchers polled employers, coordinators of volunteer resources and new Canadians to discover, "Are the current messages we use to solicit volunteers from this population working?" and "What are the motivations and needs of new Canadians?"

PILLAR identified the need to learn more about the experiences of new Canadians with volunteering in their country of origin and how their previous experiences and their cultural diversity have impacted their understanding of volunteering in Canada.

"The newcomer's previous experiences shape how he or she views volunteering in Canada. Through this knowledge," says Beth DeLong, Executive Director of Pillar, "we can learn more about meeting the challenge of communicating with and recruiting new Canadian volunteers."

Organizations use messages to recruit volunteers that have traditionally reflected the Canadian context of volunteering. If we are to bring the numbers of newcomer volunteers in line with the numbers they represent in our communities, we need to alter the means and messages we use to target them.

Why meet the challenge? The impact on the nonprofit sector can be tremendous. Of 61 voluntary sector organizations polled, 80 percent agreed that new Canadian volunteers offer a different and valuable perspective to the organization. They reflect the changing demographics of their community, helping organizations relate to the clients they serve. And they bring new skills, including language and translation services, to help reach a diverse constituency.

Where to start? The study confirmed that communicating with new Canadian volunteers has to begin with a very basic component: newcomers wanted to have explained to them the motivations for volunteering, how it originated in Canada, and how to communicate this to others in their families and their cultural/religious groups. Again, previous experience and cultural context shape this need. Religion, the concept of volunteering in one's home country, the economics of volunteering, all contribute to the perception of volunteering.

A Muslim respondent from Somalia, for example, described volunteering as an "act of charity," an expression Canadians commonly use to describe people giving freely of their time. However, to this respondent, the expression better reflected one's bid for the 'janaat', or heaven, which is accomplished through an act of giving freely of one's time. For the respondent, this was not tied to community good but more to the individual benefit of being granted entry into 'heaven'.

Another respondent discussed how, in his Islamic religion, men and women do not touch one another unless married or family members. He indicated that if he tries to preserve his religious beliefs, volunteering is very difficult.

Understanding why new Canadians are volunteering is another piece of the puzzle. The study queried 245 new Canadians to discover what motivates them to volunteer. The most common responses included: improving English skills, meeting people, giving back to society, helping others, learning new skills, improving job opportunities and learning the Canadian business culture. Others noted that, as new immigrants, they found a renewed sense of self-confidence through volunteering.

Perhaps the most revealing result of the study identified ways that organizations have worked to reach and accommodate new Canadian volunteers. Measures included: added cultural sensitivity or diversity training, offering a mentoring system for new volunteers, developing additional volunteer training and, most importantly, altering their recruitment methods.

These measures are augmented by starting multicultural volunteers with a manageable and appropriate placement to assess their readiness and commitment levels, giving them written instructions (multilingual) to take home and study, helping them identify their goals and achieve them and assigning volunteer activities that enable them to use their existing skills and teach them new skills.

Underlying all of those is an increased awareness about demonstrating respect for their cultures and religions and making new Canadians feel welcome through patience, honesty and other emotional and social support.

The strategies to recruit new Canadian volunteers rely heavily on community resources and education. Links to organizations that can help new Canadians adapt and integrate into their communities, such as cross cultural learning centres, Boys and Girls Clubs, employment counseling centres and many more are essential to a successful recruitment and communication plan.

Mentoring is another vital component. Existing volunteers and staff are often the best voice for an organization. Personal referrals lend themselves to increasing self-confidence for the new volunteer and overcoming barriers such as language, transportation, childcare and more.

Most respondents indicated that they have learned about volunteering through other new Canadians. Sharing recruiting information with English as a Second Language classes, churches and religious centres, employment centres and multicultural centres can open doors not accessed through more traditional recruiting avenues, such as the media. General marketing campaigns about volunteerism are reaching new Canadians but not diffusing the stereotypes that new Canadians have about volunteering that stem from their experiences in their own countries or from lack of knowledge about Canadian volunteering. Flexibility in providing opportunities, such as one-time volunteer roles or virtual volunteering, can also help newcomers explore volunteering at their own comfortable pace.

Meaningful volunteer opportunities, a safe and supportive environment, a clear understanding of expectations and warm recognition of an individual's contribution open the lines of communication to recruit and retain new Canadian volunteers.

One study respondent from Moldova had an interesting recommendation: "In my opinion, there should be a special governmental program for immigrants, such as 'Cultural Immersion and Skills Development', where newcomers to Canada could learn about the culture [and] enhance their skills through lectures and training, [and] through working under supervision of a trained volunteer mentor...teaching immigrants the value of volunteering in a democratic society."

Abundant opportunities exist for professional associations, voluntary organizations, government, immigration groups and businesses to work together toward fuller integration of new Canadians into our communities for all aspects of their lives.

*Christine Wilde and Michelle Baldwin are founding Board members for Pillar Nonprofit Network in London, Ontario. Christine is the Director of Fund Development for VON Canada-Ontario and Michelle is the Communications & Development Officer for the Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada.*



## THE FOUR GOLDEN RULES OF VOLUNTEERING

by Diane-Allison Palma

It has been an interesting experience volunteering this summer at The Rehabilitation Centre (TRC) of The Ottawa Hospital where I met many new people and made new friends. Volunteering at TRC taught the youth volunteers many valuable skills. It taught us The Four Golden Rules of Volunteering: respect, honesty, understanding and patience.

To be a successful volunteer you must have good communication skills. Knowing how to communicate with co-workers and people from all walks of life is an important skill to possess. Having good communications skills (including verbal and body language) can help you develop a personal and professional relationship with patients and other volunteers. TRC was a good example of this because there was a lot of respect and communication going on. Everyday, when the youth volunteers walked into Volunteer Services, they demonstrated respect by saying a simple, 'Hello, how are you?' or simply asking, 'Are you OK?' if something seemed to be wrong. The staff and volunteers respected us and gave us the space that we needed to continue on with our day. No matter what the situation, the staff in Volunteer Services took the time and effort to talk to us. They showed us respect by taking all our concerns seriously, which is important to us as youth because not a lot of adults would. Taking new ideas from us and making us feel that our opinion was important made us feel that our job at TRC did make a difference. We were very thankful for that.

Part of being a good volunteer anywhere includes honesty with yourself and with others around you. At Volunteer Services at TRC, they approached us with honesty, which is very special. Honesty was shown to us by the staff telling us the truth and evaluating our work in a helpful and encouraging manner. If we were not doing a good job, they told us the truth; if we offended someone, they helped us find better ways to deal with that situation. Not only did they approach us with honesty when times were rough, but also when times were good they came up to us and said, 'Great job!', or 'Wow, you are an awesome volunteer!' Simple little things they said made us feel more welcome as volunteers and made us want to come back. Honesty is very powerful for youth. It can make us either happy or sad but the important thing to remember is that it should be done in an encouraging and friendly way.

Along with being respectful and honest toward yourself and others around you, it is important to be understanding toward others. For example, my experience volunteering at TRC was very positive because from the beginning they always asked what I wanted to do. They asked, "Do you want to volunteer at the Kiosk or work with patients?" If you chose not to work with patients, they understood and

said, 'OK, that is not a problem'. Never did they ask 'Why?' This was very important to us as youth volunteers because it did not make us feel pressured or guilty for not wanting to do something. By doing this they gave us options and the ability to think for ourselves. Another example was, if we called in and said, "Sorry, I will not be able to make it for my next shift", they understood and did not judge us. Knowing that when I called in and that they understood made my time there even better because again there was no 'Why?' Volunteer Services knew how to understand.

The final golden role of volunteering is patience. Patience is important when it comes to volunteering because it is the glue that brings respect, honesty and understanding together. Patience is something that a lot of people forget about when it comes to youth volunteers. Simple little things such as sitting down and having a little conversation asking, "How do you like it here? Is there anything we can change to make you feel more welcome?" Or, if you forgot to sign out after volunteering, they could say, "Next time, don't forget to sign out". At TRC, they always did their best to make us feel that they understood that many of us are very young and do not have a lot of job experience and that this was all new to us. At Volunteer Services, they sure took the time and effort to make us feel important no matter how busy the office got or how much work needed to be done. They always had time to talk to us and make us feel that we were making a difference at the hospital.

*Diane-Allison Palma is 15 years old and in grade 10. Her hobbies include swimming, playing tennis, writing and reading. She enjoys helping people and listening - always with a smile. Diane looks forward to finishing high school and becoming a doctor.*

## PEER EXPERT

**Scenario:** How can the manager of volunteer resources assist staff who supervise volunteers to communicate more effectively with volunteers?

**Response:**

Gone are the days when volunteers are content to lick stamps and fill envelopes. Yes, from time to time those tasks are necessary and can be a fun volunteer experience! The engine that drives people to continue to volunteer is the good feeling and sense that they have made an important contribution to the cause. To communicate more effectively with volunteers I focus on the untapped expertise of the volunteers I engage. Today's volunteers bring with them a wealth of skills and talents with the potential to offer much more expertise to community-based organizations than is generally realized. By focusing our volunteer interview strategy

beyond filling a position in the organization, we discover and uncover broader expertise the volunteer applicant has to offer. The organization and the volunteer's experience will be far more enriched.

Let us see how this analogy relates to a management approach in our efforts to achieve outcome measurement and accountability reports. A team management approach, using a consultative formula, includes all the members of the team thereby increasing the opportunity to prove the most positive outcome. How many of us include our volunteers when we are developing our operational best practices? When developing reporting and evaluation strategies, ask who in the organization will be engaged in the activity. If volunteers fit into the equation, including these members of the team in the consultative formula can spell success! Challenge the exercise by delegating the development of a reporting strategy to a qualified volunteer. This can be a perfect opportunity to determine the volunteer's articulation of the activity, can improve the volunteer's performance and provide you with the tools you need to supervise the activity.

A simple five 'W' formula can serve to be a helpful rule-of-thumb tool when approaching a reporting strategy:

1. **What** is the purpose of the report?

Our agency is required under contract to provide a comprehensive report on all activities associated with the funded project. List all activities, including dates, times, completed by and authorized.

2. **Who** will be responsible for ensuring all applicable information is reported?

Managers of volunteer resources can share this responsibility with volunteers. Detail the list of activities to be completed, include any timelines associated with completing the activities, any supporting documents to be included in the report and identify any supervisory measures such as sign-off on completed assignments. A reporting tool can be as simple as listing dates and times individual activities were completed and by whom, or more complicated depending on the request for information. Creating reporting tools with 'rhyme and reason' that are not labour intensive supports continuity and success.

3. **Where** and **when** will reporting follow-ups take place?

To ensure confidence in monitoring and reporting, managers and staff supervisors need to schedule regular meeting times with volunteers. At the onset establish agenda items, time and location of meetings and authorize a copy of the volunteer's activity report. These meetings need not be longer than three to five minutes in length. Meetings need to be scheduled frequently to ensure the completion of assignments in the required time.

4. **Why** are reporting tools important?

Any reporting tool that ensures communication between the supervising staff and volunteer is worth the investment if it builds confidence in either's ability to get the job done. Remember, building confidence ensures confidence. Both the volunteer

As managers and staff supervisors of volunteer resources our purpose is not to do it all. Our purpose is to deliver quality service to the community by engaging volunteers. Including your volunteer team in developing an efficient reporting system spells success. Delegation is not a shirking of responsibility; it is a management style that builds expertise and strong organizations.

*Annette Vautour-MacKay is the Executive Director of the Volunteer Centre of Southeastern New Brunswick Inc. and Host of the Canada Volunteer Initiative for the province of New Brunswick.*

## BOOK REVIEW

by Dan Kelly

*MEDIA-WISE: A Guide to Media Relations for Not-for-Profit Organizations* by Susan Sommers.

Has your organization ever required a higher profile to attract volunteers, donors, clients or board members? Have you never dealt with the media? Don't know how to write a press release, public service announcement (PSA) or how to hold a press conference? Or, has your organization been in the unfortunate position of never having had to deal with the media until a crisis occurred and the media came calling?

Susan Sommers, a Canadian marketing consultant and award-winning journalist, has authored a book for your not-for-profit. MEDIA-WISE is a short (52 pages), concise manual using a ten-step program to develop relationships with the media. Ms. Sommers has been a consultant to many not-for-profits (NFPs) and private organizations and works in the media. Through this book she is enabling NFPs to deal with the situations above.

MEDIA-WISE is a practical and usable program that can be used by all skill levels, all positions and organizations of any size. There are ten chapters, each covering one of the steps. Each chapter includes definitions of common terms in that aspect of the media. And notably, for each chapter, are exercises for your organization to complete. There are many well-focused questions that when answered, greatly facilitate the relationship-building process. Many of the questions are similar to what is covered as part of a strategic plan or program planning process; much of the work might already be completed by your organization.

Most chapters cite or seek to avoid the common errors and gotchas that all newcomers to the media machine can encounter. The first four chapters deal with contacting the media: introduction to media relations, creating a media campaign,

building a media list and how to contact the media. Ms. Sommers uses the acronym RACE to frame your media campaign: Research, Analyse, Communicate and Evaluate. The chapters are built around these actions.

Quite importantly, she explains how a crisis can be turned into an opportunity to deliver key messages about your organization. The next three chapters cover developing a media kit, events and interviews. Chapter eight drives home the need for follow-up and evaluation. Chapter nine highlights choosing professionals in the following fields: graphics, writers, printers and photographers.

Using MEDIA-WISE to develop a media program does not preclude choosing media consultants in all situations. Coverage of several of the steps is very high-level and will require further research and resources. However, using the book can greatly reduce the cost of outside marketing professionals because the exercises pose the same questions professionals will ask.

No matter what the level of your program, MEDIA-WISE is a good investment of time and money. While brief, it drills down to the necessary pieces of information you require to make wise monetary decisions when putting your program together.

MEDIA-WISE: A Guide to Media Relations for Not-for-Profit Organizations was developed by Susan Sommers and produced by United Way of York Region [www.uwyr.on.ca](http://www.uwyr.on.ca). It is available from Johnstone Training and Consultation (JTC) Inc [www.jtcinc.ca](http://www.jtcinc.ca).

## ITEMS OF INTEREST

*Building Media Relationships* by Susan Sommers

*Media-Wise - A Guide to Media Relations for Not-for-Profit Organizations* by Susan Sommers

*Marketing to Win* by Susan Sommers. Provides a overview of the marketing Process.

*So You've Been Asked to "Do a Newsletter"* by Anthea Hoare

*Words do Make a Difference* by Ginette Johnstone.

*Advocacy and Negotiation* by Ginette Johnstone. A thirty minute cassette.

*The Meaning of Volunteering ~ Examining the Meaning of Volunteering to New Canadians*, and *A New Canadian's First Decade of Volunteering ~ Examining Ways to Involve New Canadians in Community Organizations*, contact Pillar Nonprofit Network at [Pillarv.com](http://Pillarv.com) or 519-433-7876.

## LOOKING AHEAD

Click on the following websites if you want either more information or to become a member of: PAVR-O [www.pavro.on.ca](http://www.pavro.on.ca) or CAVR [www.cavr.org](http://www.cavr.org)

## DEADLINES FOR SUBMISSIONS & THEMES

Issue	Deadline	Theme
Volume 1	articles due on the 24th of February	Corporate Connections
Volume 2	articles due on the 24th of May	Motivating Volunteers
Volume 3	articles due on the 24th of August	Positioning our Profession
Volume 4	articles due on the 24th of October	Risk Management