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MANAGING CONFLICT
LA GESTION DES CONFLITS

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EDITORIAL

In any group of human beings, conflict is inevitable. We are unique individuals, each with our own sets of values and opinions guiding how we see the world. We all know this to be true, yet conflict remains a difficult topic to discuss and analyze especially, it seems, within our caring profession. Volunteers, while bound by the spirit of giving, remain individuals first. Managers of volunteer resources and staff at our community agencies also bring the filters of their principles and perspectives to work each day.

We are grateful to the authors who were brave enough to share their experiences of conflict by writing for this issue. Some difficult choices were made along the way, to respect the privacy of individuals and the reputation of the agencies. However, some excellent tips have emerged for how best to manage conflicts in a variety of volunteer-related situations.

Vonnie Kline starts us off where all managers should, ideally, begin: preventing conflict by first understanding oneself. Since it is our interactions with others which normally unearth conflicts, most articles focus on particular types of relationships. Christine Gagné delves into the importance of setting clear boundaries and expectations in order to facilitate appropriate relationships between volunteers and clients. Alison Caird further explores the intricacies of boundaries in relationships between staff and volunteers and Joan Ryan looks at handling conflict amongst volunteers.

Cec Hanec applies coaching and mentoring models to managing a conflict situation and Charlene Robson takes an honest look at the emotional aftermath of serious discord. Grant MacDonald provides a practical guide to working with conflicts at the board and committee level.

In the Peer Expert column, Clare O'Kelly offers some tips on managing a conflict between experienced volunteers. And, lastly, Charlene Robson reviews a text that may help managers of volunteer resources working in a unionized environment.

We hope these articles will provide some insight on how you can make the most of conflict situations. After all, these are quite often just masked opportunities to see the world in a new light.

Rachel Stoparczyk
Editorial Team

SELF-AWARENESS, SELF-ACTION, SELF-ASSESSMENT: A FRAMEWORK TO PREVENT CONFLICT AT WORK

by Vonnie Kline

"Knowing others is wisdom, knowing yourself is Enlightenment." - Tao Tzu

How many times have you wished that you had the ability to prevent or diffuse conflict within your workplace? If you are like most managers, preventing conflict and cultivating a healthy working environment is a constant challenge. As a learning consultant for the last 15 years, I have had the opportunity to teach many managers and staff how to resolve conflict. Approximately eight years ago, I had an "ah-ha" moment: what would happen if I involved participants in understanding how they behave in a conflict situation? Would that give people a better understanding of their role and responsibility in the situation and possibly help them to reduce or prevent conflict? That was when I began to use assessment tools, such as *The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument and Dealing with Conflict Instrument*, to help participants identify how they behave in a conflict situation. I was surprised to find that, approximately 90% of the time, participants indicated that their first response is to avoid or accommodate others in the situation. Depending on how important the participant felt the task or relationship was to them, they then used one of the other three modes: compromising, competing and confronting.

The key to successful leadership is to understand not only the dynamics of your team when they are experiencing conflict, but also understanding **yourself** and your role.

Did you know that a manager's behaviour could affect the dynamics of the team? Knowing how to manage yourself is the first step in creating a positive approach to addressing conflicts at work.

The first level is **self-awareness**: a recognition of the impact of your behaviour on others and, conversely, recognition of the impact of the behaviour of others on you. Think about when your behaviour effectively influenced your team. What was the outcome? More than likely you felt successful and your team produced superior results. Now think about when your behaviour was ineffective, creating a negative interaction. No doubt you felt discouraged and demoralized, not to say anything of how your team reacted and performed.

You can facilitate consistent and positive interactions with people simply by

knowing your own feelings and emotions, and by understanding how they can impact a situation. Once you are aware, you can begin to make changes in your behaviour to cultivate positive rather than negative interactions. When you have experienced a negative or conflicting interaction, take a few moments after to analyze and reflect on your behaviour in the situation.

To become more self-aware, ask yourself:

- Why am I feeling this way?
- Why are they responding to me in this manner?
- What is it about their behaviour that is annoying and upsetting?
- How did I behave when I disagreed with them and/or how did I behave when they disagreed with me?
- Did I play a role in the escalation of the disagreement?
- What would I do differently if a similar situation occurred again?

Another step in the self-awareness process is to gain a deeper understanding of who you are by completing a personality profile such as the Myers-Brigg Personality Type Indicator (MBTI) or the DiSC Profile. These tools will help identify your preferred behaviour in situations and may even supply some answers to those tough questions above. Another tool is the Strengths Deployment Inventory (SDI). It is unique in that it helps assess the strengths you use in relating to others under two kinds of conditions: when everything is going well in your relationships and when you are faced with conflict.

By identifying our motivation or our preferred behaviour we gain insight into what is important to us and we realize that others have similar reasons for behaving the way they do. This information allows us to understand that people are not necessarily difficult, just different. If we can learn what is important to them we have a better chance of experiencing productive interactions rather than destructive ones.

Once you have answers for the questions above or have completed a personality profile, you can begin to explore different ways to respond to situations, people and behaviours. This is the second level called **self-action**. Now you begin to apply your awareness of your behaviours into concrete strategies to enhance your ability to prevent conflict. For example, when Sally rolled her eyes in the meeting, you felt trivialized and unimportant. Next time you are feeling the same way, ask for clarification instead of assuming that you have been dismissed. Choose to think from a positive and cooperative angle. Take two seconds when you feel a strong reaction to consciously change your thoughts and to give people the benefit of the doubt. Try not to take comments personally. Take a deep breath before responding and practice, practice, practice. The more you train yourself to diffuse a situation through your positive behaviour, the more it becomes a natural way to communicate.

Communication is a funny thing. It is something we do without thinking or reflecting about what we are doing. While learning how to communicate more cooperatively and reduce conflict isn't rocket science, it does take consistent effort. That's because we have to rearrange our communication habits, many of which we have been using for decades, and in some cases since early childhood. You have to work at it.
- Conflict Prevention in the Workplace,
Using Cooperative Communication
by Robert Bacal

The third level in the prevention framework is **self-assessment**. Now that you have begun to implement your new-found knowledge and understanding of yourself and others, review and evaluate how well, or not well, your interactions are going.

- What went well in that interaction? (e.g., I know when, or when not, to speak).
- What could I do differently?
- Was my tone of voice appropriate and did it match my meaning? Have you ever heard the comment, "It is not what she said but how she said it that made me so angry!"?
- Were the words that I chose effective?

Return to the questions in the self-awareness level and begin again. This conflict prevention framework is a continuous learning process that can guide you in developing yourself and others to proactively identify and address issues before they create a toxic work environment.

Workplace conflict is inevitable; but is it preventable? Dr. Elias Porter, the creator of the SDI thinks so. "Much of the interpersonal conflict people experience on a daily basis is preventable. While preventing conflict takes work, avoiding or ignoring conflict can cause damage to your relationships."

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FACILITATING APPROPRIATE RELATIONSHIPS IN VOLUNTEER-CLIENT MATCHES

by Christine Gagné

Facilitating appropriate relationships in volunteer-client matches can be a challenging and demanding process. One needs to keep in mind many details in order to achieve success. Two factors play an important role in the success of the match. First, clearly defining the volunteer role is essential in managing conflict and promoting the development of a healthy helping relationship.

Describing and explaining the purpose and role of the volunteer service within the organization gives a clear picture to volunteers about the intentions and the projected outcomes the organization hopes to accomplish for the people that it serves. It also helps volunteers understand their role in helping the organization meet its desired outcomes. One can discuss this purpose with volunteers at the initial interview and during their orientation and training.

Providing the volunteer with a clear position description which includes detailed tasks and responsibilities, as well as match guidelines and clear expectations, enables the volunteer to clarify his or her role. Volunteers need clear policies and procedures in order to accomplish their duties and responsibilities appropriately. Organizational policies and procedures are more than a set of rules. They set the boundaries and limits of the volunteer role and protect not only the organization and its clients, but also the volunteers.

The second factor that plays an important role in the success of the volunteer-client match is the development and strengthening of interpersonal skills.

Good communication and active listening skills are necessary in the development and maintenance of relationships. Being respectful and mindful of our verbal and non-verbal communication techniques is essential.

- What does our body language portray?
- Do we maintain appropriate eye contact?
- Do we respect personal space?
- Do we speak from the first person and take ownership for what we say?
- Do we give clear and concise messages?
- Do we use simple vocabulary when speaking?
- Do we allow and encourage the other person to speak by asking open-ended questions and giving them the time to respond?
- Are we active listeners?

A good active listener remains fully attentive to the other person, maintains good eye contact, nods, allows silence, resists giving advice and focuses on the overall message the person is giving. Active listening skills promote respect and build trust in a relationship. These skills encourage collaboration, understanding and creativity.

Interpersonal skills are essential in every relationship and are the tools that enable the volunteer to work as part of a team, manage conflict efficiently and interact in an appropriate manner with their client-partner.

Initial and ongoing training are essential to every volunteer service. Volunteers need to acquire techniques and build skills in order to do their job effectively and safely. Clients receive professional services because volunteers have the necessary training to fulfill their obligations. Well-trained volunteers are better able to manage conflict and cope with problems because they have developed the necessary knowledge and skills.

It is important to incorporate regular supervision for each existing volunteer-client match. Volunteers need an avenue to discuss both ongoing and sporadic issues and obtain regular feedback regarding performance. Regular supervision supports volunteers in their role; it also provides the supervisor with the information he or she needs to give appropriate and helpful guidance and direction to the volunteer. As well, if issues and concerns arise within the partnership, the supervisor can address them in a timely fashion.

Finally, it is essential that the volunteer sets clear boundaries and limits. This helps to decrease possible conflict and frustration. It is important to note, however, that boundaries and limits are personal and can fluctuate from one relationship to another. Setting limits depends on the type of role the volunteer is in, the type of situation, agency expectations and policies, as well as their job description. For example, a person may find it appropriate to give out their home address to one of their colleagues but not to one of their clients. Furthermore, the agency for whom the person works might prohibit employees from giving

their home addresses to clients.

Assisting volunteers and clients to build helping relationships can be challenging. However, if volunteers are given appropriate training, with a focus on defining the volunteer's role and developing interpersonal skills, the outcome can be immensely rewarding.

Christine Gagné, R.S.W., is a Vocational Support Specialist with the Canadian Mental Health Association, Ottawa Branch.

BOUNDARIES AND THE STAFF / VOLUNTEER RELATIONSHIP

by Alison M. Caird

A boundary at its simplest is a fixed limit, extent or area, and in the context of relationships, it is an understanding between acceptable practice and that line you should not cross. As professionals we do not often get into trouble where there exists a very clear, black-and-white boundary crossing. For example, most professionals comprehend that sexual abuse and breaching confidentiality are boundary violations. It is when we get into the grey zone that we run into trouble: the area on the edge of reasonable action. Is accepting a gift from a client/volunteer a boundary violation? As a staff person, is it appropriate for me to disclose personal information? As the supervisor of a particular volunteer, is it okay to date that person? It really is in the analysis of context that we will be able to determine whether or not a particular action or inaction is a boundary crossing.

There are four areas of potential breach that have been identified:

1. client and/or customer interaction (e.g. touching, communication, tone, etc.);
2. access to and/or disclosure of information (e.g. confidentiality and privacy legislation, inappropriate self-disclosure, etc.);
3. gifts, services and financial relationships (e.g. understanding the motivation behind gift-giving, respecting timing and cost of the gift, etc.); and
4. dual relationships (e.g. business relationships with clients / patients / volunteers, understanding when the client/patient/volunteer ceases to be same, supervising family members, etc.)1.

How do we look for the signs of a potential boundary crossing? There are several questions we can ask ourselves to identify whether or not we are in the grey zone. A primary question to ask is, to whom will this action/inaction possibly benefit and conversely harm? A secondary question is, are there extenuating circumstances and could they make this situation particularly volatile?

Finally, is there a different way to handle the situation that is less likely to either raise or eliminate concern?

Let us consider a couple of scenarios.

Scenario #1
A volunteer gives a leather briefcase to their manager of volunteer resources as thanks for being accepted and placed as a volunteer. *Who will this action possibly benefit?* The manager of volunteer resources. *Who will this action possibly harm?* Perhaps the volunteer if it is an expense they cannot easily afford. *Are there extenuating circumstances and could they make this situation particularly volatile?* People often give gifts to others who have assisted and/or supported them and it is a culturally accepted practice in Canada. However, if the volunteer is looking for paid work and believes that a gift of this value/significance may secure a job opportunity within the facility and/or ensure an extremely positive reference, then the situation could become open to misinterpretation and eventual harm. *Is there a different way to handle the situation that is less likely to raise or eliminate concern?* Have a policy that caps the value of a gift to a staff person from a volunteer. *Was this scenario a boundary crossing?* Absolutely.

Scenario #2
A volunteer approaches their manager of volunteer resources and discloses that their husband abuses alcohol and her. The manager happens to have a relative in a similar situation and she briefly shares details of their family's experience. The manager then recommends that the volunteer discuss the issue with a professional and provides contact information for the local women's shelter. *Who will this action possibly benefit?* The volunteer. The disclosure was effective in building trust with the manager and putting the volunteer at ease. The manager provided appropriate resources to support the volunteer. *Who will this action possibly harm?* No one. The manager did not disclose any identifying information about her family member and so confidentiality was maintained. *Are there extenuating circumstances and could they make this situation particularly volatile?* No. The motives for disclosing were in the best interest of the volunteer as the manager was trying to put the volunteer at ease, empathize with her situation and build trust. The manager did not use the opportunity to turn the discussion into a therapy session to either a) work through her own issues, or, b) act outside of her role by providing therapy or counseling to the volunteer. *Is there a different way to handle the situation that is less likely to raise and/or eliminate concern?* The manager could have simply provided resources to the volunteer; however, the lack of empathy/rapport could possibly make the volunteer feel guilty for wasting the manager's time who may then not

have the courage to disclose to an appropriate professional or, conversely, she may continue to disclose to everyone in the facility. *Was this scenario a boundary crossing?* No. The manager's behaviour was appropriate. The volunteer was under their direct supervision and they were upset. The disclosure was professional as it was an act of empathy that helped put the volunteer at ease. The manager did appropriately redirect her to a professional for further guidance and support.

It is important to note that boundary issues are about the power relationship and its abuse. In the arena of volunteer management you could have the staff person in the position of power as the direct/indirect supervisor of the volunteer, or, also possible, you could have the volunteer in a position of power as a board member who has direct/indirect supervision over the staff person. It is essential that education and/or a discussion occur in both circumstances. It is recommended that you introduce practices that will assist in eliminating the possibility of future breaches: develop and introduce policies and procedures, volunteer agreements, position descriptions, a volunteer code of conduct, confidentiality agreements, volunteer orientation and training. These are all elements of solid, professional management of volunteers.

1. With notes, and permission, from: *MLT Boundaries of Practice Guidebook*, College of Medical Laboratory Technologists of Ontario. www.cmlto.com

Alison Caird is the Manager, Volunteer Resources for the Toronto Rehabilitation Institute, who has 20 years experience in the profession. Alison is an active presenter/public speaker, writer, researcher and professional consultant in the management of volunteer resources. Currently she is Director of Strategic Alliances for PAVR-O, and Co-Chair of the Strengthening Voluntarism in Ontario: Collective Action on Common Issues initiative funded by the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration. Alison received the Linda Buchanan Award – Administrator of Volunteers of the Year 2004, in recognition of her professional commitment to and leadership of Volunteer Resources.

HARMONY AND DISCORD AMONG VOLUNTEERS
by Joan Ryan

I have worked with many volunteers over the years and have dealt with all kinds of conflict. However, one of the episodes that sticks in my mind is one of humour as well as conflict.

Our program involves many couples as volunteers who fulfill the need to install equipment in the homes of our clients. This is an excellent practice as most of our clients are elderly and 80% of them are female. For some of our male volunteers, having their wives along makes for a more comfortable experience.

Some years ago, we had recruited a delightful couple. He was a retired accountant and she had been a career homemaker. We put them through the usual training and they were very excited about volunteering for our Lifeline Program. After some on-the-job training with experienced volunteers, the couple was deemed ready to go out on their own.

They took on their first volunteer experience and, within a week, I received phone calls from each of them. This generation often has very definite ideas about which tasks are the forte of which gender. It seems our "Mr." was not particularly strong technically, where his "Mrs." was. However, he felt it was his role to install the equipment and hers to speak with the client and tend to the paperwork. Unfortunately, our Mr. was giving the client incorrect information and, as safety for our clients is paramount, his wife was correcting him each time. Hence the phone calls. Each ensured the other was not in hearing range when he or she called me. They felt their marriage was more important to them than this team approach to volunteering for Lifeline, but they both wanted strongly to continue to give us their time. The solution: we gave each a different role with our program and they continued for several years to be much loved and dedicated volunteers until health issues dictated that they retire from volunteering. I am happy to say their marriage survived very nicely and I was invited to their 50th wedding anniversary.

Working with couples as a volunteer team has its own challenges. Most people volunteer on an individual basis and conflicts can be resolved with that one person through re-direction, further training or letting go. With couples, we have other issues to keep in mind. I am pleased to say that I have never had to deal with interrelationship issues with any of our couples, but I have had to be aware of personality conflicts between the volunteers. We try to give all of our volunteers an opportunity to get to know one another and particularly an opportunity to learn from one another. Since we are working with changing technology, it is beneficial to have people who are experienced with telephone equipment or electrical equipment, as they can pass on knowledge to others.

Sometimes, we need to keep the little things in mind to ensure harmony in the group. It can be likened to a large dinner party or a fundraising dinner where certain people are not seated beside one another or at the same table in order to ensure harmony. Relationships with people call for diplomacy and attention to detail more than anything else and a few minutes spent considering your volunteers' personalities and feelings is all it takes to keep the volunteers' experiences with your organization and one another enjoyable and rewarding.

I can honestly say we have not had much conflict among our volunteers. Our issues of concern often are around a person's health challenges. A topic for another time: how do you help a volunteer slow down or even resign when the conflict is within him/herself as they do not want to acknowledge that they can no longer physically do the job? I have had occasion with couples where one had resigned and the other was re-assigned and continued for a time to volunteer with our program.

The solutions and the conflicts are as varied and complicated as the personalities involved. Sometimes we try too hard when the solution is a simple one. Successful solutions to conflicts are their own reward.

Joan Ryan has been managing the Nanaimo Lifeline Program, and its volunteer resources, for 19 years. She is a member of AVRBC (Administrators of Volunteer Resources, BC) and CAVR (Canadian Administrators of Volunteer Resources), through which she is certified. Joan is looking forward to retiring in the next few years but hopes to continue as a consultant in the field of volunteer management while spending more time with her grandchildren.

COACHING AND MENTORING INSIGHTS FOR POSITIVE RESULTS

by Cec Hanec

"…When coaching principles govern or underlie all management behaviour and interactions, the full force of people's performance potential will be released."
- John Whitmore, Coaching For Performance

Spend less time putting out "people fires" and more time focusing on creating a positive and motivating work environment for your volunteers and/or staff that is built around a solid coaching/mentoring perspective. A positive coaching/mentoring culture, based on mutual respect, mutual trust and freedom of expression, builds and sustains workplace relationships, encourages new levels of performance and productivity, reduces turnover and improves morale.

Developing your coaching and/or mentoring skills will impact your ability to influence, manage and motivate others to perform at their best.

Dr. Jan Northrup Kratochwill explains mentoring as offering the wisdom of one's years, helping through the tough times, giving a pat on the back and knowledge of the organization to help guide someone less experienced, passing down knowledge through advising and counseling versus longer term acquisition of skills.

Whereas coaching, according to James Flaherty, author of *Coaching: Evoking Excellence in Others*, involves "working with people leaving them more competent and more fulfilled so that they are more able to contribute to their organization and find meaning in what they are doing."

As a coach or mentor you play an important role in unlocking another person's potential, helping to maximize their own performance, believing that person possesses more capability than they currently possess and providing essential accountability to the participant, holding them accountable for implementation and results. It is important to engage the individual in ongoing discussions on key accountabilities and performance expectations so that they understand what is expected of them and what a good job looks like.

Your role as a coach or mentor, be it on an informal, spontaneous basis or a more formal basis, may vary and could involve acting as a sounding board, orientating new volunteers or staff, helping develop skills, tracking progress and/or enhancing personal growth experiences.

The role of a coach or mentor can be a very stimulating and positive experience leading to:

- personal satisfaction of giving back something of personal importance;
- stronger leadership abilities;
- personal knowledge, insight and experience;
- higher visibility in the marketplace and with one's peers; and
- renewed energy and commitment to developing others.

James Flaherty emphasizes six important areas that a coach needs to address to bring about intended outcomes.

1. A coach needs to address short-term actions that support individuals in reaching their long-term goals. The individual is left competent to deal with challenging situations as they arise.
2. A coach needs to account for behaviour because behaviour leads to outcomes.
3. A coach needs to provide a new language that encourages an individual to make new observations, to be self-correcting and self-generating.
4. A coach provides practice time that allows the language introduced to become a permanent part of the individual's structure of interpretation, making it possible for the individual to be a long-term excellent performer.

5. A coach needs to adapt to fit individuals.
6. A coach needs to ask good questions that get to the heart of the issue and get the individual thinking differently and better.

Target Training International, a company in the forefront of people performance, recommends the following tips on developing personal coaching and mentoring skills:

- Think of your people in terms of their potential, not their performance.
- Communicate a vision and its value.
- Lead, based on the foundation of your values and beliefs.
- Share information with others – do not hide news, feedback, critiques or praise.
- Support people when they make mistakes and help them learn from the situation.
- Choose your battles wisely.
- Be decisive.
- Do not make other people's decisions for them.
- Listen to others' problems and help them define solutions.
- Be persistent.
- Encourage others to take initiative; reward them for independent decisions.
- Do not procrastinate.
- Build teams and empower them to address problems.
- Recognize the value of others' contributions.

Knowing the powerful impact that coaching and mentoring can have on individuals and organizations, take a moment to determine what you are going to do in the next month to strengthen your coaching and mentoring skills that could enhance your ability to influence, manage and motivate your people to enjoy and maximize their experience with your organization.

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VOLUNTEER RESOURCES: THE AFTERMATH OF A CONFLICT

by Charlene Robson

The aftermath of a conflict can be a time of reflection and renewal for your volunteer programs and policies. Conflict is inevitable, but a volunteer program built on a strong foundation will give you good stead to deal with the aftermath. If based on logic and reason, this foundation should provide an Administrator of Volunteer Resources with the guidance necessary to make difficult decisions. The response to conflict should reflect the mission and values of your organization. The aftermath of a conflict can also be a time to reflect on your leadership and management skills and to identify opportunities for growth.

Dealing with the Emotions of the Post Conflict

When you make a decision that will cause conflict, it is important to keep yourself open to feedback from those affected by the decision. Sometimes there is no alternative to the decision made, but one needs to keep an open mind and encourage those involved to talk through their feelings, even if the discussion will not change the outcome. Avoiding this discussion will not allow people to work through their issues and may influence future events.

Administrators should consider the needs and feelings of those affected by the conflict. The psychiatrist Elizabeth Kubler-Ross developed the Five Stages of Grief. These stages can apply to many circumstances, including a significant conflict or loss in the work place. To understand that people may exhibit many of these stages can be helpful in assisting people through a conflict. The stages are:

1. Denial: The initial stage: "*It can't be happening.*"
2. Anger: "*Why ME? It's not fair!*"
3. Bargaining: "*I'm so sorry, it will never happen again, give me one more chance*."
4. Depression: "*I'm so sad, why bother with anything? I'll just quit volunteering*."
5. Acceptance: "*It's going to be OK.*"

These steps do not necessarily come in order, but most people will experience at least two of the stages. Some organizations offer professional counseling to volunteers and staff if there is a dismissal or significant event. This offers staff or volunteers the opportunity to work through their loss with support that is independent of the organization where the conflict occurred.

Working with Staff through a Conflict Aftermath

When a volunteer's actions require discipline, an emotional aftermath may result.

If staff no longer want the volunteer in their department, for example, the volunteer may not understand that their skills were not meeting the needs of the program. The volunteer may experience a sense of failure. The intervention of the Administrator to redirect the volunteer to a more appropriate program for their skills will help the volunteer remain competent. At this point, the Administrator needs to ask:

- Why was the volunteer no longer appropriate for the department?
- Do you need to change your screening process?
- Does the volunteer need to be older or have different skills?
- Could you ask a different question in future interviews to help determine a better fit between volunteers and departments, ensuring that both staff and the volunteer have a more enjoyable experience?

In the aftermath of this situation, the Administrator of Volunteer Resources needs to sit down with the staff and review the lead-up to the dismissal, or reassignment, and look at what policies or procedures could have prevented the conflict.

When a volunteer interprets feedback as a personal attack, the aftermath may involve helping the volunteer work through their feelings. If the volunteer has a close relationship with staff, the Administrator may also end up counseling staff through the issues or situation. In this instance, staff may not understand why a volunteer has been disciplined and they may sympathize with the volunteer, putting you in a bad light. Knowing that you followed policy and procedure and kept within the mission and values of your organization will provide you with a solid foundation upon which to defend your decision.

Sometimes events are cut and dry, but often if the staff feels sorry for a disciplined volunteer, they may need to work through their feelings of grief and loss. For example, a volunteer may befriend staff to the point where the volunteer feels they can push the program boundaries without the staff's notice or reprisal. When staff starts to take notice, the staff member may not want the volunteer to be dismissed, only spoken to about the incidences. When breaches such as these are repeatedly brought to the attention of Volunteer Resources, dismissal is often the only solution. This leaves the Administrator of Volunteer Resources consoling both staff members and the affected volunteer.

Volunteer Denial and Anger in the Aftermath

One day, while on the bus, I overhead a conversation between two women. One had recently been, in her words, "fired." The other woman was aghast. "You can't fire a volunteer!" As the conversation continued, it turned out that the woman who was "fired" was told that there was no longer a role for her in the organization due to the time requirements of the program. This plays out time and time again in our programs. This woman was only available on Tuesday mornings between 9:00 and 11:00, but programming for clients had been re-scheduled to the afternoon.

What could have been done differently to avoid this conversation on the bus? No matter what we do as Administrators, sometimes there is no appeasing volunteers who no longer fit our requirements. If you have one Administrator coordinating a considerable number of volunteers, it may be difficult to allow the flexibility that some volunteers desperately desire. In this circumstance, one option may be to offer the volunteer other opportunities within the organization or assist the volunteer to find other opportunities in the community.

Renewing and Remodeling your Foundation

Discussions with those affected may help to influence future events. These discussions will give one time to reflect on practices. An evaluation of the conflict may deter a similar incident from occurring in the future. Discussions with stakeholders could include talking about how the incident could have been avoided in the first place. There may be no perfect solution. If one is working with a team of staff, brainstorming could be useful to find out how others would have handled the situation or prevented the situation from occurring. When holding these types of discussions, remain open to the opinions of others and do not take the feedback as an attack on your capabilities.

Seeking feedback can be effective to improve your leadership. Be sure to ask for specific rather than general feedback. For instance, specific feedback would be telling a person "You talked so much that I stopped listening," versus "you are too talkative." Feedback should be timely so events are fresh in the minds of those providing the feedback and it should be descriptive rather than judgmental. Descriptive feedback will reduce defensive feelings which will cloud the process.

Sometimes a volunteer's feedback may be of the general nature because he or she is emotionally charged or feeling intimidated by the process. Using coaching techniques as you sit and listen to the volunteer may uncover specific feedback that will give a different perspective on the conflict and how to avoid similar problems in the future. Ask the volunteer:

- Why do you feel this way?
- Tell me more about…
- How did events lead to this outcome?
- How could we do this differently in the future?

Coaching is concerned with the "how." How did this situation arise? How can we ensure that processes meet the mission of the organization?

When dealing with these situations, remember to keep your cool. Dealing with the aftermath of a conflict is not about winning or losing. There is no benefit or advantage to setting up a win/lose situation. The BTI Consultants website, www.bticonsultants.com, offers this advice for dealing with conflicts:

- eliminate emotions;
- stay in control;
- keep a positive outlook;
- maintain a sense of humour;
- focus on a positive, solution based outcome;
- brainstorm solutions;
- concentrate on what you can control; and
- take action when an opportunity is provided to improve the program.

You may never see eye-to-eye, as the reasons for conflict are sometimes beyond your control, but one should feel comfortable in agreeing to disagree.

Conclusion

The aftermath of a conflict requires an Administrator to deal with multiple layers of emotions from various people affected by the conflict. The Administrator will benefit from using the conflict as an opportunity for growth and renewal rather than setting up a situation of win or lose. Using coaching techniques and an awareness of the feelings of all involved will create and enhance an exemplary volunteer program that reflects the integrity of the organization's mission.

Resources:

BTI Consultants.
www.bticonsultants.com/eprise/main/web/sg/bti/en/dealing_with_conflict. 2007

Corporation for National and Community Service. *Becoming a Better Supervisor: A Resource Guide for National and Community Service Supervisors.* 1993. Downloadable at
http://nationalserviceresources.org/resources/online_pubs/program_management/

Kubler-Ross, Elizabeth M.D. *On Death and Dying*. First Touchdown. 1997.

McDermott, Ian and Wendy Jago. *The Coaching Bible: The Essential Handbook.* Judy Piatkus Publishers Ltd. 2005.s

National School Board Association. www.nsba.org/sbot/toolkit/conflict.html. November 9, 2007.

Charlene Robson has been coordinating volunteers since 1992 and is currently working at St. Paul's Hospital for Providence Health Care in British Columbia. Charlene completed the Certificate in Volunteer Management at Vancouver

Community College in 1993. She is a graduate of Simon Fraser University and is certified in Volunteer Administration through CCVA and CAVR. Charlene is Past-President of AVRBC (Administrators of Volunteer Resources BC).

MANAGING CONFLICT: A GUIDE FOR VOLUNTEER BOARDS

by E. Grant MacDonald

Conflict, whether out in the open or submerged, is one of the leading reasons for board member and executive director resignations. Community organizations and their boards of directors can be fertile ground for conflict because they tend to:

- be diverse in their membership;
- involve passionate, caring people;
- struggle with being unified and focused in terms of mission and goals in the face of many important demands;
- be an expression of alternative democratic structures and processes: non-authoritarian, non- hierarchical and inclusive;
- require shared leadership by a volunteer board and an executive director; and
- operate in a dynamic, frequently adversarial, political context.

What lies behind most conflict?

While we are often quick to attribute board strife to "a conflict of personalities", most of the differences that we experience are more complex than our individual styles or traits.

Friction can certainly result from unhelpful "behaviour" in terms of interpersonal communication. But conflicts can also result from lack of information, different views of what information is important or even varying interpretations of available information. Often, conflict is rooted too in different needs or interests with the perception that all the choices facing the organization are in competition with one another. Structural conflicts involving a struggle over power or authority are also common. Value conflicts, the most difficult to resolve, result from different ways of understanding the world; our ideals in the broadest sense.

Four Areas of Conflict

1. Conflict among board members

Conflict on the board can arise from differences between or among individual directors or factions of directors. The chair of the board can be a contributing

factor when board members are fighting. Indeed the chairperson may be the source of the conflict by virtue of "running the show" or dominating board discussions. He/she may also be the problem because there is no leadership when others are at odds.

The chair and executive director can both play a role in resolving board conflict, but the latter is in a very awkward position to act without appearing to take sides or be manipulating the situation. Beyond providing factual information or providing process advice, the executive director is wise to let the chair play the lead role.

2. Conflict between board and executive director

Differences between the board and the executive director are probably the most common area of conflict in non-profit organizations. Often these differences will be structural in nature, that is, they have to do with the boundaries of each other's roles and responsibilities.

Trust is a huge factor in the board-executive director relationship. The more involved a board is in overseeing operational decisions, even when such oversight is invited by the executive director, the less trust will characterize this relationship. In contrast, the more the board is involved in strategic decisions, the greater will be the trust.

3. Conflict among staff members

Boards frequently get drawn into conflicts among staff or volunteers. Staff conflicts, and conflicts between a staff member and the executive director, are not uncommon and boards should not automatically regard them as an indication of a deficiency in the executive director's management skills.

Ideally, a board will hear about such situations first from the executive director. Sometimes however, someone with a grievance will choose to do an "end run" around the executive director and appeal directly to the board. The board may need to get involved either to mediate or arbitrate such disputes, especially in situations where no policy has been set. Where the conflict is between other staff members, or between volunteers, a board would be wise to stay clear, especially if it wants to affirm the executive director's authority and accountability.

4. Conflict between the organization and its members and stakeholders.

Sometimes the members or groups that are part of the organization's constituency can itself challenge the legitimacy of the board. Factions amongst the membership can arise whenever a few people become unhappy with how things are being run and believe they or others can do a better job.

A Strategy for Confronting Conflict
When the board or the organization as a whole is disabled by a conflict it needs to face it head on. Conflicts should not be left to simmer in the hope they will go away. Leadership by the board chair or the executive director in pushing for a resolution process is required.

In situations where the board chair and/or the executive director are parties in the conflict, an external resource person should be called upon to assist in a mediation role.

Confronting a conflict situation can almost always benefit from face-to-face communication amongst the parties involved, either a series of meetings with individuals and/or a group meeting involving all of the parties. An intervention aimed at resolving the disagreement and repairing a damaged relationship should rely on a volunteer, a staff person or an external facilitator who has the respect of everyone to facilitate the process. This could be a board member. Boards should avoid handing the work over to an existing board committee:

- Arrange a special meeting or a series of private meetings, not a board meeting. Regular and official board meetings are not the best place to confront a serious conflict even if all members of the board are involved.
- Avoid secret meetings; the process needs to be transparent. Inform the whole board and the staff that a conflict resolution process has been undertaken, indicate the steps and who is involved and that the outcome will be reported to them.
- Ensure that everyone understands that the process is not one that will result in organizational decisions or commitments although the parties, if an agreement is reached, may make recommendations to the board.
- Do not involve formal minutes or notes of conflict resolution meetings. Ensure that the dialogue is treated as confidential. The outcome, if the parties agree, can be reported. A list of the participants and written statement or recommendation from the group is often useful in terms of moving ahead.

It is well known that men and women, and people of different cultures and traditions, bring different perspectives and skills to managing conflict. If a conflict suffers from an ingrained gender or cultural pattern, boards should look for some alternative ways for talking things out. Other approaches can sometimes come from sources that are closer than we might have thought.

This article was condensed from a resource written by E. Grant MacDonald, Associate Professor (Continuing Education) at Dalhousie University and Director of the Non-Profit Sector Leadership Program and Associate Director of the Negotiation and Conflict Management Program. The full guide and companion resources are available from the Non-Profit Sector Leadership Program at www.dal.ca/cce/nonprofit.

PEER EXPERT
by Clare O'Kelly

Scenario:
I am having difficulty with two of my experienced volunteers. They always seem to be in conflict over how things should be done and I am at a loss as to how to handle the situation. Can you help?

Response:
Conflict is inevitable. It is as much a part of life as breathing, eating and sleeping. So it should come as no surprise that it manifests itself amongst our volunteers. It is especially tricky to deal with because most of us are uncomfortable with conflict. However, if we as administrators can recognize the opportunity for growth and clarity that comes out of conflict, and communicate this to our volunteers, it sets the stage for better learning and understanding, which in turn will lead to higher volunteer contributions.

Conflicts come in all different shapes and sizes, just as people do, and people have all different styles of responding to conflict. It may be helpful to assess whether the conflict is rooted in opposing values, in relationship issues, or in a communication problem. It is also helpful to assess how individuals respond to conflict.

The Thomas-Kilman Conflict-Mode Instrument identifies five common responses to conflict:
- competing or forcing;
- collaborating or problem-solving together;
- compromising ——I'll give this, if you'll give that;
- avoiding or withdrawal; and
- accommodating or trying to smooth out the situation but not necessarily resolving the root issues.

There are pluses and minuses in each response, and some may be more suited for certain types of conflict than others.

You may more easily assess the root cause and the individual responses to a conflict situation by asking:

1. What is the issue?
2. What is actually happening, generally and specifically, for you in this situation?
3. What are the options?
4. What can you contribute to solving this issue?

Once you understand the problem, you are in a better situation to bring the volunteers together to discuss what is happening, what is at stake, and what the solutions might be.

The Supervisor as advisor in a joint meeting then helps to

- clarify the problem;
- clarify the goal;
- identify the obstacles, resources or strategies;
- determine a course of action that volunteers can commit to; and
- follow up to assess progress.

In any discussion it is important to maintain an objective role as an advisor, and avoid becoming personally enmeshed in a conflict situation because of our own boundary issues or personal, habitual ways of responding to conflict. It is also important to keep the conversation steered away from "then and there" and instead focus on the "here and now".

Doing what we can to avoid conflict in the first place is, however, the best place to start. One of the key tools in avoiding conflict is clearly articulating our expectations and values for volunteers. Clear service assignments and an understanding of the mission of the organization and how the volunteer programs contribute to it is vital. If volunteers understand from the beginning (through education in orientation sessions, interview, training and day-to-day contact) that the ultimate goal is to contribute to the mission of the organization, not their own individual needs, then the focus on a potential conflict can be resolved according to the goals of the organization. If volunteers' personal needs or motivations do not fit in with this organizational goal, then this is an indication they should seek other opportunities elsewhere.

In one case I dealt with there were two long-time volunteers experiencing both relationship and communication issues. Both responded primarily in a competitive fashion. It was affecting paid staff and the rest of the volunteer team. Although I went through the individual coaching session with each of them, they were unwilling to meet together to resolve the issue. At this point both volunteers went in to a withdrawal response. Ultimately both volunteers left the program. While this is not the resolution I had hoped for, it was in the long run probably the

best one for the organization as a whole. The team was then able to refocus on the goals of their area, rather than on the personal difficulties between two team members.

I was able to practice my skills, learn more about people and realize again the importance of focusing the volunteer program on the goals of the organization, rather than the needs of the volunteers.

Clare O'Kelly is Manager of Volunteer Resources at Burnaby Hospital, a 300-bed acute care site in Burnaby, BC. She is also Regional Coordinator for the Administrators Volunteer Resources BC (AVRBC), and Membership Rep for BC for the CAVR. Clare has 14 years of experience in the field of volunteer administration, and is a certified member of CAVR.

BOOK REVIEW

by Charlene Robson

Volunteering in a Unionized Environment
by Colin Thacker

Although written eight years ago, Colin Thacker's *Volunteering in a Unionized Environment* is still poignant today. As Colin mentions, and in general, it is always a good practice to work closely with your key stakeholders to develop sound practical position descriptions that meet the needs of the staff and will be meaningful for volunteers.

Following the Standards of Practice of your professional organization, such as CAVR, will ensure that volunteer position descriptions and practices are clear to union leaders and the union members. Colin also emphasizes the importance of an orientation for volunteers. Orientation is important to ensure that volunteers understand their role in relation to union roles.

Other "day to day steps" that Colin recommends are:

- emphasizing, to volunteers, the importance of reliability;
- training and orientation for staff working with volunteers;
- allowing front line staff to supervise the volunteers;
- ensuring that Volunteer Resources Staff are enthusiastic and approachable;
- acknowledging volunteer's credentials, expertise and contributions; and
- always placing volunteers where they will be welcomed.

Colin's book is brief but touches on the important elements of operating a successful volunteer program in a union environment. The only aspect of the book that would have enhanced its reading would be solutions to the cases presented in the book. This could perhaps be an opportunity for a sequel.

This is an easy reading book and I recommend it as a refresher to anyone working in a unionized environment.

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NEWS BITS

In 2008, the Canadian Journal of Volunteer Resources Management will revise its publishing schedule to include three issues per year. Your Editorial Team hopes that this new schedule will enhance our focus on timely, relevant information regarding the management of volunteer resources in Canada. To further this goal, we have also engaged a group of Regional Representatives, volunteers from across the country who will assist us in finding articles of local interest. Their names appear under the table of contents in this issue. Subscription renewals, reflecting a reduced price, have now been mailed to all individual and group subscribers. We welcome any comments on this change, or subscription inquiries, by email to contact_cjvrm@yahoo.ca.

JOURNAL OF VOLUNTEER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

Editorial Process and Guidelines for Authors

Objective
The Journal of Volunteer Resources Management is intended:

1. to serve as a credible source of information on the management of volunteers in Canada;
2. to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and to encourage networking among managers of volunteers;
3. to provide a professional development tool for managers of volunteers;
4. to recognize and encourage Canadian talent in the field of management of volunteers;
5. to include in each issue at least two articles that will consider different views on a specific and predetermined theme.

Target Audience
The Journal's intended audience includes managers of volunteers, educators, media and funders of not-for-profit organizations across the country.

Submissions
All manuscripts will be accepted on diskette or via e-mail in either Microsoft Word or Word Perfect. Submissions should be written according to "Canadian Style - A Guide to Writing and Editing" - Secretary of State, Dundurn Press. External reviewers may be engaged to review content if deemed advisable by the committee.

The revised draft is edited for clarity and consistency by the Editorial Team.

The edited version is returned to the author for acceptance along with an approval form for signature.

The signed form is to be returned to the Editorial Team within a week along with any suggestions for final revisions.

Format and Style
Authors are asked to respect the following word counts:

	Words	Pages
Lead Article	1000	5-6
Secondary Article	700-800	2-3
Book Review	150	1

The lead article will look at the topic in some depth and will normally require the author to conduct research into current trends and perspectives on the subject.

The secondary article will adopt a more practical approach, including personal experiences and opinions.

Advertising
Limited advertising space will be allowed in the Journal, for materials of direct relevance to managers of volunteer service, and as long as it conforms to the guidelines set out by the Editorial Team.

Guidelines:
1. Only ¼ page and ½ page ads will be accepted.
2. Ad must be camera-ready.
3. A maximum of one page of ads will be permitted per issue.
4. Job ads are not recommended.
5. Cost is to be determined by the Editorial Team.

LOOKING AHEAD

National Volunteer Week
April 27 - May 3

Conference on Volunteer Administration

Building Through Inspired Leadership

May 6-8, 2008

Sheraton Hamilton Hotel

www.cavr.org

DEADLINES FOR SUBMISSIONS & THEMES

Issue	Deadline	Theme
Volume 16.1	articles due on the 28th of February	Partnerships and Alliances
Volume 16.2	articles due on the 31st of May	Intergenerational Volunteering
Volume 16.3	articles due on the 30th of September	Technology