



WHEN VOLUNTEERS NO LONGER CAN DO THE JOB

From a post by a volunteer manager on LinkedIn:

“Managers of volunteers are very compassionate people but they also engage volunteers in order to do the work/mission of the organization, not to provide a service or program for the volunteers... I want to find a way to help the staff talk with volunteers who are unable to continue their role.”

Risk management in any organization involves holding volunteers, as well as employees, accountable for carrying out their responsibilities. What to do when a volunteer no longer is able (or willing) to do the job to your standards? Do you have to show them the door? Not always. Sometimes you can promote the volunteer to a new role he or she can love, and will help the organization.

For example, if the volunteer has devoted years of service to the organization, who better to accompany your development person to visit a potential major donor? The volunteer might have diminished skills in whatever he or she has done for years, but will have passion for the mission, still can express it in a way that could move the needle, and might really appreciate the opportunity to be part of such an important effort.

Another option that can help the veteran volunteer still contribute, and know he or she is appreciated -- Have them train new volunteers (and maybe select the new volunteers to be trained, as well.) "You know, Margaret, we want to create opportunities for all the new volunteers coming into the organization. Who do you think might be good at (whatever Margaret – or Harold -- has been doing)?...Would you be willing to train him, so he can help in the area you know so well?" (Make sure you're there at the training session, too, for support.)

Of course, veteran volunteers who show signs they might be limited in their capabilities for their current responsibilities might be reassigned to something new, that they can do well. For example, someone who no longer can transport clients safely might be a great help in planning the fundraiser gala or the volunteer recognition event.

These are a few options that are respectful of the long-time volunteer, and might be better than the "lifetime achievement award" approach that could leave the volunteer wondering whether he or she is supposed to show up next week.