

Care and Feeding of Volunteers: the Foundation for Effective Leadership in AFS

AFS Leadership Workshop
Jackson, WY
March 25, 2012

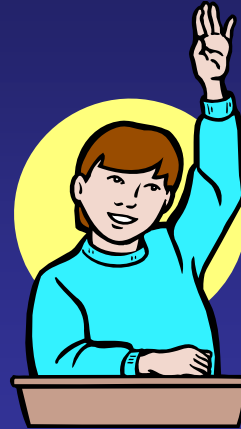
Presentation by Steve McMullin, VA Tech
Presented by Lori Martin, Colorado Parks and Wildlife

AFS and Volunteers

- AFS units are all volunteer organizations
- The “real work” of AFS is done by committees of volunteers
- In general, only a small percentage of members become “active” members (volunteers)
- The challenge for leaders in AFS?
 - Recruiting new volunteers to get involved

Why do people volunteer?

- According to an old saying quoted by Linda Greenlaw (author and the woman sword boat captain in "The Perfect Storm"), a volunteer is someone who didn't understand the question



What Prevents People From Volunteering Their Time?

- They feel that they lack the capacity to help the organization achieve its goals
- They lack the motivation to volunteer
- They feel they are just too busy
- They haven't been asked

Verba, S., K. L. Schlozman, and H. E. Brady. 1995. *Voice and Equality: Volunteerism in American Politics*. Harvard University Press.

So What Can You do to Encourage More People to Volunteer Their Time?

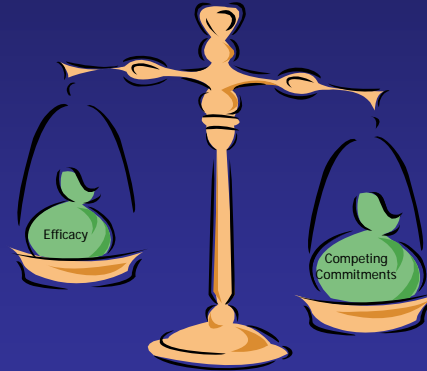
- First, you have to ask!
- Draw out new volunteers
- Encourage new unit members, students to take an active role—build capacity!
- Be wary of overcommitted people—unless they have a history of producing!

Some Research Findings on Motivations of Volunteers

- People volunteer their time to organizations for many reasons but two factors outweigh others in making their decisions
- Efficacy: will their participation make a difference?
- Competing commitments: does their desire to participate and the social pressure to do so outweigh other commitments?

Appeal to Efficacy

- Every potential volunteer balances his/her sense of efficacy (Can I make a difference?) with competing commitments—focus on how he/she can help the AFS unit & the profession



Competing Commitments

- People who volunteer often have more competing commitments than those who don't—they belong to more organizations, donate more time to other organizations than nonactive members
- But their desire to make a difference outweighs the competing commitments

Martinez, T. A. and S. L. McMullin. 2004. Factors affecting decisions to volunteer in nongovernmental organizations. *Environment and Behavior* 36:112-126.

For Whom Will the Volunteer Work?

- Volunteers also must decide to which organizations they will donate their time
 - Professional?
 - Civic?
 - Kids' activities?



Don't Give Up

- Timing of the request is important—don't write off a person because of one negative response
 - A person who is too busy to help this year might be willing to help next year



What strategies for recruiting volunteers have worked for you?

Keeping Volunteers Involved

- Recognition is the only reward we have to offer volunteers
- Recognize them at annual meetings
- Award prizes
- Write letters
- Reinforce efficacy
- Thank them every time you talk to them



Being an effective leader in the AFS...

- Is more than doing the work yourself
- Is more than being a visionary
 - It includes developing followers (volunteers) to achieve the vision even after the leader is gone
- Be selective, strategic—decide on a few, important things you want to accomplish
- Develop a work plan

Being an effective leader in the AFS...

- Be prepared to work in spurts of activity (intense activity before meetings with periods of inactivity is normal—with exceptions)
- Plan far ahead—the people you ask to do things have regular jobs
- Make expectations clear, follow up

Being an effective leader in the AFS...

- All-volunteer organizations require extra attention to caring for people—you have no authority, but you do have the ability to inspire people to action
- A leader's legacy is the people she/he develops to be future leaders

Collective wisdom: tips from other AFS leaders