

Volunteers Work

By Dave Ashman

Many factors have influenced recreational and athletic organizations to move toward creating new business relationships with the communities they serve. Many of those organizations rely on volunteers to provide expertise and leadership to their programs. President Kennedy gave the best advice any volunteers could ask for, "Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country."

Why Are You Here?

People offer their support and services to groups for a wide variety of reasons. The most common is they

have some direct connection with a group. Usually a family member is involved in some way, or perhaps they have been recruited by a friend to assist in a particular job. Just like any relationship, you have to figure out how to work together. Dr. Dick Caton addressed this topic in a speech at the annual conference of STMA several years ago. He gave sage advice on how to find a way to get the job done.

Dr. Caton pointed out that a great number of organizations depend on volunteers to organize and operate their programs. Little Leagues, American Legion, recreation departments and most athletic programs use volunteers to keep their programs on line. Many of the groups that are successful have a few common traits:

- They plan their programs well.
- They clearly define the roles and jobs of the members.
- They do not lose sight of who they serve.
- Most importantly, they check their egos at the door when they start work.

Dr. Caton says that effective communication skills are the building blocks for a successful program. Volunteers bring an incredible amount of expertise to any program. Sharing this expertise in a functional way will provide the training the organization can use to develop a long-term plan and grow.

When a group develops an organization of volunteers, motivation of the staff is a constant battle. People want to know that their efforts are important. Finding volunteers to complete the day-to-day basic work is difficult. In every organization, there are jobs that are less desirable but still need to be done and done well. There is a tendency to let the same people handle



Dr. Dick Caton has found that effective communication is a building block for successful volunteer programs. Photo courtesy: Henry Indyk.

this task until they leave the organization. To be successful, you must provide a support network for these leaders. You must also let these people know daily how important they are to the program.

These are the front-line people who find a way to get the job done. You will never hear about these people except when something goes wrong. There are millions of volunteers, but there are few who can get it done like these people. Mike Benedahl with East Altadena Little

League is one of the best. Frank Schwengal with UCLA Baseball's 10th Player is able to walk on water. Bill Bauman with Men's Senior Baseball League uses his vast business skills to hold the league together. Being the liaison or point person working with these groups is not a job for the faint hearted.

People like Angie Avery, with Long Beach Park, Recreation and Marine, will go the extra mile and find a way to accommodate the greatest number of people with a fair and equitable plan. She is working with several of her Long Beach Recreation colleagues to develop a training program to educate volunteers on how to maintain baseball and softball fields. She understands the importance of field maintenance and safe conditions for young athletes.

These are just a few of the front-line people who find a way to get the job done, and I salute them. □

If you have a story or anecdote you would like to share, call (562) 425-2449 or write it down (include your name and phone number) and mail it to: Ashman & Associates, 3164 North Greenbrier Rd., Long Beach, CA 90808.

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