

How Effective Communication Will Help an Organization

Editor's Note: We've all been both the victim and perpetrator of ineffective communication. Had a friendly voice mail mistaken for a hostile remark? We all know that effective communication is critical to an effectively run program, but how often do we take the time to think about how we are communicating, how to be more effective communicators, and how to improve our overall effectiveness through paying closer attention to our messages and methods? Substitute "volunteer" for the word "employee" and "business" with "organization" in the article below and (I hope) you will gain some insight into the importance of effectively communicating with the volunteers in your organization. Since communication is so important, the DCAVS/United Way Conference Planning Team has included an interactive workshop on communication skills and strategies at our annual conference, *Leading the Way to Successful Volunteer Involvement*, scheduled for September 14. For more information about the conference, contact Kathy Martinson, kathym@uwdc.org or 608.246.4356 or me at sminkoff@wisc.edu or 608.263.7760. We hope you'll join us at the conference for this and other DCAVS-sponsored training events.

Sara Minkoff, editor

by Leigh Richards, Demand Media

Effective communication is critical to any organization and can help in many ways. In fact, communication plays a role in product development, customer relations, employee management—virtually every facet of a business' operations. Employees are a key audience because they often serve as the conduit to other audiences. If employees are informed and engaged, communications with other constituencies are likely to be strong as well.

Clear Expectations

Effective communications help to establish clear expectations for employees and, perhaps surprisingly, for customers as well. For employees, clear expectations will convey how their performance will impact the company and give them an indication of what they need to do to achieve positive feedback. For customers, clear communication can help manage their expectations about service issues or even about how best to interact with the organization.

Strong Relationships

Effective communication builds strong relationships. Trust and loyalty are key factors in any relationship and both are boosted by communication that is focused on meeting individual needs, conveying important information and providing feedback—positive and constructive. Strong relationships with external audiences also build strong solid communication about products, services and company culture and values.

Ideas and Innovation

Open channels of communication can lead to new ideas and innovation in a number of areas. Employees that understand what's important to their companies can focus on making improvements and spotting opportunities for innovation that can help further success. When employees know their ideas will be sought after, that company leaders will have open minds and be responsive to their feedback, they're more likely to contribute their ideas. Customers also can be a source of great ideas to help improve products and services.

Customer Ambassadors

The more employees know about the company, its culture, its products and services, and its response to any negative issues, the better job they can do of serving as ambassadors to the community, their friends, relatives and other business connections. Employees who feel they have a strong, positive relationship with their employers and trust the information they receive from their employers will be more likely to share that information with others. Employees can be a highly valued and trusted source of information about a company and its products and services.

Strong Teamwork

Effective organizational communication will lead to strong teamwork and the ability for employees at all levels of the organization to work together to achieve company goals. In addition, effective organizational communication will provide employees the knowledge, structure and positive work environment they need to feel comfortable dealing with conflict and resolving issues effectively.

About the author: Leigh Richards has been a freelance writer since 1980, and has been published in *Entrepreneur*, *Complete Woman*, *Toastmaster* and many other trade and professional publications. She has a BA from UW-Madison and a MA from the University of Phoenix. From: <http://smallbusiness.chron.com/effective-communication-organization-1400.html>





Online Webinar: Effective Engagement of Skill-Based Volunteers, 10/13/11

ALIVE Webinar series presents a training on effectively engaging skills-based volunteers. With the numbers of people with valuable skills who are unemployed, looking to build their resume, or newly retired and wanting to contribute, there is an opportunity to engage volunteers who are interested in sharing their skills to make an impact. In order to maximize the opportunity that skilled volunteers can bring to your organization, there needs to be an investment of careful thought and planning. This workshop will focus on developing this group of volunteers and will include how to find these volunteers, develop a training program to build on their skills, and how to retain and evaluate if expectations are being met.

This webinar will be presented by Regi Mezydlo, Volunteer Programs Manager of the Chicago Zoological Society-Brookfield Zoo. In her role, Regi leads a team of more than 600 volunteers passionate about animals and nature who serve as strong community conservation leaders and advocates for the Society, the zoo, wildlife, and conservation. She is a founding member of the Association of Zoo & Aquarium Volunteer Administrators and is active locally with the Volunteer Coordinators of Chicago's Cultural Institutions and the DuPage Association for Volunteer Administration. Regi has published in the *Journal of Volunteer Administration* and has presented volunteer management workshops at numerous conferences. Regi was awarded her CVA (Certified Volunteer Administrator) certification in 2010. She is currently an Adjunct Instructor in The School of Continuing Education/Sociology at Triton College in River Grove, IL where she is developing and teaching an inaugural Volunteer Management Certificate Program. For registration information, as well as listings of additional training programs, go to http://www.volunteeralive.org/trainings_and_webinars.php



Certification Program for Manager of Volunteers

DCAVS encourages managers of volunteers to enhance their skills and effectiveness on the job through a variety of educational opportunities: newsletter, Lunch and Learn, committee and board service, annual conference, networking opportunities, and other ways. Experienced managers of volunteers can highlight that skill achievement by seeking the Certified in Volunteer Administration (CVA) endorsement. The Council for Certification in Volunteer Administration (CCVA) advances the profession and practice of volunteer resource management by certifying individuals who demonstrate knowledge and competence in the leadership of volunteers. CVA is an international credential awarded to practitioners with at least 3 years of experience who successfully complete an exam and written portfolio process. Originally developed by the Association for Volunteer Administration several decades ago, the credentialing program is now sponsored by CCVA.

For detailed information, go to: <http://www.cvcert.org>.

Sad, but true...was that your organization on late night television?

By Beth Steinhorn

A sign of how much volunteerism in this country has "made it" into the national spotlight is the news that a comic recently included a spoof of volunteering in his act. Yes, indeed. If you believe, as I do, that comedy is one reflection of society's views, then take a moment (1 minute 41 seconds to be exact) and check out <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VnQkChD6Kdc> from *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* to get a peek at some commonly held perceptions about volunteering.

After Mr. Kimmel's initial plea to get a volunteer to do his laundry in honor of National Volunteer Week, he shares a funny but sobering video about how to volunteer, including all the common pitfalls of trying to volunteer: multiple attempts to reach an organization to offer your services, the length of time it takes to get a response, delays from background checks, boring trainings, and so on and so forth. To further the point about the disconnect between today's volunteers and the antiquated volunteer systems they encounter in many organizations, the video was created in a scratchy black & white format, just like old home movies or newsreels from the 1950s. Did it make you chuckle... or did it sound eerily familiar? Or both? Does this video reflect, in any way, the experience of your organization's volunteers or, worse yet, your potential volunteers who never made it through the maze of calls, screenings, and trainings? If not, then congratulations! That's great news. But there is still a challenge for you and your organization given that this perception of an antiquated, irrelevant system of volunteer engagement has risen to national prominence, in fact to pop culture. That question is "How can you and your organization share your stories of success so that your best practices are widely known and we can effectively chip away at this unfortunate, but popular perception of volunteering?"

If, however, the video resonated for you or your volunteers, then take this opportunity to imagine how you'd like their experience to differ from this tongue-in-cheek video. Check out my article about the value of engaging a "Secret Shopper" to help assess your cultivation and placement process (find that article here: <http://ifixler.com/there-a-%E2%80%9Csecret-shopper%E2%80%9D-your-midst>). Imagine how you'd like to rewrite the script of that video - and of your potential volunteers' experience - to reflect your ideal storyline of interested parties contacting your organization and being screened and placed in a timely, user-friendly process that works for both the volunteers *and* your organization's needs. And then consider what you might need to invest in order to make that storyline a reality. Professional development? Coaching? An internal task force to help make the change? Sometimes, the hardest part is taking the time to consider and draft the plan; implementing it, with the right tools and support, can be much easier. And, if you run into challenges, simply take a moment to watch that Kimmel video again so that you can have a giggle, get a little inspiration, and then get back to work on improving your system. Comedy has its place in our society and this video can be a great motivator... it's better than a pie in the face!

Excerpted from: <http://www.ifixler.com/sad-true-was-your-organization-late-night-television>



President's Column



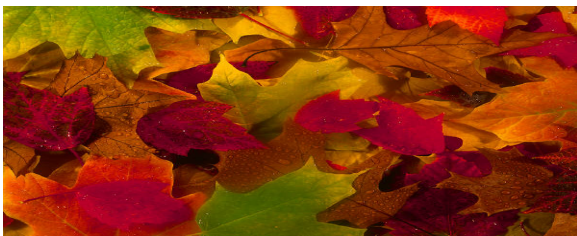
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DCAVS members are all over the map, figuratively speaking. Our member agencies are involved with health care, education, animal care (wild and domestic), housing, radio, television, gardens, criminal justice, children, recreation, faith, food and more. Binding us together is an understanding that the success of our agencies rests, in part, on the success of the agency's volunteer program. Successful volunteer programs depend on many things, including effective leadership, good communication, and a good understanding of the needs and wishes of the volunteer AND the agency.

The upcoming DCAVS/United Way Volunteer Center conference, "Leading the Way to Successful Volunteer Involvement," will help volunteer managers and other agency staff strengthen their leadership and communication skills. Come to the conference to learn how to effectively connect with and tap into the large pool of volunteers available through corporate volunteer programs. Figure out better ways to communicate within your agency or with the outside world – for volunteer trainings, staff meetings, at volunteer fairs - and more. Attend the sessions on courage and power and emerge ready to challenge bad ideas more often, cognizant of the power you have to move good ideas forward.

With the pressure DCAVS members are feeling to serve more people more quickly, using less money and fewer paid employees, now is the right time to invest in the skills which are essential to successful volunteer programs. I hope to see you all at our conference on September 18!

Registration information is available on our website, dcavs.org.



A New Way to Identify and Manage Volunteers

Many managers of volunteer resources are conducting their business the same way they have been doing for many years: we recruit, interview, place, train, and recognize our volunteers in structured, predictable ways. Even though it was written in 2006, this report, addresses an innovative approach to these topics. Over the past several years, we've seen volunteers looking for more flexibility and autonomy in their community activities. The authors, two leaders in the field, the late Mary Merrill and Nancy Macduff, provide some strategies and give examples of different ways that community members may come to their volunteering. Many volunteer managers understand that learning the motivations of potential volunteers can influence all the traditional areas of volunteer administration; this report helps to more fully understand these impacts. To quote the report: "The challenge of modern management of volunteers is versatility in working with people with vastly different motivations and agendas." This report is available free at <http://www.volunteertoday.com/PDF/multiparadigm%20POLF.pdf>



Mark your calendars for the 2012 Wisconsin Volunteer Coordinators Conference, May 3-4, Sheboygan

Highlights of the 43rd Annual WVCA Conference include:

- Business panel sharing volunteerism from the companies' view point
- Accommodations at Blue Harbor Resort & Water Park
- Lighthouse and downtown free walking tours available
- Two outstanding keynote speakers:
 - ◆ **Connie Pirtle**, Founder and Director of Strategic Nonprofit Resources, a Washington, D.C., area firm that serves nonprofit organizations in all areas as related to volunteerism. Connie has over 20 years experience working with trustees, volunteers, volunteer program managers, executive directors, and senior staff members on effective volunteer engagement. Connie also writes a monthly online volunteer management advice column, "Ask Connie," for www.VolunteerToday.com.
 - ◆ **Joe Kiedinger**, President and Brander-In-Chief of Prophet Marketing, Inc., author of *The Brander-In-Chief*, host of his own radio show, Monday Mastermind in Green Bay, and blogger at Wisdom on Wednesday.

For more information, contact Diane Jones, dianej@westmadisonseiorcoalition.org or 608.238.7368.



Wisconsin Volunteer Coordinators Association Strategic Planning Gathering in Appleton, WI on July 21, 2011. Three DCAVS members attended to help our statewide organization move forward in its mission to advocate for volunteerism through support, resources and educational development. From L to R: Christina Knudsen, Children's Museum of La Crosse; Cheryl Lewis Hartl, Chief Professional Officer at Soup or Socks in Marshfield; Diane Jones, Volunteer Coordinator at West Madison Senior Coalition & DCAVS Board Member; Penny Jane Strauss, Volunteer Coordinator for Outagamie County Dept. of Health & Human Services; Chris Nye, Program Director at Verona Senior Center, DCAVS Committee Member; Back Row: Elaine Glowacki, DCAVS Board Member, was the Strategic Planning Facilitator.

Strategic Volunteer Engagement: A Guide for Nonprofit and Public Sector Leaders

This free downloadable report from researchers at the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin provides a strategic framework for nonprofit and public sector leaders open to exploring the ramifications and implications of engaging volunteers in mission-critical work. The information in this report emerged from the findings of *Volunteer Champions Initiative*, a research project that engaged skeptics as well as 'true believers' in intensive dialogue about both their fears and their positive experiences with volunteers. The authors are seeking to build a body of knowledge and inform current and future organizational leadership about effective practices supporting volunteer engagement.

This report is available from the following website: <http://www.utexas.edu/lbj/rgk/serviceleader/downloads/Guidefordownload.pdf>



United Way
of Dane County

United Way
Volunteer Center

UNITED WAY OF DANE COUNTY

Every year on June 21 (the longest day of the year), United Way Worldwide invites all Americans to LIVE UNITED™ and volunteer in their communities for a Day of Action. This year's Day of Action marked the public launch of United Way's Education Volunteer Call To Action to recruit one million volunteer readers, tutors & mentors over the next three years.

Nearly 1 million U.S. students fail to graduate high school on time each year. That's one in four students. They need caring adults in their lives to support and guide them through the early years. Volunteer reading, tutoring or mentoring one hour each week can change the life of a young person. Tutoring has been shown to have positive effects on academic performance, especially with at-risk children experiencing reading problems. Children and youth need more than academic supports to make it through school successfully. Reading with children engages them in storytelling, opens their mind, and unlocks their imagination. It is a great way for volunteers to support literacy development. Adult mentors provide emotional support that enhances a child's self-esteem, foster self-control, and provide guidance and advice that many teens may be uncomfortable in seeking from their parents.

People want to work together to improve education in America, but aren't sure what to do. In United Way's national poll, participants said they are willing to volunteer for education and are looking for organizations that can help create clear pathways for them to act that are tied to large-scale change. We invite you and your volunteers to join in and be part of the national challenge to recruit one million volunteer tutors, readers and mentors over the next three years. Take the pledge to become a volunteer reader, tutor or mentor at www.liveunited.org.

If your agency has opportunities for volunteer tutors, readers or mentors, please make sure you have those registered and up-to-date on VolunteerYourTime.org

VOLUNTEER ADMINISTRATION RESOURCE KIT

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has a series of self-study courses for those in the disaster preparedness business. One of these courses deals with volunteer administration. Even if you do not manage volunteers during a disaster this self-study guide has information to help you organize volunteers.

Chapters include such things as:

- Needs analysis
- Writing job descriptions
- Writing a recruitment plan
- Developing interview questions
- Developing a training plan
- Supervising and evaluating volunteers
- Managing volunteer stress

There are case studies, checklists, scenarios, worksheets, links to other sites, tests, samples, and much more. The writing is bulleted and easy to read and absorb and it's free. Even if disaster is not your mission, the ideas on recruiting are generally applicable in most programs. Go to <http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/IS244A.pdf>.



The Network is published bimonthly by Dane County Administrators of Volunteer Services (DCAVS) as a benefit to its members. DCAVS promotes successful volunteer administration by facilitating the professional growth of its members through networking and training opportunities, as well as providing support through advocacy for the profession of volunteer administration in specific, and volunteerism in general. Visit us on the Web at <http://www.dcavs.org/>

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We welcome your contributions, comments and suggestions. Next deadline: October 5. Contact editor at sminkoff@wisc.edu or 608.263.7760.