

**SUCCESSFUL VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT SERIES – TOPIC 6**

## **Discipline and Dismissal**

It would be wonderful if every volunteer experience was positive and if problems never arose. But that's not reality. In fact, because volunteers are freely giving of their time and energy, addressing performance-related issues, discipline or even dismissal can take on added sensitivity or delicacy when volunteers are involved.

Performance problems are gaps between what is expected from volunteers and what is actually happening. While all performance-related problems should be immediately addressed, supervisors must also evaluate the difference between a one-time mistake and reoccurring problems. The best way to avoid major performance-related problems is to address problems while they are minor, and to create and maintain a culture where there are clear performance expectations and open lines of communication.

In the event of a problem escalating, it is essential for the supervisor to have as much accurate information as possible before confronting and asking to meet with a volunteer. Refer to the job description, orientation and training to determine if there are any gaps or problems with your organization's processes or the way volunteer expectations are defined or explained. Take the opportunity to confirm that the volunteer's reason for serving has remained in alignment with the organization's goals and mission. This may be your best opportunity to determine if a disgruntled volunteer is maligning or misrepresenting the organization. If issues requiring discipline are occurring on a regular basis, there may be a problem with your recruitment and screening processes.

Any meeting to address performance-related problems should begin by disclosing that you may have some concerns, and then proceed to outline your understanding of the events. Be sure to invite the volunteer to also outline the events from their perspective. While it may be impossible to arrive at a totally agreed-upon series of events, it is essential that the supervisor base their actions and decisions on as much accurate information as they are able to gather.

Depending upon the magnitude of the problem, information and observations from other staff or volunteers may be necessary, in which case it should be gathered in a discreet and professional manner. Similarly, if you are dealing with problems arising from sudden, unusual changes in behaviour, keep in mind that there could be health-related factors, and consult with other supervisors/managers to determine the best course of action. Issues that jeopardize health and safety must always be addressed immediately and decisively. Threatening or violent behaviour requires immediately contacting the necessary authorities.

Once you have gathered the necessary information, reviewed job descriptions and procedures, and discussed the situation with the volunteer and any other affected party, you will be in a good position to evaluate your options and choose the best course of action.

Possible outcomes could include a commitment to a change in behaviour or the redefining of expectations, reassigning the volunteer to a role or position for which they are better suited, or agreeing to part ways. As the supervisor, your responsibility is to choose and then implement the action based on the information and discussions that have taken place, and your assessment of whether the problem can be resolved or corrected, is performance or character/personality based, and the impact the volunteer's continued service may have on your organization morale and customer/client service.

### QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES:

- What are some circumstances that are likely to lead to performance issues with volunteers, and how can these be best managed or avoided?
- What are the reasons why supervisors often hesitate to deal with performance problems?
- Why is it critical to address performance issues in a timely and effective way?
- Under what circumstances do you feel it would be necessary to dismiss a volunteer, and how would you handle such a situation?

ServiceLink is proud to offer the following *Volunteer Engagement* workshops:

1. Identifying and Designing Volunteer Positions
2. Recruitment and Marketing
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4. Orientation and Training
5. Supervision and Evaluation
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