

Volunteer Performance Issues

There are constructive rules for approaching difficult volunteer performance issues and for the process for dismissing a volunteer.

Rules of Constructive Confrontation

- Don't attack personality; focus on performance.
- Be specific. Do your homework and have specific examples of the behavior to share.
- Keep conversations private.
- Make intervention timely but do not approach until you are calm and rational.
- Reiterate expected behavior using "I" not "you" language.
- Get agreement on the problem. "Do you agree?"
- .Determine a shared commitment for finding a solution to the problem.
- Agree on a mutual plan to solve the problem.
- Arrange for a follow-up meeting to determine if the issue is resolved or needs an alternate solution.
- Document the conversation.
- Leave the ball in their court and let them contact you when they are ready to volunteer again.

Procedures for Releasing a Volunteer

When all options fail, or when an infraction is extremely serious (one listed in policies as cause for immediate dismissal), it may be in the best interest of the organization and the volunteer to dismiss the volunteer.

Dismissal

1. Discuss the need to release a volunteer with your supervisor to have his/her support.
2. Send official warning letter to volunteer including specific information of what behavior needs to change and by when.
3. Provide assistance to help volunteer change the behavior - and document changes.
4. Give probation with special goals.
5. Dismissal if goals are not achieved.

Alternatives

- Re-assign to new position in your organization.
- .Train/coach or re-train.
- Provide a more motivating climate if volunteer has lost interest in the work/mission.
- Give information on where and how to find a better-suited volunteer position in another organization.
- .If age or disability prohibits carrying out the position, retire the volunteer with style.



Tips for a Dismissal System

- . In orientation, volunteers should receive agency policies which include information on dismissal, suspension, and grievance procedures.
- With only a few clear exceptions, a volunteer should not be dismissed without an investigation to make certain that policies were violated or performance was well below standard. (Can suspend while investigating.)
- . Dismissal should be handled fairly and with utmost diplomacy. Don't apologize. Allow for appeals process.
- Provide notification to staff, clients and other volunteers that the volunteer will no longer be working at the organization.

Steps for Dismissal

1. Procedures that address standards of volunteer conduct, grounds for dismissal, and written policies dealing with problem situations should be covered during orientation and training with the volunteer.
2. If alternatives have been explored and tried and none have been successful, a standard process should be initiated:

- **Forewarning/notice** - The volunteer is notified by his/her supervisor that there is some serious concern about his/her behavior. You may need to suspend the volunteer while an investigation is underway. You would very rarely fire a volunteer on the spot, unless there is obvious danger to clients and the organization if the volunteer continues the behavior.
- **Investigate** to determine whether the volunteer has, indeed, broken the rules or if there is adequate evidence that s/he should be dismissed from the position. During this phase, it is important to determine whether the organization's management/staff could be linked to this problem, in addition to the inadequacies of the volunteer's behavior. Assuming that alternative solutions to dismissal have been explored, and that there is clear evidence for dismissal, the dismissal process should commence quickly.

The Release Meeting

- .Meet in private. Be quick, direct, and absolute in announcing your decision. There should be no further discussion at this point.
- .Allow the volunteer to resign to "save face" and to help prevent the volunteer from spreading bad PR into the community.
- Notify all others in the system who need to know that the volunteer will no longer be carrying out that role.
- .Keep written records of:
 - o Deficiencies in performance.
 - o Attempts to correct the behavior (counseling, coaching, warnings; evaluation forms given to volunteer).
 - o Any signed documentation from those who can verify the behavior.
- .Follow-up with a letter to the volunteer reiterating the decision and sharing departure information.