

Bookshelf

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The Art of the Volunteer: Volunteerism in the Professional Performing Arts in Canada

L'Art du bénévoles: le bénévolat dans les arts professionnels du spectacle au Canada

By Margaret Genovese

Published by The Council for Business and the Arts in Canada, Toronto

Sponsored by the Department of Communications, Government of Canada

50 pp. (English), 50 pp. (French).

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Somewhere, on a remote island in an uncharted sea, there is probably an organized colony of actors, supported by professional management and an enthusiastic corps of volunteers, where mutual respect, generous appreciation, and total harmony reign. Unfortunately, I've never heard of it and neither has anyone else connected to the professional and performing arts in Canada.

In truth, although they insist that their aims are the same—artistic excellence and the continued health of their particular entities—professional staff and volunteers have a grasp of such different parts of the elephant that it is hardly surprising that a state of armed neutrality is often the best that can be achieved.

Thus, valuable though it is, this excellent little book cannot guarantee a state of blissful harmony to those who take its suggestions and insights to heart. But it is full of practical information and commonsense suggestions.

Stepping firmly into the morass where prudent angels fear to tread, the opening section of the book, "Volunteerism and Philanthropy" manages to combine a sincere tribute to volunteers with a frank admission of the problems, irritations and misunderstandings that often come between volunteers and professional staff.

Section 2 includes a demographic chart which should be of interest to those who seek to cultivate volunteer support in the greenest fields. (This information

should not, perhaps, be read without critical judgment. Using it as a base, lazy recruiters may be tempted to confine their search to females between the ages of 35 and 44 with household incomes between \$30,000 and \$39,000.) This section also sets out reasons why "Volunteers can be a first choice solution" for managers. In general it deals with "Setting the Stage for Volunteerism: Myths versus Opportunities".

Section 3, "Volunteer Management: A Personnel Function" is a brief but useful outline of personnel policies which have proved successful in both business and volunteer organizations and includes a brief discussion of some of the problems peculiar to the management of volunteers.

Section 4, "The Nuts and Bolts of Volunteer Management" is a "how to" manual that includes Job Definition, Recruitment, Screening and Interviewing, Placement, Orientation, Training, Motivating, Supervision, Evaluation, Communication, and—the ultimate horror for all concerned—Conflict Resolution and Dismissal. The reader turns with relief to the relatively uncomplicated Record Keeping, Computer Systems and Recognition. Risk Management is another area which haunts the nightmares of professional managers who must deal with volunteers. Finally, a brief discussion of the wisdom of hiring a professional manager of volunteers and (in my by no means disinterested view) a biased reference to the disadvantages of separate volunteer auxiliaries, the use of volunteers from other organizations, and "mixed" models.

Section 5, "Arts Fund Raising and Its Relationship to Volunteer Programs" covers ground that has been much trampled over the years but provides a useful precis of the issues.

The final "Conclusion" is the expected upbeat summary, and no worse for that. Of considerably more interest to both the volunteer and the professional is a supplementary list of organizations providing materials, training and information; a list of volunteer centres and bureaus; and a good bibliography.

Throughout this slim volume, case histories and reports from actual organizations and their managers outline successful programs in each of the areas discussed. Inevitably, these self-reportings are (at least in the cases of which I have personal knowledge) rather more glowing than is actually the case, but they do offer practical examples that are worth study.

This volume contains sufficient information to provide any professional manager with a crash course in volunteer management that should ensure, if not perfect harmony, then at least productive co-operation of professional staff and volunteers. The voyage would be even more productive, in my opinion, if a companion volume, setting out duties and responsibilities, were to be directed to volunteers.