

# **Riding the Third Wave: The Growing Need for Trained Volunteer Administrators\***

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Why do we need trained volunteer administrators?

The most fundamental reason is that our employee-driven institutions have only half-delivered their potential.

## **The High-Water Mark of the Second Wave**

As the American futurist, author Alvin Toffler has put it, we have reached the high-water mark of the Second Wave. That is, we are coming to the end of the age of undue reliance on the business-like mercenary, the hired professional, and the specialized expert. These awesomely efficient functionaries brought us the assembly line which produces a cornucopia of low-cost products—and a plague of industrial strife. They brought us the mega-university with its high-tech instructional aids—and its wretched teaching. They brought us the mass-produced hamburger—and that relentlessly cheerful and equally cardboard injunction to “have a nice day”. They brought us the modern hospital—which diagnoses our illnesses by computer but treats us like chopped liver. They brought us the modern social service agency, armed with enough masters degrees to denounce 16 kinds of inappropriate behaviour—but incapable of dishing up emotional chicken soup. In short, they brought us efficiency but not effectiveness, impact but not humanity.

And why? Because they got it half right. They harnessed expert analyses, but did not combine them with citizen involvement. They mobilized specialized expertise but they did not marry it to outside stakeholders’ concerns. They enlisted those impressively professional mercenaries called “employees”, but they ignored those superbly gifted amateurs called “volunteers”.

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\*This article was developed from a speech by Dr. Moyer.

## **The Mismanagement of the Volunteer**

Some will say that it is not so, that the third sector is enlivened, led, and inspired, by the volunteer. They can point to the fact that Statistics Canada has counted an army of 2.7 million Canadians who work as volunteers. Surely, then, we have not only hired the fastest guns, we have also deputized the townsfolk?

Not really. Throughout the not-for-profit sector we squander the opportunities presented by volunteers. We do it through inept appeals that fail to inspire the uninvolved citizen to share our cause. We do it by assigning capable recruits to unsuitable jobs. We do it by limiting gifted helpers to trivial tasks which are safely distant from the professional workers' sacred turf. We do it by starving concerned individuals of feedback as to how their efforts *did* improve the lives of those they sought to help. We do it by being too busy doing good to say "thanks".

And the StatsCan study reflects it. Over a third of those who do volunteer tell us that their work amounts to only one or two hours a week. About one half of them report that, by StatsCan's standards, they were inactive, which is to say that, in a given week, they did no volunteer work at all.

And why? The study makes it plain: "The majority of volunteers did not work . . . not because . . . the project was not in operation during that week . . . [but] because there was..no demand for their services".<sup>1</sup>

In effect, then, an army of concerned Canadians is saying that, while it aims to serve, it often stands and waits.

Of course, there are some magnificent exceptions. Some organizations have admirable programs of volunteer administration. Mostly, though, we do not manage, we simply muddle through. Often, even when citizens have been deputized, they have not been mobilized, armed, activated, and inspired.

That cannot continue. The world is turning, and soon it will turn on us. Those who muddle in the market for volunteers will be left behind. Why?

First, because withdrawal of government funding, the tightening of corporate donations, and the pinch on private charity have pitchforked fund raisers into a desperate competition for the donor's dollar. From that free-for-all will emerge some winners and some losers. The winners, one might guess, will be those organizations which have sexy causes, high profiles, influential friends, aggressive styles, and a businesslike approach to fund raising. But the winners will also include those who realize that, as fund raising begins to resemble eye-gouging, the most

productive source of increased resources may not be money raising but recruiting volunteers. As the professional fund raiser becomes more beleaguered, the volunteer administrator becomes more indispensable.

### **The New Volunteer**

The times are changing in other ways that point to the same conclusion. The increasing number of women who work outside the home shrinks a traditional pool of volunteers and requires that we look to others. These will include the young, whose sixties brothers and sisters stepped forward to teach school in the slums or raise chickens in Kenya, and the retired, who are not willing to park a lifetime's wisdom—and themselves—on the shelf.

However, a complicating factor: the women's movement and the human potential movement have affected potential volunteers so that they now ask quite frankly, "What's in it for me?"

Some regard this new "transactional" attitude with regret, chagrin, even indignation. We should not. We should remember that altruism is seldom unconditional. We should admit that most of us are not saints. If our service is to be sustained, some of our own needs must also be fulfilled. We should recall that when we offer ourselves in service to others we do so because of personal hopes and expectations, not because we are narrowly grasping, but because we are gloriously human. The volunteer's new insistence on a quid pro quo does not represent an egocentric new selfishness but a refreshing new candour.

### **Marketing Marketing to Voluntary Organizations**

The emergence of the transactional volunteer means that, to "make the sale", we will need to negotiate a mutually satisfactory exchange. And that will require a new approach—a "marketing" approach.

Fundamentally, marketing *is* the facilitation of exchange. Every human organization exists through mutually advantageous exchanges between itself and key actors or "customers" in its environment. On the success of these exchanges it thrives or dies. This holds true for political parties, governments, unions, arts organizations, churches, co-operatives, fraternities, trade associations, universities, corporations, and social-service organizations. In the third sector our customers include patrons, believers, members, donors, voters, recruiters, adherents, patients, clients and—by no means least—volunteers.

Accordingly, the volunteer-recruiter must recognize that the world of volunteering is like any marketplace, that unfilled volunteer assignments are like unsold products, that alternatives to volunteering are like competitors, that volunteers are like customers, and that volunteer administrators are like marketers.

Thus, the question is not whether your voluntary organization will engage in marketing or not, but whether it will do so implicitly or explicitly, professionally or clumsily, witlessly or well.

Yet in most non-profits, the huge potential of skilled marketing is little understood. Some see marketing as an organizational aphrodisiac which, taken just before key meetings, can restore pep and passion to a jaded agency. Some see it as a policymaker's placebo, a nutrition-free treacle which will cure no agency ills but create a state of euphoria while the agency waits for fate to finger it. Some see it as an elixir which, taken with a chaser of faith, will cure people of everything but wilful ignorance. Some see it as snake oil known to be ineffectual and, it is hoped, not addictive. Some see it as a managerial laxative which, while unpleasant to take, will shake up the system and move things ahead. Yet, like it or not, recognize it or not, most of the activities of non-profit organizations, including the recruiting of volunteers, involve marketing. Marketing is as essential for the director of a lifeskills program for welfare mothers, the artistic director of a repertory theatre, the trainer for a rape crisis centre, and the program planner for a children's museum, as it is for the fund raiser.

Marketing is particularly essential if volunteers are to be recruited, and the trained volunteer administrator will be able to give leadership in another important area: marketing marketing to the entire organization.

### **Coming to Terms With Unionization**

The emerging body of trained volunteer administrators will also be called upon to offer guidance as non-profits confront another threat and opportunity: unionism.

A monumental change under way in the not-for-profit sector is the unionization of its employees—not only clerical staff, but also professionals. There are several plausible reasons: a decline in dedication, a weakening of the sense of service, the twin pincers of inflation and recession, ham-handed management, the need of organized labour to regain its momentum. You can add your own. But let no one doubt that one factor has been the fear that, unprotected, the paid employee will be displaced by the volunteer.

Yet just as remarkable as the advance of unionism has been the silence about its implications. In a field where phenomena like incest, masturbation and sodomy are discussed as freely as the job requires, the subject of unionization remains taboo. And when a executive director, president or United Way official does acknowledge that there may be some issues related to unionism it is usually to nail down the lid on discussion more firmly by solemnly certifying that no paid jobs will be lost to volunteers.

This is not responsible leadership, it is mealy-mouthed obfuscation. Responsible leadership will acknowledge that the ineluctable fact is that the resolution of the conflict between unionism and volunteerism must be something better than today's evasive, uneasy truce. It must be a creative, constructive accommodation of the legitimate interests of the union members *and* the volunteers—with both subordinated to the overriding needs of those the organization exists to serve.

If top management cannot find its voice or its vision to resolve this issue, then some of the initiative must be taken, by default, by the volunteer administrator. This added responsibility will, of necessity, stretch the qualities required for competence in volunteer administration to include courage, empathy, patience, and resolve.

### **Winning Volunteers From the Workplace**

Another exciting opportunity for the volunteer co-ordinator is to mine that mother lode of volunteers, the corporation.

Until now, charitable organizations have seen the corporation as a wellspring of only one thing: money. Consequently the donations committee of every major company is simply overwhelmed. One company donations officer puts it this way: "Each day my office is inundated with about two dozen different requests for money from charities . . . There are not enough hours in my week to schedule a flip chart and slide show for every charity eager to set up its easel in my office . . . We want to see the killer diseases conquered, scholars educated, and the arts flourishing . . . [But] I once figured out that if we granted every single request for money put to us in a single year, our total revenues (not *profits* but *revenues*) would be insufficient for the demand".<sup>2</sup> In short, we have so besieged corporate donations officers that they have developed a garrison stance.

The answer to this cutthroat competition is for charities to tap the corporation for its other resource, the one that is equally valuable and more available—its people. In the United States, one of the most auspicious new developments is corporate volunteering. Company-

based volunteer programs may include individuals or groups, they may extend to an after-hours assignment or a lengthy leave of absence, and they may involve everyone from the clerk to the senior executive. What these schemes have in common is that through them the corporation donates not its limited charitable donations but its abundant talent.

A map leading to this treasure already exists. It is called *Volunteers From The Workplace*. That is a book published by the catalyst for corporate volunteering, the National Center for Citizen Involvement or VOLUNTEER, based in Washington, D.C.<sup>3</sup>

We do not need to search very hard to know where to dig. Logically, we can begin with the Canadian subsidiaries of American parents which have led in corporate volunteering.

However, finding gold—or its equivalent—will not be automatic. To win the individual unaffiliated volunteer, amiable amateurism may suffice, but to forge pioneering partnerships with leading companies, thoroughgoing professionalism will be essential. That will call for more than an individual with facile social skills; it will demand an agency representative who is highly trained in volunteer administration.

### **Volunteerism And a Healthier Society**

If that argument for the employment of trained volunteer administrators is not sufficiently persuasive, it should be stressed that by fostering citizen involvement, the volunteer co-ordinator makes a real contribution towards the development of a healthier society.

It was Thoreau who said that “The majority of men lead lives of quiet desperation”. That was over a century ago, when the majority of men and women worked on self-sufficient farms and moved to the rhythms of nature. Since then we have ridden Toffler’s Second Wave to workplaces that are separate from our homes, that are segmented into many compartments, that are driven by the drumbeat of the machine, that are owned by others, and that seem to treat employees as interchangeable parts. Perhaps today Thoreau would say that the majority of men and women live lives of quiet depersonalization.

Certainly contemporary critics say so. Respected social scientists like Erich Fromm have argued that if there is one pervasive malady that afflicts modern men and women, it is that they are alienated from their fellows. “The experience of separateness . . . is . . . the source of all anxiety. Being separate means being cut off, without any capacity to use my

human powers. Hence to be separate means to be helpless, unable to grasp the world".<sup>4</sup>

For this debilitating disease there is one sure remedy. It is volunteerism. By volunteering, people put aside their time cards, shed their uniforms, stop the meter, and reach out to others. The pay is terrible—but the rewards are terrific. For, in volunteering, people overcome alienation, recapture their feeling of community, expand their perception of neighbourhood, and enjoy a healthier sense of self worth. In short, in a depersonalized society, the volunteer is helped to become his or her own person.

And there are benefits for society as a whole. Sociologists tell us that volunteering provides people with an opportunity to direct their organized energies to social innovation and reform, to master more rewarding responsibilities than may be available in their regular work, to learn how unfamiliar institutions work, and thereby to experience, test, and share those core values which bond a society into a healthy whole. The effect is to reduce social alienation.

## Conclusion

The challenges awaiting volunteer administrators are awesome and inviting. Surely, then, no forward-looking non-profit enterprise should be operating without a person who is educated in volunteerism, trained to promote it, and dedicated to exploiting its full potential. No executive director can afford *not* to afford a skilled paid manager of unpaid employees.

If we are to grasp fully the opportunities outlined here, we need a new kind of person—one who has a regard for administration combined with a respect for the volunteer; one who has a professional's capabilities for managing volunteers married to an amateur's enthusiasm for doing so; one who brings an analyst's detachment to designing volunteer programs but a suitor's ardour to wooing volunteers for them. In short, we need a Third Wave person—the wave of the future.

## FOOTNOTES

1. Statistics Canada, *An Overview of Volunteer Workers in Canada*, February, 1980, catalogue 71-530 Occasional.
2. "I Hate Charities", *Duns Review*, September, 1973.
3. Kevin Allen, *Volunteers From The Workplace*.
4. Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, Bantam Books, Harper & Row Publishers, 1967, p.7.