



How to Lose a Volunteer in 7 Days

From the September 2007 Newsletter of Our Community Matters
<http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/index.jsp>

What group couldn't do with a bit more help? What group doesn't need more volunteers?

Well, let's be fair – the problem isn't so much getting volunteers as getting them to come back. If we could hang on to all the well-meaning people who front up for one of your big events, there'd be enough hands-on help to go around every day they're needed. So why aren't we all smiling? Because sometimes we get it wrong. Like this.

Day 0

Stop them from applying

Put up barriers – physical barriers like steps, educational barriers like long written paperwork, psychological barriers like having all your material featuring young white healthy rich people, or personal barriers like being rude and offhand. It's all bad!

Day 1

Make signing up difficult

Complex forms help sort out the visually impaired, people with literacy issues, people whose main language isn't English, and people who don't like being mucked around. If possible, ask for three copies.

Day 2

Throw them in at the very deep end

There's nothing that puts a person off like turning up early only to discover that nobody knows why they're supposed to be there, what they're to do, or who to ask for help. Sink or swim! It's a way of sorting out the weaklings! Or anybody else, come to that.

Day 3

Avoid policies

Even better, have nobody at all know what the volunteers are supposed to be doing and how they're to do it. Don't have policies written down – it'll only hold you back. Or manuals. Or orientation papers. Ad hoc rocks!

Day 4

Minimise support

Don't have a volunteer coordinator, or anybody whose job it is to keep things going smoothly.

Day 5

Ignore feedback

If you wanted to know their opinions, you'd have put them on the board! The only time you should ask them a question is when you want to know why they mucked up.

Day 6

Ignore problems

There's nothing like letting a dispute fester till it bursts. Stride past looking busy – that always works

Day 7

Good riddance

When they leave, don't ask for reasons. Instead, blame it all on them, and change nothing. For extra points, badmouth them with other people.

Alternatively, if you actually want to build and grow your organisation, you can turn your thinking around and set proper procedures in place that both show new volunteers they are valued and give everybody a framework to get the most value out of their involvement.

- Draw up a volunteer orientation manual, containing everything they need to know and details of all important contacts.
- Assign them a mentor to ease them in to the tasks they've been given.
- Debrief them afterwards, listening to their suggestions.
- Chase up the Our Community online help sheets on managing volunteers here.

You need volunteers more than they need you. Grapple them to your heart with hoops of steel.

and small business and community organisations