

“Volunteering to lead”

When you step up to the plate and volunteer to lead any part of any group, there are some things you will give up if you plan on being an effective leader. One of those is just speaking whatever comes to your mind, without thinking a bit before you speak. As a leader, when you speak people will listen to you and expect you have thought before you started speaking. If you regularly say things before thinking first about the impact it will have on your group, then it is likely you will soon notice your volunteers don't seem to listen very well. I don't care too much for all the so called political correctness; people seem to cling to as an absolute must these days. However, every leader should understand, if you desire to be a good leader, then like it or not, some level of political correctness and diplomacy will be required if you are to be successful.

1. • Keeping the Volunteer

Your volunteers will more likely continue to remain volunteers of your group if you make a dedicated effort to ensure that:

a) Your training process is tailored specifically to the needs of your group and the individuals who comprise it. Obviously your volunteers have skills which they are bringing to the group, but increasing those skills and educating your volunteers in new skills will probably keep them more interested in your group. Most people like to improve their skills, and the one who don't are not likely to most your most treasured members anyway. What basketball coach would ever promote a player to first string who cannot make time to come to practice and training?

b) You provide timely information to your group. Keep them informed of the organizations activities as a group. In other words, don't tell one or two members and expect the rest to find out “on their own.”

c) You should be someone your members can turn to for assistance on EMCOMM matters. If you can't provide the personal time a member needs, at least lead him in the right direction and do your best to get someone in the group to mentor them.

d) You should realize that, although some members may feel secure being given one responsibility and keeping that responsibility during their tenure with your group, other members may enjoy being given several different assignments. Those members who request different challenges may be your best candidates to use as your assistants.

e) You may wish to implement your own system of showing appreciation, recognition and rewarding of members for their services. Awarding certificates or recognizing them verbally at the next special occasion such as dinners or picnics your group might have, are excellent ways to reward your members for a job well done.

2. • Suggested Approaches

First, most volunteers don't respond well to orders. They will honor requests, particularly if you have time to include information on the need for that request. An example would be: "Bill, we need a replacement operator at the High School shelter B. Joe has to take his son to the doctor. Can you do it?"

Second, if you desire their loyalty, you must be prepared to give them yours. The responsibility for a group's success or failure rests with its leaders and their ability to lead. Your loyalty must remain steadfast if you expect those you lead to do the same. You can't put them last on your list, and then expect to be first on theirs.

Third, never criticize a member in public, unless you absolutely must. People will respond much better to criticism in private. Remember that their pride and dignity are at stake and some folks carry their feelings around on their shoulder which is mostly a problem on their part, yet it isn't going to help you or your group to knock them off. If you must criticize a member in public, or for that matter in private, make it brief, make it as positive if possible, and don't criticize the member personally, always direct your criticism toward the action that is the problem.

Fourth, recognize that factions and cliques will develop within your group as they do with any kind of group. You must do your very best, to not become identified with any subgroup within your unit. Your impartiality will be questioned at times when it seems to members that you "always give "Mr. important" the best jobs."

Fifth, when a member of your group complains about another member's lack of knowledge or operating skills, keep in mind that some people simply learn quicker than others. In an emergency, you'll still want the member who is learning. If your group is alive and growing, you should always have members who are learning. One effective method, which is often used to handle a problem such as this, is by asking the member who is upset to develop a training program in the area, he feels the person needs training. That way the whole group benefits and a negative situation is turned to a positive one. Stress to him that his efforts will increase the

effectiveness of the entire unit. Such an approach may seem to be a little to politically correct way of handle it, but the truth is leaders should practice what works, and use methods that has the group's best interest in mind.

Sixth, never discuss a member's weaknesses, faults or limitations on the air or in public. If someone complains to you publicly about another member, handle the situation as diplomatically as possible. If the conflict can be resolved by having the two members talk to each other, follow that route. If not, offer to discuss the problem privately. Your responsibility, as a leader in this situation, is to help solve the problem and not to take sides.

Lastly, when you find that a member is causing more harm than good to your unit, it is important that you are diplomatic in your actions while keeping, as previously mentioned, the effectiveness of your group as your primary consideration. If, for the good of the group you must remove someone from the position or appointment, then make sure they know it is not personal, and that your decision doesn't mean they are anything less than a great person and a great volunteer. Then be specific, as to why you feel for the good of the group, you must remove them, and allow them to use their time more effectively some other way. It is in fact a favor to them and to your group. Remember to always keep our comments professional. Don't say things that if made public would embarrass you or your group.

Summary

Working with your volunteers is the most critical aspect of your job as a leader and will call for the most time and effort on your part. To work effectively with volunteers, you must first understand them and use that understanding to motivate them to do the job. When you're leading your volunteers, you should not try to be "all things to all people." You must be a diplomat, a leader, a friend, and an excellent listener. You won't be able to please all of the members in your group all of the time. However, you should attempt to please them whenever possible for the good of the unit. Strive to "lead" you group, not simply "manage" it.