5 Critical Aspects of Nonprofit Staff and Volunteer Development

Nonprofit organizations are carried by two main things: their mission and their people.   The mission creates the purpose of the organization and the people uphold and implement the areas which fulfill the mission (such as strong leadership, financial stability, sound technology, etc.). Therefore, the people of a nonprofit organization are vital.   A nonprofit organization relies not only on its paid staff, but on the volunteers that help programs, events and day-to-day activities function. Here are 5 critical areas to focus on when developing your staff and volunteers.

1. **Make sure they can "represent"!**

   If a potential funder calls your organization and gets a secretary, assistant or hand-on case manager on the phone, what would that staff member say about the organization? What if the funder speaks with a volunteer? <u>Would your people know about all the levels of your organization as well as all the programs that are a part of your organization?</u> As organizations grow, this becomes harder and harder as sometimes programs get disjointed (the right hand does not know what the left hand is doing). <u>Your people should know enough about the organization to be able to "market" your organization to anyone and everyone they run into AND they should know what the organization needs in terms of revenue development and volunteer outreach.</u> Let your people help you to do your recruiting for you!

2. **See them regularly.**

   This could mean a morning hello to your regular staff or emails to volunteers that are not on-sight very often. Never underestimate the power of <u>contact</u>. We often thrive on simple contacts such as "hello", a smile or a quick "how are you?". <u>Find out what type of contact your people would like and then provide that to them on a regular basis.</u>

3. **Let them have a voice.**

   <u>It is critical that people have the opportunities to give ideas and feedback on the organization, specific programs and projects as well as having an official avenue for complaints.</u>   These outlets must be genuine. The organization or management must hear the comments and consider them. Even if people's feedback is not used, the person should be told why or given some sort of response. This type of communication stream is a HUGE motivator and morale booster!

4. **Make sure that they "have an ear".**

   Just as important as it is for your people to have a voice to give feedback, it is critical that you as the Board, managers and leaders have a voice. <u>Tell your staff and volunteers</u>

as much as you can about the organization, your direction with strategy, fundraising, growth, etc. Let them know the financial status of the organization. The more they know, the more "buy-in" they will have. They will then be better "representatives" for your organization.

5. **Trust your people!**

Give your people their job description, tell them what you expect from them, get regular updates from them and then let them do the rest. Let your staff and volunteers do what you have hired them to do. They become the expert in their role. Therefore, you should let *them* tell *you* what works for that role and what does not work in that role. As Steve Jobs said, "You have to be run by ideas, not by hierarchy".

He states that Apple is run as a Start Up, it is the "biggest start-up on the planet."   He explains that Apple had no committees. They have 1 person in charge of each division who works with their staff, entrusting that their staff have the knowledge.

Working to develop your staff and volunteers will develop your organization.   Help your people fulfill your mission!