INTERNAL MARKETING:

KEY TO SUCCESSFUL VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS

Use these seven steps to build long-term relations with volunteers.

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With a laser-sharp mission and internal marketing plan, Wheelchairs for the World has mobilized volunteers to distribute hundreds of wheelchairs throughout the world.

Today's volunteers can choose from a wide variety of options. If you want them to donate time to your organization, you must do more than recruit them. You need to assure their long-term loyalty.

It costs at least five times more to develop a new volunteer than to cultivate greater exchanges with existing volunteers. Thus, it is imperative to create an internal marketing plan focused on increasing volunteers' commitment. That plan should emphasize employee motivation by concentrating on your organizational culture.

Link Internal Marketing With Your Organizational Culture

Your culture is the set of key values, guiding beliefs, and understandings shared by people in your organization. The culture tells new employees the "proper" ways to think and act.

Culture is revealed in people's attitudes, feelings, and the overall chemistry which emanates from the work environment. An understanding of your organization's culture is critical to designing internal marketing strategies.

Manage Your Culture With These Seven Steps

You can use your organizational culture as a tool to stimulate individual performance and create long-term relationships with your volunteers by following these seven key steps:

1. Analyze your existing organizational culture. Evaluate its compatibility with your organization's objectives. Address any discrepancies between the two.

2. Decide what benefits volunteers want. Then design volunteer roles to provide those benefits. For example, volunteers seek such benefits as:

- self-expression
- the opportunity to develop specific skills
- personal challenge
- recognition of achievements
- the chance to do meaningful work and make an impact.

To create a good fit, be sure to give prospective volunteers a true picture of your organization's culture and the benefits you offer.

3. Recruit people whose values match those of your organization. Likewise, maintain a culture consistent with the values of the volunteers you'd like to recruit.

4. Design internal marketing to cultivate the desired organizational culture. Focus on the ***4 Ps*** that make up the marketing mix: ***product*** (the volunteer experience); ***price*** (the monetary and non-monetary costs of marketing; ***place*** (ease of donation in terms of time and effort); and ***promotion*** (communications between the volunteer and organization). Use relationship marketing to target people on an individual basis.

5. Plan a socialization process for new volunteers to support the culture. Focus on ***informal socialization,*** which takes place when volunteers draw conclusions about your organization by observing the surroundings, and ***formal socialization,*** which involves structured training programs. Many volunteers are drawn to an organization because of the opportunity for training. Be sure this training explains that everyone, including volunteers, must help market the organization.

6. Structure ceremonial activities to reinforce the desired organizational culture. Plan activities to recognize volunteer efforts and celebrate achievements. If you fail to do so, you risk losing your volunteers' continued commitment.

7. Maintain a feedback mechanism to foster continuous quality improvement of the volunteer experience. Solicit the advice of volunteer and paid staff. Schedule regular meetings to permit the open exchange of ideas. Use exit interviews to discover why volunteers are leaving. Then, embrace an axiom of the sales profession: Follow up; follow up; follow up. Use what you learn to sculpt a more volunteer-friendly culture. ■

Selected References

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*Starred resources are available from the Society's Resource Center, www.snpo.org.

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Rally Round the Mission

The first step to energizing your volunteers is to have a mission they can understand and believe in. A good example is Wheelchairs for the World (3700 Blackhawk Plaza Circle, Danville, California 94506, 877-378-3839, wheelchairsfortheworld.org), which leads an international effort to deliver a wheelchair to every man, woman, and child who needs one.

Wheelchairs for the World attracts volunteers and partners because of its focus on one specific, basic need—mobility for the more than 20 million people in the world who need a wheelchair but can't afford one. This mission underlies everything it does and gives supporters a clear sense that they are making an important impact. Nothing is more motivating than people's belief that what they do matters.