



Voluntary Sector Training

Dealing with Difficult Situations with Volunteers

Rebecca Tully

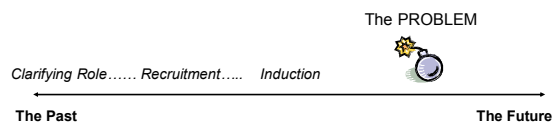
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Today...

- Avoid the problem
- Catch the problem
 - Regular checks, supervision and support, named supervisor
- Deal with the problem

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Avoiding Difficult Situations...



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Why, specifically, do volunteer managers need to have strong assertiveness skills?

- They need to champion volunteer issues:
 - To workers
 - To volunteers
 - To senior management and management committee
- They are often learning 'on the hop'
- They have lots of evidence to share (both anecdotal and statistical)
- They need to use many personal skills to motivate and nurture – this is the reason volunteer stay, not a contract.
- Problems will always exist, but as skills bases increase, they become easier to deal with

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First: Accept how important your own actions and behaviour are

“Gill never speaks her mind at staff meetings”

Gill is perceived as a person who doesn't care about the direction of the organisation, and having a part in it.

The real story is that Gill is shy of large groups but worries terribly about how to do right by the organisation and the decisions she makes within it.

People will judge you by what you do, even if it's totally different to how you are actually feeling.

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Second: Be aware of your behaviour

- Ask for feedback;
 - examples of specific behaviour if someone is being very vague
- Have a contrasting action
 - **NO:** I've *got to stop* getting scared in staff meetings!
 - **YES:** Next time I will say x, or y, or z.
 - Prepare the sentence. Prepare when you will say it. Tell a colleague what you are going to do.

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Techniques

- Broken record
 - Work out what it is that you really want to say to the other person. Make sure you keep saying it, calmly and slowly, until it is received.
- Body Language
 - Smiling, friendly, relaxed.
- Take criticism
 - Be aware of who is giving it to you, get other opinions if you're not sure
- Sandwich the criticism you give to others with positivity
 - Be honest about the positive, be clear and specific about the negative
- Disagree, but carefully:
 - There is a process, and it begins with a yes!
- Use 'I' statements.
 - Very direct and come from your point of view.
- Say No if you mean it, say Thank you if you mean it
- Say When, not If!

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"I want you to work late tonight to finish preparations for the Volunteer induction"

Start with an affirmative statement. Agree with something they are saying or feeling.

"Yes, I can understand that..."

Softening statement: show recognition, empathy or understanding

We have been short staffed all week and I know it has been difficult...

Indicate process

But I have to tell you something...

State reasons for your position

I have not seen my children much this week and tonight I promised to take them to the park...

Disagree – finally! Use strong language – don't be tentative. And start with "so..." it makes the whole thing seem logical

So I cannot work overtime tonight...

Compromise – optional, but useful if it will help you get what you want.

Would it be helpful if I stayed tomorrow?"

How to Say 'No'
Max Eggert, *The Assertiveness Pocketbook*

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Saying No

A volunteer has been in your organisation for three months, but has volunteered intermittently and hasn't always been reliable. He is starting to look for work, and has come to ask you for a reference. You don't think he has been present enough to warrant one and are going to say no.

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Broken Record

You have been volunteer co-ordinator for 6 months and have started to put in place a new supervision schedule. A long term volunteer is resistant to this and insists that it never has been, and never will be necessary.

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What's happening?

- What is the person doing that presents a challenge?
- How do you feel about it?
- Who else is around?
- How are you responding to the behaviour?

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During the Problem:

- Give people an opportunity to explain or change behaviour – don't ignore
- Find out about them first – listen. Work out why they might be doing what they're doing
- Explain the impact of what they're doing and ask them to stop
 - Clear, but sensitive, statement of how you feel
 - "I don't like it when..."
- Focus on solving the problem/why they're here

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