

4-H Volunteer Leaders' Series

Leadership of Volunteers Affects Success of Extension Programs

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“Without the cooperation and energy of tens of thousands of volunteers, it’s inconceivable that Extension could succeed in rallying the resources it has to help solve individual and community problems.”

(Vines and Anderson, 1976)

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Importance of Volunteers

Volunteers are essential to the success of Extension programs. The Cooperative Extension Service utilizes volunteers extensively by delegating them responsibility over programs, projects and activities. Extension has extended its educational outreach through the use of volunteers to reach more diversified clientele, to provide more attention to clients that need assistance and to assure program visibility.

Volunteers contribute to the educational experiences of both adults and youth involved in Extension programs by donating their time and personal resources. Advantages of utilizing volunteers as a program delivery method are: (1) the addition of multiple expertise in a subject area, (2) enables Extension agents to have time for in-depth programming and (3) ability to devote resources to issue-based programs.

Types of Extension Volunteers

Some Extension volunteers have specific titles. These include Extension Homemaker, Master Gardener, 4-H, Strong Women leaders, etc. Others have a more indirect volunteer role and serve on Extension committees, boards and councils, or represent Extension within community organizations.

Along with different titles, Extension volunteers also have different roles. Volunteers may serve in a *service role*, such as answering phone calls or preparing educational materials; a *community outreach role* where the volunteer becomes involved in community issues or represents Extension programs to other organizations; or a *teaching role* in which the volunteer works with participants or learners in delivering a lesson or demonstrating a skill.



County Agents as Volunteer Administrators

Because volunteers are used extensively to present programs for Extension, this makes every Extension agent a volunteer administrator. While volunteers are effective and efficient, they cannot accomplish their jobs alone; they need direction from a leader who can focus their efforts toward specific problems.

The leadership style of an Extension agent influences the job satisfaction of volunteers; therefore, it is critical for agents to understand their own type of leadership style and how to most effectively use it. The success of an organization cannot be achieved without agents who can empower others to a shared vision.

Transformational Leadership of Volunteers

Leadership has emerged as an identified key competency for volunteer administrators. Transformational leaders are more likely than transactional and laissez-faire leaders to have high job satisfaction with their volunteers.

Transformational leaders work toward cooperation with volunteers and provide support, consideration, stimulation and motivation for followers. Transformational leaders broaden the interests of their volunteers, generate awareness of the organizational mission and stir the volunteers to look beyond self-interest for the good of the organization.

Transformational leadership is concerned with values, standards and goals, as well as the motivation and needs of the followers. This leadership style transforms people and enables followers to accomplish more than what is expected of them. There are four leadership factors associated with transformational leadership: individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation and idealized influence.

Volunteer Motivation

Learning about volunteers' motivation, activities, time and values can help increase efficiency and effectiveness. Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory classified motivation factors into two categories: (a) factors that produce job satisfaction (motivators) and (b) factors that lead to dissatisfaction (hygiene). The five main motivator factors are achievement, recognition, the work itself, increased responsibility, and growth and development. Administration, supervision and relationship with supervisor are examples of hygiene factors.

When considering the connection between transformational leadership and volunteer motivators, motivators such as achievement and recognition are addressed by the individualized consideration aspect of transformational leadership. The work itself, along with increased responsibility, is connected to intellectual stimulation. Idealized influence and inspirational motivation can have persuasion over the growth and the development of the volunteer.

Summary

Understanding how leadership can be applied to volunteer programs can increase the quality of the program, as well as the quality for the volunteer. Transformational leadership should be encouraged because it can make a substantial difference in an organization's performance at all levels. Extension agents who feel proficient in organizational leadership are more likely to be transformational. Also, with transformational leadership, more importance is placed on being committed to the profession and participating in professional development activities as opposed to organizational culture, norms and values. If a leader is engaged in professional development, they are engaged in creating a better experience for volunteers.

It is important for Extension agents to understand which leadership style increases the satisfaction of volunteers in order to retain volunteers already involved with Extension and to attract new volunteers.

Remember, volunteers can be utilized to enhance Extension programs and provide many services with the proper guidance and leadership from Extension county and state faculty. With proper leadership, volunteers can:

- Teach groups and educate clientele.
- Organize educational events and projects.
- Assist with demonstrations and research.
- Provide meeting places and prepare materials.
- Prepare media programs.
- Share information with other community organizations.
- Serve as officers and on committees.
- Promote and support all Extension programs.

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