Effective Use of Volunteers

Why talk about Volunteers?
- Important element of rider team
- Precious resource
- Facilitate rider growth and development
- Attract and retain more volunteers
  - We need to fulfill their needs or risk losing them
  - 400+ volunteers helped in 2010 at Saddle Up!
  - 13,502 hours logged
  - Competition from other organizations
- Crucial to further growth of any agency
- Volunteers are clients too!

Why do people volunteer?
- People volunteer because they get something in return...
  - Satisfaction, recognition, smiles
  - Opportunity to make a difference
  - Use a skill or talent
  - Professional and/or personal networking
  - Express a religious faith
  - Avenue to a more balanced life
  - Personal growth and self-esteem

Barriers to Effective Communication
- Busy, overwhelmed, distracted!
- Pulled in different directions – you AND them
  - Time to communicate with the volunteers?
  - How much information do you provide?
- Last minute changes
  - Horses, riders, volunteers, tack, equipment...
- Easier to do it yourself than to manage them!
Effective Communication is...

3 Fundamental Attitudes
- Empathy
- Genuineness
- Unconditional Positive Regard

+ 4 Key Principles
- Maintain/Enhance Self-Esteem
- Listen and Respond with Empathy
- Ask for Help and Encourage Involvement
- Share Thoughts, Feelings and Rationale

Maintain/Enhance Self Esteem
- Not damaging others’ confidence
  - Focus on the facts
- Acknowledge others’ effective performance
  - Initiate interaction
  - Be specific

Listen and Respond with Empathy
- Builds trust and encourages involvement
- Describes feelings AND content
- Does not necessarily mean agreement
- Empathy (understanding another’s feelings) IS NOT Sympathy (feeling same as another, sorrow for another; agreement)
Empathetic Statements = “I” Statements

- Four parts
  - “I feel______(owning one’s own feelings)
  - “When you____(address behavior)
  - “Because____(express reason/effect)
  - “I would appreciate it if____(offer possible solution)

Example:

“I feel frustrated when you pet Nacho’s face, because I have informed you that it is against our rules, I would appreciate it if you would pet his neck instead.”

Describe Feelings AND Content

- Restate the effect and feeling expressed before offering solution.
  - Acknowledges that you heard the individual
  - Gives the person a chance to correct what was said in case what you heard isn’t what he/she meant

Example

Volunteer: “I just don’t think that the child I’ve been working with likes me. I’ve been coming here for two months and she barely talks to me! I’m sure that it’s my fault though, I know I’m not very good at this.”
Example continued

A. Instructor: “I know that must be very hard, I imagine that you feel frustrated and maybe even a little hurt right now.”

B. Instructor: “Have you tried asking the child specific questions about her interests?”

B is incorrect… Even though it may have been a helpful solution, it is wrong because it fails to meet the volunteer’s basic need for an emotional connection and sense of being heard.

Open Ended Questions

- Require more than a yes or no answer.
- Can be used in conflict situations, eliciting help from others, and corrective situations

Example

- Meets the volunteer’s need for serving
- Empowerment
- Taps the unique resources of others
- Helps YOU!

- "So Jim what could happen if you walk behind Nacho to get around him?" or “Jim, do you think it’s safer to walk behind or in front of Nacho?” Instead of just telling him not to walk behind him.
- If you are in a situation where the volunteer is simply not coming up with the right answer, keep asking questions until they do, or explain it to them thoroughly.
- Always end by asking for/encouraging more input in the future.
Share Thoughts, Feelings and Rationale

- Communicate openly with volunteers
  - Issues or situations about which you feel strongly
  - Problems that concern you
  - Lesson(s) expectations, objectives, and/or goals
  - Personal visions
  - Information that may not be common knowledge

Putting it all Together

Role Play... Practice your observation skills!

Summary

- Four Key Principles built on three fundamental attitudes = Communication Toolbox
- Effective communication does not require more time.
- Effective Communication saves you time and improves your effectiveness and your team’s effectiveness

How to more effectively utilize your Volunteers

- Get to know your Volunteers
- Set Expectations
- Share the lesson plan, objectives, and rider goals
- Delegate to your Volunteers
- Seek feedback
### Get to know your Volunteers

**WHY?**
- Know their skills = leverage those skills
- When you know what the volunteer is looking for, you can help them obtain it
- If you know your volunteers as individuals, it is easier to interact with them and provide them feedback

**HOW?... ASK!**
- How did they find out about your agency?
- Why are they volunteering?
- What they do/did for a living (i.e., skills)
- Ask them about family and/or hobbies
- Take a minute each lesson to ask them about themselves

### Set Expectations

**WHY?**
- If they know what you want, it is much more likely to occur
- Expect too little and you’ll never cause them to rise to the challenge.
- Expect too much and they’ll feel like they failed you or the rider

**HOW?**
- Communicate up front what you’re expecting and give them the opportunity to respond
- Plan to use their strengths and know you will have to manage their weaknesses
- Provide them with prompt individual feedback (what/how/why)

### Create and share the lesson plan

**WHY?**
- A clear plan lowers stress
- If volunteers know what you want to accomplish and how you want them to help, your probability of success will go up
- Your volunteers will feel like part of the team

**HOW?**
- Arrive early enough to set up & have time to communicate
- Have your game plan in mind ahead of each lesson
- Pre-lesson “huddle”

### Delegate

**WHY?**
- Delegation is defined as empowering one person to act for another, which is how we enable volunteers to do their part
- Delegation allows more tasks to be accomplished than if one person did them all
- Volunteers are motivated when given encouragement and responsibility
- Remember – delegation does not eliminate work, it changes it

**HOW?**
- Clearly define responsibilities
- Describe freedoms and limitations
- Maximize strengths
- Set goals & expectations
- Fully delegate and allow for personal success or failure
- “Thank you” after the job is done should acknowledge the contribution
WHY?

Volunteers often see what’s happening with the rider closer than you can
Communication follow up is critical to continued success
It will help you with your lesson notes and future lesson planning
It can help volunteers feel a part of your team

HOW?

Encourage them to ask questions and then provide answers
Check in with your volunteers. Is there any training they desire? Are they happy in their role? Do they feel accomplished?
Provide a way for volunteers to give you feedback. What worked? What did not?

Sample Volunteer Observation Log

Participant:  **Susie Q**
Special Needs/concern/equipment:  **Left hand/fingers weak**
Leader:_________________ Sidewalker:_________________

Goal 1:  **Hold reins with BOTH hands 90% of class**
Goal 2:  **Demonstrate a balanced 2-point position over 4 ground poles without help from sidewalker**

Date: ________ Observations:________________________________________

Date:________ Observations:________________________________________

(Volunteer Observation Log created by Susan Lutz)

What did we learn?

- Why people volunteer
- Barriers to effective volunteer communication
- Key principles and attitudes for relating to volunteers
- Steps to take to more effectively utilize your volunteers

Where do we go from here?

- Identify 1 or 2 things that you learned today that you want to implement in your upcoming communication opportunities with volunteers
- Give them a try and see how they work
Thanks for coming!

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