

COACHING – THE KEY FACTOR FOR A SUCCESSFUL VOLUNTEER MANAGING PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

During the process of voluntary management coaching can play a major role. Especially the possibility of dealing with individual requirements and problems offers a wide range of connecting factors in the management process, which marks a very structured approach. In this paper, the management process is analysed in terms of how and where exactly coaching could be relevant and in which way coaching could be applied in case of a conflict.

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How to attract volunteers is in fact one of the most widely discussed questions when it comes to the Volunteer Managing Process. As these recruitment strategies usually seem to be the most important point in that topic, there is a constantly growing demand for them. But the reality is far from that. The questions that should be asked instead, those that would be much more urgent, are different ones:

- “How do we keep volunteers, once we won them?”
- “How can we support them and their activities most efficiently?”

Let me give you an example:

Mary is forty years old and volunteers as a school crossing guard. She has been doing this work for five years now; the reason she originally started out working there was her daughter. When she started in primary school, Mary recognized that the way to get there was a lot too dangerous for a six-year-old without any help from an adult. So that was the point her social involvement began. To start as a school crossing guard she joined the local community's initiative for a safe way to school. In the beginning she was really happy with the feeling of doing something meaningful, she had fun, made the acquaintance of a lot of other volunteers and cherished her work. Nevertheless, now, after five years, Mary had to admit that she got tired of standing at a zebra crossing; and as her daughter, who's about to turn twelve, is old enough to go to school on her own now, her activity somehow lost its meaning for her and while she started getting bored, she lost her motivation to volunteer.

So, what can be done about that? I think, everyone would agree on the fact that it would be comprehensible and perfectly fine if Mary decided to stop volunteering. And after all, voluntary engagement doesn't necessarily have to be a lifelong commitment. Nowadays, people get more and more involved in temporary projects. So, the next step for Mary's volunteer manager should be to help her find out whether or not to continue her current engagement. Perhaps, he could support Mary in searching for a new, maybe more responsible activity like instructing others or giving lectures to motivate future volunteers for the work she did.

THE POTENTIAL KEY: COACHING

Coaching could be the answer to that question. Through efficient and well-directed coaching it would be possible to work out solutions for a wide range of issues concerning the Voluntary Managing Process, especially in cases like the one mentioned earlier. One could find a way to show Mary appreciation for the dedication she has put into her work as a volunteer during all those years and she could be given the feeling that her decision to end her engagement is accepted and understood. With the right coaching it would also be imaginable to help Mary to regain the joy for her current engagement or to find another possibility for her to get involved and to apply her skills. This could also be relevant in terms of her professional future. A personal coaching would precisely sound out the possible and cogitable ways for Mary's future as a volunteer and could also support her in choosing a new engagement and putting it into practice.

Due to the ongoing changes in today's working environment coaching is getting more and more popular in social work, as it helps to improve a wide range of fields of work as well as the included subareas.

The „Deutscher Bundesverband Coaching (DBVC)“(German Association of Coaching) defines coaching in the following way:

„Coaching ist die professionelle Beratung, Begleitung und Unterstützung von Personen mit Führungs- / Steuerungsfunktionen und von Experten in Unternehmen / Organisationen. Zielsetzung von Coaching ist die Weiterentwicklung von individuellen oder

kollektiven Lern- und Leistungsprozessen bzgl. primär beruflicher Anliegen“ (Deutscher Berufsverband Coaching e.V. 2011).⁴

The DBVC lines out the basic aspects of coaching: The concentration on results and solutions, the increase and maintenance of productivity, the improvement of the current work situation and the shaping of roles under challenging conditions.

At this juncture coaching is tailored to everyone's individual needs and tries to optimise all aspects of human potential. The client is supposed to develop own solutions statements for certain problems. During that process, the coach helps to recognise causes and reach the best solution. This includes, amongst other things, the promotion of self-reflection and self-perception.

Coaching differs from therapy in terms of pre-conditions, aims and settings. However, the boundaries to counselling are fluid, even if there are significant differences, especially in the area of the specialist counselling.

Normally, coaching follows a certain fixed process, starting with defining the task and analysing the current situation, then continues with setting targets and working out practical possibilities of implementation and finally finishes with checking up on the earlier accomplishments. A continuous offer for personal coaching could be given to volunteers as it would maintain the process of supporting them as well as possible.

THE SEQUENCE OF COACHING

The schematic structure of a coaching process:

1. Need for consultation

Cognition of the wish for individual support

2. First contact

Approaching and initial talk

3. Signing of an agreement

Formal and psychological contract

⁴ Translation: "Coaching is the professional consultation, guidance and support given to people in leading and controlling functions and to experts in companies or organisations. The aim of coaching is the advancement of individual and collective learning and operating processes primary related to professional concerns"

Main Phase:

4. Clarification of the initial situation

Determination of the current and the targeted state

5. Destination

Drawing up aims and solution strategies

6. Interventions

Conversations and other measures

7. Evaluation

Checking the status of the achievement of objectives

8. Completion

The final session: the coaching's formal end⁵

There are different methods of coaching, but the systematic basis for the process of coaching is spread very widely. It poses the question for certain connections and the people involved are not only seen as individuals but also and especially in their relationships to each other. This very view offers a wide variety of new possibilities for the Volunteer Management, because normally, working with voluntary workers is mostly about social interaction. Very often, voluntary engagement happens in a social context.

As a coach has to have special skills, a professional vocational training is inevitable and strictly necessary. Especially in the area of empathy the coach has to provide certain skills, he should be able to understand the techniques and methods of advisory work, as well as reflect them and apply them in a targeted manner and he is supposed to cope with several communication techniques. By now there are a large number of qualified trainings for potential coaches.

THE VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT CIRCLE

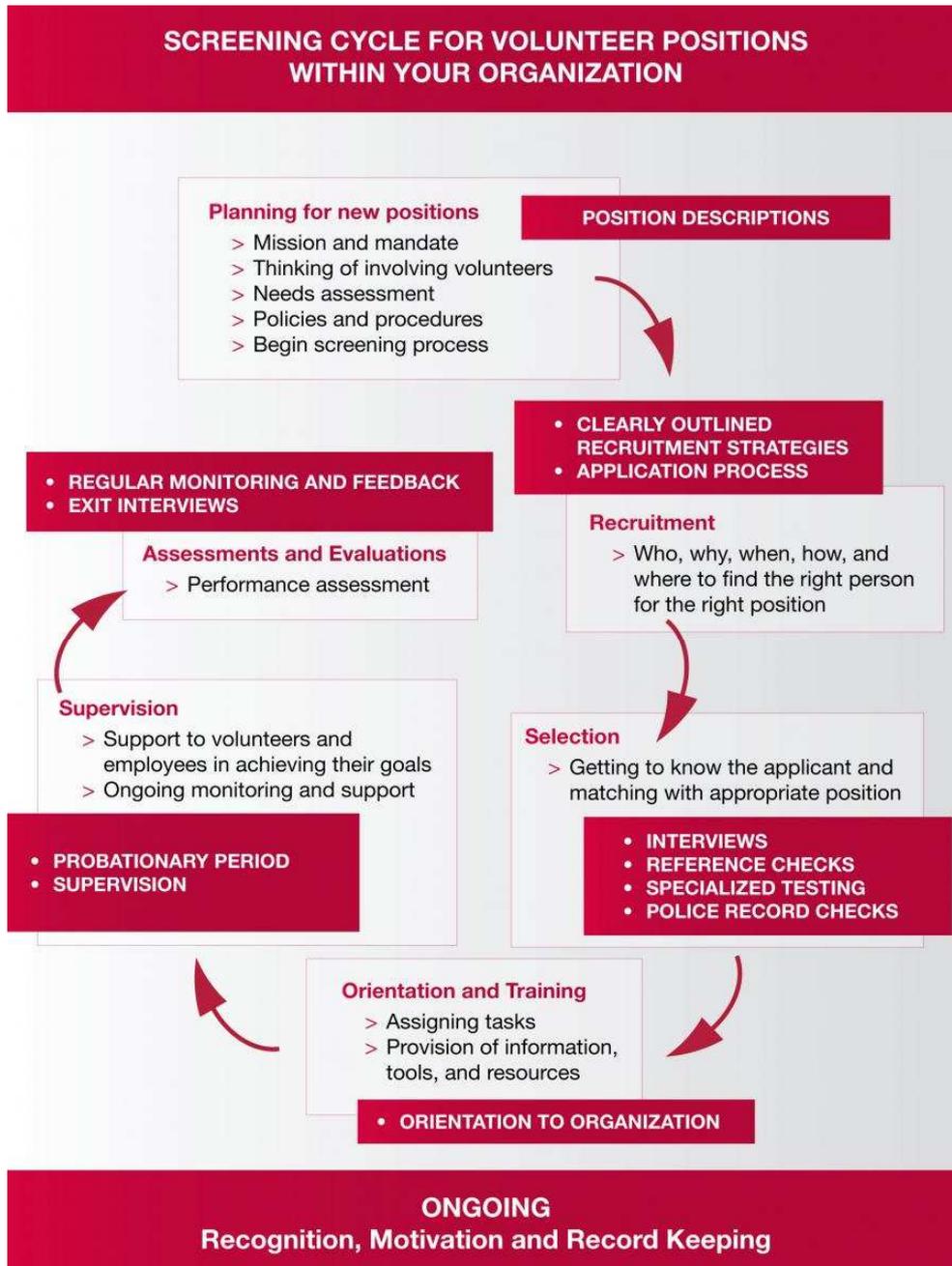
The volunteer management circle is the central approach for the process of winning, guiding and supporting voluntary workers. The term 'coaching' is not used in that process, but – that is the following thesis – can be the key factor for a successful implementation – in each one of these six steps. The use of coaching in all the phases of the Volunteer

⁵ Rauen, Ch.: Handbuch Coaching. Göttingen 2000, pp.??

Management Process would be imaginable. In the following, an overview of the methods of coaching is provided and after that, the particular possibilities for application in in the single steps of coaching will be displayed.

In literature about volunteer management, there are a lot of circles to illustrate that process and normally, the circle of managing volunteers contains six steps looking like this:

Figure 1: The process of volunteer management⁶



⁶ Volunteer Canada: Volunteer Management Theory (<http://volunteer.ca/topics-and-resources/volunteer-management/volunteer-management-theory>) [09.01.2012].

1. Position description and recruitment

The first step includes preliminary considerations about placing volunteers, planning and concept elaboration. During that process, the coaching of voluntary workers could already be preconceived. Starting with the description of positions, coaching could be considered as an adequate method to support the volunteers in their engagement. Whilst recruiting, a convincing support concept is an essential advertising and motivation strategy. Good guidance and support in difficult questions and responsible tasks could be the determining factors in the decision for a potential social engagement and for getting involved in a certain initiative with great energy and vigour.

To improve and support the process of capturing certain skills the Federal-Länder-Commission for Educational Planning and Promotion Research in Germany developed a potentially useful project called "profile pass ". With that instrument it's possible to name skills and experiences, as well as assort and classify them.

Trained counsellors work, amongst others, on the following questions with interested participants:

- What are the job experiences I gained?
- Which skills did I win beyond outside of profession?
- What did I learn in my family, my leisure time, my social engagement?

A skill based volunteering would have to be precisely geared to the worker's personal skills and needs to systematically record them in a first step. Most of the time, people are not aware of the skills, experiences and responsibilities they possess. However, in the area of voluntary work, not only the knowledge and skills that have been gained until now should be relevant, but also especially those one is still aiming for. Therefore the question about one's future, about goals, interests and wishes should be considered in a 'profile pass' for volunteers, too.

A coaching process, that works for example with the 'profile pass' and therefore centres these specific questions, could stand at the very beginning of a voluntary engagement in order to evaluate a potential volunteer and find a tailor-made position for him or her.

The organisation „Volunteer Canada“ worked out a discussion paper about how a skill based volunteering could look like in reality. They characterise today's volunteers in the following way:

“While there are differences in these cohorts in terms of their specific motivations and personal goals, when combined with overall societal trends, the following 6 common characteristics of today’s volunteer emerges:

1. **Highly Educated** with professional backgrounds
2. **Goal-Oriented** with highly organized career, family, and social lives
3. **Sense of Mobility/Transient** in terms of residence, school, and work
4. **Technologically Skilled** and comfortable participating in social networks
5. **Individualistic** and have a strong desire for autonomy
6. **Multiple Interests and Identities** linked to many communities and causes”⁷

The paper describes further basic changes in the area of the voluntary management since the 1990s. The culture of voluntary work has changed and the management of volunteers consequently has to adjust to the changing realities and must naturally find new ways of coping with novel situations. Particularly the fact that latterly, the input of the voluntary worker’s personal skills looms large, presents the organisations working with volunteers the major challenge to detect these skills in an adequate way. Nevertheless, setting the focus on skills is unconditionally necessary, because more and more volunteers make their decision for an engagement based on whether their capabilities, interests and wishes will be considered: It’s necessary to meet the needs of today’s volunteers and to regard that there are highly-skilled volunteers.

2. Selection

In the step of finding a tailor-made position the results gained out of the competence profile can be considered and one can benefit from a sophisticated coaching.

3. Orientation and Training

Especially in this step, coaching looms large because it can offer the appropriate support in specific questions. Assumed that a volunteer is taking on an important, high-skilled function, coaching is a possibility to help him or her train the required capabilities and skills.

⁷ Maranta, A.; Sladowski, P. et al.: *Skills-Based Volunteering: A Discussion Paper*. Centre for Voluntary Sector Research and Development. http://www.volunteer.ca/files/2010-08-10_skills-based_volunteering_discussion_paper_and_case_studies.pdf [10.01.1212].

For example in the area of the voluntary leadership of a bigger association a certain amount of specialised legal and economic knowledge is indispensable. In that case, coaching could offer a well thought out specialist support to the volunteers.

4. Supervision

The forth step is supervision. The term “coaching” is missing here, but it could be the key to keep volunteers. Particularly in conflict situations, coaching is an adequate method to solve problems.

Conflicts between paid and non-paid staff are a lot more common than the involved people are aware of and those disputes can often be traced back to the basic structures themselves. I gave a lot of courses in advanced training for voluntary managing and one field of questions always seems to be the most difficult part in the managing process: The definition of the relationship between volunteers and paid staff, usually called professionals. For professionals, it sometimes is very hard to accept the competence of a non-paid member of the team. Maybe the finance, the payment is the key to this conflict.

Finally, I want to give you an example for a successful realization of coaching in a social project. In Germany there is a widespread project called “multi-generation housing”. These accommodations shall provide offers for people of all ages. Therefore professionals and volunteers work together to gather a comprehensive range of activities for all ages. Plenty of multi-generation housings systematically follow the ideas of voluntary management and offer targeted coaching to find volunteers, to train them and most important – to keep them.

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