

Dealing with Performance Issues

Volunteer performance has an effect on the overall performance of your organisation. The longer issues are ignored the more ingrained they may become, and the greater the negative effect will be on your volunteers, organisation and clients. The sooner you deal with issues, the better for everyone...

In simple terms, performance refers to the ability to produce required results, measured against standards such as accuracy, completeness and speed. However, performance issues can relate to insufficient skills or ability, work ethic, behavioural or inter-personal issues, and more.

START WELL

Poor performance can result from a volunteer being placed in a role that doesn't suit them. Care taken during the recruitment process will reduce the number of unsuitable volunteers that are engaged. Ensure you assess the ability to perform tasks during the interview and reference checks.

REALISTIC TARGETS

Job descriptions are vital when addressing performance issues, and will help a volunteer understand what the expected targets/outcomes are. Ensure these targets are clear and achievable, and communicate effectively how the volunteer can achieve them. Small gaps in someone's ability/knowledge can generally be resolved with training.

IDENTIFYING THE ISSUE

Performance issues often stem from someone's ability or lack thereof, and/or poor motivation.

Regularly checking in with your volunteers and having your finger on the pulse of your volunteer team will help you to identify any issues early.

Reasons for performance issues vary greatly; it could be personal issues, not feeling supported in the role, not understanding expectations, not

believing in or supporting the ethos of an organisation, not relating well with a work colleague.

People with low ability may have been poorly matched to the job or they are no longer receiving the support that previously helped them to perform well. Before you talk to someone about the issue, take an objective look at the situation. Listen to comments from others. Ensure you have strong evidence of poor performance. Make sure they have all the resources they need to perform their duties well.

DEALING WITH IT

Be fair and consistent with all volunteers, don't avoid addressing an issue because you may hurt someone's feelings or someone is a 'little bit scary'. It is wise to give the volunteer the opportunity to correct the behaviour. Be upfront, direct and empathetic.

Use language that is non-confrontational and respectful e.g. 'This task should be completed...' Avoid using 'you' statements e.g. 'You are doing it wrong!' Ask questions (and listen) to ascertain if there are any barriers to their success. You could get the volunteer to fill out a self-assessment on how they think they are performing and compare this to your own assessment.

Provide constructive feedback and offer solutions. Provide ongoing support and opportunities for one on one discussion. Whilst volunteers are not covered by the Employment Relations Act, best practise would be to have a similar process in place e.g. verbal and written warnings if necessary.

DEALING WITH IT cont

Tips for improving performance – give the benefit of the doubt, take action, develop a collaborative strategy/work plan, provide support and give feedback. Indicate a timeframe for improvement.

- **Resupply** – does the volunteer have what they need to perform their tasks well and meet expectations, if not, what do they need?
- **Retrain** – provide additional training, either externally or internally. A mentor to work one on one with them might be appropriate. Ask what development and support they might need
- **Redesign** – can the job be redesigned to suit the person's abilities? What tasks can be delegated to someone else?
- **Reassign** – Is there another role within your organisation that better meet suits their skills and knowledge?
- **Release** – sometimes a volunteer may not be a good fit and it is time for them to move on, with a range of not for profits seeking volunteer support, the right role/ organisation could be elsewhere

PROGRAMME REVIEW

If your organisations regularly encounters performance issues, take a look and see if there is anything internally that could be improved or needs to be addressed. Addressing any of the following areas will improve the quality of your volunteer programme and ensure that the programme is not being undermined:

- Undervaluing of volunteers
- Failing to have a strategic view of volunteers
- Not understanding the skills base of volunteers
- Providing inadequate resources for the volunteer programme
- Making a poor selection of Volunteer Coordinators
- Acceptance of poor practise or behaviour
- Failing to evaluate the programme
- Over-bureaucratising volunteering

IN CONCLUSION

Risking losing good volunteers as the result of a poor performing (or poor behaving) volunteer will of course have a negative impact. To ensure that everyone gets the most out of a volunteer programme, deal with issues quickly and effectively, and look at the bigger picture - evaluate your programme. Prevention is always better than finding a solution.