DEALING WITH DIFFICULT VOLUNTEERS

*Dealing with volunteers who are under-performing or exhibit inappropriate behaviour can be an awkward issue for many clubs. This is especially because of the nature of voluntary work and the need to retain as many volunteers as possible.*

There is sure to be some conflict when you work with a group of different personalities. This is as true with volunteers as it is with staff. If only 2 percent of the volunteers you work with are troublemakers, that small percentage is going to take up the most of your time.

Unfortunately, that’s not the situation we live in and we have to find ways to handle troublesome volunteers. The following is suggested advice to help deal with volunteers who cause problems for you and their colleagues:

**Know-It-Alls**

* The name says it. They alienate others. They also limit creativity.

*How to deal with this type of personality:*

* Don’t ignore this type. If they don’t get pushback quickly they will assume their advice is always wanted and always right.

**Saboteurs**

* Rare, but they do exist.

*How to deal with this type of personality:*

* One of the worst things they do is hold back important information. They can cause genuine, consistent failure.
* Prevention is the best treatment.

**Gossips**

* They particularly enjoy when a club is in upheaval. Their damage usually is to morale.

*How to deal with this type of personality:*

* Stop them in their tracks by ensuring information flows freely.

**Rule Breakers**

* They ignore both club policies and position duties. Consequences: Lawsuit, anyone?

*How to deal with this type of personality:*

* Don’t let them get away with it, but deal more discreetly and gently than with Know-It-Alls.

**Negative Ones**

* Nothing is ever right, including changes for the better. They can sap a club’s energy.

*How to deal with this type of personality:*

* Listen to them, but don’t get caught up in their negativity.

**Social Climbers**

* They care more about their status than your cause.

*How to deal with this type of personality:*

* Managing them takes patience. Be clear about expectations.

**Harassers**

* They are aggressive and intimidate others with demands and threats. They can derail programs.

*How to deal with this type of personality:*

* They often start mildly, so don’t tolerate anything from them.

**Prejudiced Ones**

* Very often the first instance will come out of the blue.

*How to deal with this type of personality:*

* It will lead to a hostile environment. Don’t tolerate it.

*Extracted from “The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Recruiting & Managing Volunteers,” John L. Lipp*

**DISCIPLINE**

There may be occasions where your club will need to discipline a volunteer. Discipline refers to actions taken to enforce your club’s standards and regulations. The most common types of discipline problems include role behaviours and dishonesty. Where disciplinary procedure is required the following guidelines could be adopted:

* Discipline should take place as soon as possible following the incident
* Advance warning should be given to the volunteer before initiating the disciplinary action
* Consistency is important is using disciplinary action
* Discipline should be connected with the behaviour and not the person
* Discuss the issue in a calm, objective and serious manner
* State the problem specifically
* Keep the discussion impersonal
* Allow the volunteer to explain his or her position
* Maintain control of the discussion
* Obtain agreement on how mistakes can be prevented in the future
* Select disciplinary action progressively and consider mitigating circumstance

*Robbins, SR, Bergman, R, Stagg, I and Coulter, M (2000)*

**5 General Tips**

* Sometimes conflict between volunteers, when managed carefully and respectfully, can lead to growth for a club.
* Ignoring volunteers who act inappropriately only makes the situation worse.
* Deal directly with problem volunteers and focus on the behavior, not the person.
* Support volunteers and help them make their own decisions about whether or not their position is a good fit.
* Firing a volunteer should be a last-choice option. Document the behavior as well as any attempts you made to correct it.