

Managing Volunteer Staff

A Primer

A presentation by Glenn Glazer for SMOFcon 32 in Manhattan Beach, CA

What this is

- De gustibus
 - This is my style, what works for me
 - Not all of it will work for everyone
- Focused on volunteers at cons
 - Real jobs are very different
- Focused on the long run
 - Not just this con, but will they work for me again and again and again.
- Intended audience: chairs, division heads and area heads.

Basic Tenets

- Supportive
- Proactive
- Solution Oriented
- Fun
- The model is high motivation, not a slave ship

obQuote

If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.

Antoine de Saint-Exupery

Managing New Acquisitions

● Asking someone

- A little truthful flattery goes far
 - Why I think you are best for the job
- Be up front with expectations
 - They'll have to know eventually and they won't feel betrayed or deceived
- Hopefully, a big carrot is how much people like working for you

Managing Acquisitions Con't

- When volunteers, well, volunteer
 - Sometimes they are perfect – great!
 - Sometimes you have someone else in mind
 - Be honest, tell them you are talking with someone else and ask them to be patient.
 - Sometimes you don't have confidence in them
 - Again, be honest. “Look, I really don't think this is the right position for you.”
 - Listen attentively to their responses. It is okay to be persuaded, but it is also okay to gently say no.
 - Often a counteroffer of some other job helps.

On the job

- Manage expectations for future work
 - Deadline reminders as group broadcast
 - As far ahead as possible with reminders
 - Follow-up privately with those that are behind
 - Communications need to be **clear**, not *harsh*
- Surprises will happen, teamwork helps with agility
 - “What do you need from me to help you get this done?”
 - *NOT* “Why the heck isn’t this done yet?”

On the Job, Continued

- Go to bat for your team
 - If you fight for what someone wants, they will cheerfully march to the ends of the earth for you
- Likewise, be a sergeant, not a general.
 - Roll up your sleeves and pitch in
 - Be an exemplar, not the exception
- If your departments are fixed in different places, do the rounds at least once a day to see if they need anything.

“All”-Hands

- Not just for the entire committee
 - Divisional, possibly even departmental
- Regular, periodic
 - Gets everyone used to working together
 - Faces build trust and ease of communication
- Agile style: since, next, blockers
 - Blockers aren't criticisms, they are opportunities for you to help
- Record it

Care and Feeding

- 5-2-1, say it often
 - Follow it yourself!
- Watch for danger signs
 - Burnout, including in you
 - Dehydration
 - Know where to get bottled water
 - Overcommitment
 - Multiple jobs and/or multiple cons

Public Praise, Private Criticism

- Make this your maxim and people will work for you time and time again
 - Burn people and the good talent goes away
- Overstate praise
 - Don't exaggerate, but use lots of superlatives
- Understate criticism
 - Use a soft tone, serious looks and measured phrases.
 - Make people adverse to disappointing you, not fearful of your wrath

Dealing with Small Failures

- Focus on causes and lessons learned
 - “How can we not do this again?”
 - Emphasis on “we”: as a manager, you own the failure as much as the individual
 - This is your chance to shine: be supportive and helpful.
 - Piling on is not going to make for a Better Future.
 - It is *never* right to throw someone under the bus.
- Repeated small failures is a large failure

Large Failures, Recoverable

● Scramble the team

- Possibly get outside help for technical issues
- Focus on the emergency fix
- Build on brothers in arms

● After the rush

- Work on a post-mortem
- Analyze, fix *and move-on*
- Owning the fix gives the person a war story
 - Not just owning a failure.

Large Failures, Attrition

- Family emergencies, etc.
 - Stress that they are making the right decision
- Interpersonal problems, other quits
 - Again this is as much your fault as theirs.
 - “I’m sorry this didn’t work out and I’m sorry I couldn’t help more.”
- Death
 - If you knew the family send condolences.
- Then, focus back on recruitment
 - Focus on the fix

Bad Large Failures

- Sometimes, it just doesn't work
 - Major flaking, politics, insubordination, meltdowns, etc.
 - Line up a replacement
 - Sit down (hopefully face-to-face) and explain why.
 - Have back up documents
 - Unanswered emails, deadlines gone by, etc.
 - If you feel it was a one-off, say something about next time. Otherwise, thank them and move on.

Small Successes

- Little bits above and beyond expectation
- Getting things done early
- Solving future problems

- Coins of the Realm
 - Egoboo
 - Creative control
 - Greater responsibility

Large Successes

- Very public praise
 - Staff lists
 - Social Media (voiced as the con, though)
- Even more responsibility/promotion
- Special projects
- What they want (within reason)

*Share the ownership of fault,
give all of the credit away.*

Failures of This Model

- No model is perfect for all people and all situations
 - Some people need more monitoring and less motivation, adapt to this
 - Some people view a gentle touch as weakness and will try to exploit this (firm is not necessarily weak)
 - Getting jaded on praise, try to be kind but measured

Sunday, 6PM, The Bar

- If possible, gather everyone together at the end.
 - If you have the resources, buy a round
- TEAM, WE MADE IT!
- If things went well, keep in touch
- *This is the bridge point to them working for you again.*