

Volunteering

Volunteer...one who enters into any service or undertakes any thing of his own free will

Canadians by the thousands are engaged in volunteering time and expertise to educate and help better their communities, country and people. Minor sports, charitable and other community organizations would not survive, were it not volunteers.

The men, women and young adults providing volunteer services have a great impact on our lives. Coaches have a greater influence on children's lives; more so than parents and school teachers. Working with young children, volunteers mold the character and lives of these very impressionable members of society. Those working with the elderly, sick and handicap offer hope and dignity as they attempt to live the meaningful and productive life they once did. Volunteers in the health sectors save lives and offer consolation in time of grief. Hospitals rely on volunteer help to provide services that would otherwise be neglected or require payment to a service provider.

A volunteer gives of herself to build a better society, with little regard for remunerations or personal recognition. Often placed in positions of trust, we expect volunteers to act with honesty, integrity and impartiality. Many a volunteer form part of management in many community organizations. Who is responsible for training volunteers for management positions? Boards and committees are expected operate in accordance with the society's rules, some form of parliamentary democracy or at a minimum Roberts' Rules of Orders. Being a former Executive of Erin Mills Soccer Club, I am painfully aware of the lack knowledge of procedures and rules of conduct of Executives when conducting Board and Members meetings. Believe me, it shows and it is affecting the well being of your children

I saw volunteers refuse to learn the policies and procedures and government regulations pertaining to their society they. These volunteers generally use ignorance, arrogance and bullying tactics to gain legitimacy for their points of view. In many instances they succeed as the other well-intentioned and hard working volunteers allow them. Many a

volunteer have been heard to say “I am just a volunteer, I am not being paid” when confronted with their poor attitude, incompetence, or ungentlemanly behaviour. The same is true for volunteers whom receive harassment from the benefactors of volunteerism. Being a volunteer does not give you the right to disobey the laws of the land or your society nor to encroach on the rights and privileges of members of the greater society.

What then does the society do when volunteers breach that trust? Is it a reward or conflict of interest for a volunteer to use his “insider” knowledge for personal or professional gain? Should a volunteer use his insider knowledge to prevent or otherwise hinder the benefits that may accrue to a non-volunteer member of society? What does the society do with a volunteer which is not performing as expected? Will he be fired or reassigned to a less demanding position? Is it ethical to “fire” or terminate a volunteer? At what juncture should a volunteer be relieved of his duties?

For twenty seven years I have volunteered in many community organizations, serving in Executive capacities on at least one Board of Directors each year. In every organization, I have seen volunteers who believe that volunteering entitles them to special privileges. I have seen volunteers blatantly use inside information to gain personally and professionally; to obtain benefit for family and friends. Many volunteers wear a title without doing the work, garnering all the praise. By far the majority, works very hard without a title and receive little praise from their peers or benefactors.

When you volunteer, do so with vigour and enthusiasm, as though you will receive monetary rewards for the service you provide. You are being rewarded by the gratitude of the benefactors, though it may not seem apparent every time. A child’s smile, a parent’s handshake will provide the volunteer with memories for a life time. Sentimental objects such as a Thank You card or plaque will provide constant reminder of your contribution to volunteerism.

Be a volunteer, make a difference in your corner of the world. The greater society will gain immediate benefit. Your efforts will change the lives of those you touched.