

Tips on Establishing Great Relationships Between Volunteers and Professionals:

1. Intentionally begin to build your relationship with each volunteer from your very first visit. Be positive. Be enthusiastic. Be well prepared. Think in advance about the impression you want to make as their district executive, Scout executive, or staff adviser.

2. Be accessible to your volunteers. Exchange phone numbers, e-mail addresses, mailing addresses, etc. Avoid the impression that you are too busy or annoyed when a volunteer calls. Return their calls.

Set up regularly scheduled visits and/or phone dates with key volunteers. Some people you need to talk with weekly, others monthly or even less frequently. Once a month, place in your schedule a few minutes to review a list of others who you do not need to meet with regularly but whom you have not seen at a meeting or talked with for some time. Find a good excuse for a short phone call.

3. Names are important. Know the names of volunteers; pronounce them correctly and, if in doubt, check the proper spelling. It's OK to ask people how they would like to be addressed and how to pronounce their name.

4. Create a welcome environment for new Scouters and plan ways to incorporate them into the team—a new board member, a new unit

commissioner, the new district chair for FOS. Remember, it's easy for a group to turn inward and make newcomers feel awkward or unwelcome. A volunteer who feels like an outsider is not likely to come back. See that a new Scouter receives a letter of welcome from an appropriate person in authority (district chair, council president, Scout executive, or committee chair). This helps a person feel good about joining the organization and conveys that we are well organized and truly need their services.

5. Make efficient use of volunteers' time. Don't waste it. As best you can, plan visits and meetings at times that are best for your volunteers. Be on time for appointments. Come well prepared. Help volunteers make the most efficient use of their Scouting time. For example, a field director arranges to pick up the council commissioner near the close of the business day, makes a recruiting call at 4:30 P.M., and conducts Scouting business over dinner, en route to a key evening meeting. The commissioner is saved a commute and a lot of Scouting business is accomplished in a condensed period of time.

6. Your district and council Scouters should know that they can turn to you for advice or troubleshooting. You, however, must create the kind of non-judgmental relationship in

which they are comfortable to ask for help. Promptness in responding to their needs and questions demonstrates that you care and that their service is valued. Keep your commitments—big or little.

7. Sometimes professionals think they need only work with a couple of people at the top of the district structure. But a good executive probably needs to meet regularly on an individual basis with at least 12 to 15 district leaders to help them plan and prepare for success. Other volunteers also need to know you are available. Build the structure, but don't blindly rely on it. The more volunteer management layers that are superimposed on top of each other, the more the professional needs to help facilitate good communication and working relationships between people in the different layers.

8. There will inevitably be some volunteers that you don't like as much as others. That's human nature. However, part of being a professional is being objective and being impartial. Your reputation and credibility rest, in part, on your fairness.

9. While you obviously want to form a Scouting relationship, it is nevertheless important to get to know each volunteer as a whole person. Most volunteers will feel



more comfortable working with a professional who is interested in the rest of their lives as well as their Scouting responsibilities.

Keep in mind that Scouting is not a person's only priority in life. They will have family priorities and employment obligations, and may be active in religious and other activities.

Write down personal information volunteers share with you and refer to it later. ("Did your daughter get into the college she applied to?" or "How was the week you and your family spent at the lake?") As you believe appropriate, send birthday cards, attend funerals, weddings, etc.

10. Convey a cordial and positive attitude to a volunteer's assistant,

family member, work associate, or anyone else who answers their phone. Let the Scouter's assistant know you are interested in being helpful and conserving the volunteer's time. If a Scouter has asked his or her assistant to help with a Scouting task, you may need to be helpful to the assistant, an action which will not go unnoticed by the volunteer, and will turn that assistant into a friend and supporter.

11. Be sure staff employees in the council office are alert and sensitive to volunteer needs. Help them recognize how important their communication with volunteers is to the success of Scouting (the way the phone is answered, messages taken, a smile conveyed, a sincere interest in volunteer requests). Office support staff should make volunteers feel that someone has listened, heard, and really understood their question, request, or concern.

A well-trained office worker will also keep an ear out for issues that need an immediate or priority professional response. Support staff can indeed help build or damage a good volunteer-professional relationship.

In a challenging low-income urban district, a playground-director Cubmaster spent countless hours collecting the fees and signatures to renew his pack's charter. When he proudly took the papers and fees to the council office, a stern-faced registrar promptly pointed out numerous errors or omissions on the paperwork, which was interpreted as a rejection of both the man and the pack. The Cubmaster was so upset and confused that he returned all the registration fees and the pack never had another meeting. Office staffs do make a difference.

12. Next consider this: A volunteer may expect more from you as a

professional and the greater the energy you may need to give to meet that volunteer's expectations. That can be very demanding, *but* it will also have a big payoff as you and that volunteer move your district and council ahead in serving young people.

An exceptional volunteer will have exceptionally high expectations of the professional. That exceptional volunteer will expect:

- Thoroughness of your preparation.
- Accuracy in the details of everything you do.

Praise motivates, reinforces, and inspires.

Make it a part of your relationship with everyone on your council and district team.



- Immediacy of your response to their requests.
- Highest quality of your work to gain their trust.
- That you respect and use their time wisely.

13. Always involve appropriate volunteers in setting goals and planning projects. Neither dictate to nor ignore volunteers. You will seldom move forward by trying to shove an idea down the throats of volunteers. Give them credit for a good idea even if it came from you. If volunteers feel a part of the planning process, they are far more likely to feel responsibility for the end result. The more power you share, the more powerful you become.

14. Project a clean and orderly appearance. Without becoming preachy here, let's just say that a volunteer's perception of you in part mirrors your cleanliness and appearance!

Your car—If you must move a bunch of materials before a volunteer can get in your back seat, that's awkward.

Your office work area—If there's anything on your guest chair, clutter on the floor, or stacks of stuff on your desk, that's an embarrassment.

Your person—If you are not well groomed, neatly dressed, or clean, that's an embarrassment.

15. Then there is "PLT." You know what PLT is? It stands for the "piddly little things."

- Returning phone calls promptly
- A warm welcome when they visit you at the council office
- A concern about their sick child
- An article you've clipped and sent about their hobby or accomplishment
- Helping new volunteers feel like insiders by giving them a short glossary of Scouting lingo

PLT—piddly little things; they are important!

16. In some instances the function of guiding volunteers is shared. A district executive works with operating committee chairs who also look to the district chair for guidance. Both the council camping committee chair and the director of camping have a direct working relationship with members of the council camping committee. Unit commissioners work with both their district executive and their ADC.

The professional is careful to avoid confusion for volunteers and tries to ensure that they receive consistent messages and have a compatible relationship with both their volunteer leader and the professional.

17. Here's an important thought: Be sensitive to the individual differences of each of your key people. They won't all succeed in the same way; you need to know that their working styles are different. Some may move forward without your suggestions,

while others will rely on your specific plans and guidance to accomplish what needs to be done.

Adjust your style to the temperament, age, experience, and cultural background of each volunteer. They are all unique individuals. Needs for guidance will vary even among those engaged in the same task at the same time. Each volunteer will function and use their time differently. *You need to adapt.*

It may seem quite appropriate for a council or district to develop a highly structured and precise support system for volunteers. That system, however, may be quite inappropriate for some volunteers or committees of volunteers (remote rural or low-income urban areas for example). We may become so acclimated to our own setting, background, and structures that we do not notice those Scouting methods or structures that may be awkward, uncomfortable, or inappropriate for others.

The professional uses his/her judgement about each person and each community to provide the flexibility that enables many different people to contribute to Scouting. The ability to adopt Scouting methods and their own professional style to the uniqueness of each individual and each situation is what often distinguishes a great professional from a mediocre professional.