

Key Points for Trainers and Supervisors

A. Training Techniques for Adults

Learning occurs best for adults when it:

- **Allows for some self-direction.** Participants need to feel that they have some control over their learning. They may resist situations where they feel that they are being placed in a dependent role.
- **Values their experience and builds on it.** Participants usually come with some experience. Trainers should respect learners, acknowledge existing knowledge and help learners relate new learning to their own experiences.
- **Is relevant to the person.** Participants learn best by drawing on their own knowledge and experience. Learning must meet their real life needs and be useful to their jobs, family and life.
- **Fills an immediate need.** People are most motivated to learn when the information or skill meets their immediate needs and they can use the information or skill right away.
- **Engages the participant (is not passive).** A learner gets more involved through discussion, small groups, and learning from others.
- **Provides feedback and praise.** Effective learning requires feedback that is corrective but supportive. It also requires that praise is given, even for small attempts.
- **Uses visual materials and practice of new skills.** Adults remember best when they practice the new skill (they remember 20 per cent of what they hear, 40 per cent of what they see, and 80 per cent of what they practice).
- **Provides a safe comfortable atmosphere.** A cheerful, relaxed person learns more easily than one who is hungry, cold, afraid, embarrassed or angry.

B. Supervision Skills

Supervision is key for the success of the project, especially with the number of volunteers involved.

Guidelines for giving feedback

Feedback should be:

- **Immediate.** To be effective, feedback should be provided immediately after or during a volunteer's performance. The longer the period between the performance and the feedback, the less of an impact the feedback will have.
- **Personal.** Be personal when providing feedback. That is, use the personal pronoun "I" rather than the more impersonal expressions of "we", "the branch" or "the organization". Speaking personally will help positive feedback be perceived as sincere. This helps the person see the *consequences* of his/her behavior and not simply the behavior itself. In that way, the person will feel a greater sense of responsibility for changing the behavior.
- **Individualized.** Individual feedback is more powerful than group or team feedback. This does not mean that supervisors should not recognize the group for team accomplishments. It only suggests that individual positive feedback should be included in the feedback process. Individual corrective feedback should never be given formally in front of a group or team.
- **Often.** As well as immediate, feedback needs to be given often, on a regular basis, and as a matter of routine. This applies equally to positive feedback as to corrective feedback. In fact, praise and sincere appreciation should be given more often than any other kind of feedback, and should be repeated to associates.
- **Task-specific.** Make performance feedback task-specific. That is, avoid the "good job" syndrome because it is too general, lacks specificity and can more easily be interpreted as lacking in sincerity.
- **Vary style.** Most feedback is provided verbally. When giving positive feedback, look for alternative ways to deliver the "good" news. Examples include letters, memos, telephone, fax, e-mail and so on. For corrective feedback, follow your National Society's procedures for

corrective action with volunteers.

- **Sincere.** Associates have a knack for recognizing when their supervisor is just going through the motions, or when s/he is not being sincere. Therefore, for supervisors to be able to harvest the rewards of providing positive and corrective feedback, it is important that they are genuine and truly believe in the process.
- **Appropriately timed.** Avoid giving feedback only when it is convenient for you. Make sure that the time is right for the other person to hear what you have to say. If the other person does not listen to you, then you probably will not improve anyone's situation.
- **Supportive and constructive.** When you are about to criticize what someone has done, begin by showing respect for the other person. Talk about something positive the person has done. Most likely, you will want to remain on good (if not better) terms with the person, and so let that person know that, in general, you value what he/she does. No matter how poorly the person has behaved, you should be able to say *something* nice. If you are too angry, you should probably cool off first.
- **Descriptive and specific.** It is more useful to discuss specific events than general behavior. The more recent the event, the less likely it is that you will disagree about what really happened. The more specific you are, the easier it will be for the person to understand what needs to be changed and why.

Working in teams

Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that individual members of the team understand their role and the processes that ensure effective teamwork. To do this, clear communication is required. The responsibility of the supervisor is to ensure that the communication has worked, and that the team accepts his or her leadership. Team members must:

- Have a common purpose
- Share a clear understanding of goals
- Understand their roles clearly and how to interact to accomplish goals
- Recognize the responsibility of every team member
- Establish solid relationships within the team and rely on each other.

A supervisor is largely responsible when a team does not work as well together as it could. Factors that may contribute to dissatisfaction of volunteers, and lack of teamwork, include:

- Volunteers treated as unimportant and less worthy of support than staff
- Not feeling equal members of the team
- No flexibility in work outputs or hours worked
- Supervisor unwilling or unable to correct people when they are wrong or make mistakes

Some common problems include:

- Different work ethics
- Differences in personalities, work habits, communication styles
- Not keeping each other informed about emerging issues
- Power struggles over responsibilities and credit for work done
- Failure to follow through on commitments
- Nervousness, lack of confidence in abilities
- Conflict (either between volunteers, volunteer and supervisor, or within the area or surrounding areas of work)
- Cultural inappropriateness
- Personal problems (home life, health)

Actions might include:

- Negotiate a solid set of working agreements
- Clarify expectations from the beginning
- Address the behavior, not the person

- Give specific, timely feedback
- Try to understand the situation from multiple perspectives
- Commit to working together to achieve a set goal
- Consult a neutral third party

Tips for addressing a performance issue

- Be specific about the issue. Give examples.
- Do not use global language, i.e. "You always do"
- Allow the volunteer to maintain dignity.
- Avoid the tendency to hover around the issue.
- Use the position description and related policies either to reiterate or clarify expectations with the volunteer.
- Reassign the volunteer, if appropriate to do so.
- Document all performance-related discussions. Ask other staff involved to do the same.
- Ask another person, preferably a volunteer, to be present.