

# Supervision of Volunteers

Doran McCarty

## *Supervision as a Ministry*

*One of the realities of ministry leadership in resort and leisure settings is supervising other members of the ministry team. There are some who might view this responsibility as another administrative burden that keeps them from doing ministry. These unfortunate folks do not realize that a call to missions leadership is a call to enable and equip other members of the body of Christ to be about their ministry for the kingdom.*

*The ministry of supervision is a key tool by which each member of a resort/leisure ministry team can be helped to be all that God has called him or her to be. Supervision in ministry is more than simply getting specific tasks completed. It also means helping those who do the work grow as disciples of Jesus.*

*The ministry of supervision requires a person to know about the gospel, people, tasks, themselves, and the interaction of these. May God bless your supervisory relationship and make it a profitable one.*

— Doran McCarty

## Introduction

Experiences with volunteers can be happy, sorrowful, or destructive. One supervisor said, “I spend more time straightening out his mess than it would take me to do the work myself; and he thinks he did a pretty good job!” Another supervisor said, “Nothing big has gone wrong, but it just doesn’t seem that we have put it together.” A third supervisor listed a volunteer’s many accomplishments during a summer’s program and proudly confirmed growth in the volunteer. He mentioned the volunteer’s request “to do this again next summer.”

Research shows that supervision is a basic ingredient in successful work with volunteers. The purpose of this guide is to help you to be a good supervisor. There is the science of supervision that can help anyone to be a good supervisor. Even a “natural” supervisor can improve his or her skills by using the science of supervision.

## Ministry of Supervision

Supervision is a ministry comparable to hospital ministry, counseling ministry, administrative ministry, teaching ministry or evangelistic ministry. Supervision ministry can strengthen the Christian life of your volunteer through your Christian service. Supervision extends your ministry. With good supervision, the volunteer is not your errand runner, but the extension of your own ministry as you share your work and goals.

The supervisor should ask: “What is the object of my ministry of supervision?” Is the object a program or a person? Every supervisor is either program-oriented or people-oriented. An administrator administers a program but a supervisor supervises a person.

If the supervisor’s central focus is on the program, he or she depersonalizes the volunteers and makes them errand runners rather than fellow ministers. Your ministry is helping volunteers fulfill the task which you have assigned to them. Your focus is not on the task but on the volunteers. The volunteers’ focus is on the task.

## Definition of Supervision

While there are many possible definitions of supervision, the following fulfills a Christian-theological perspective.

*Supervision is the development and actualization of a support system for the enrichment of personhood and the performance of tasks.*

This definition has several important parts. Supervisors do not supervise their volunteers alone, but are part of a system. The system may be an institution, a staff, family, or society.

The supervisor needs to make the system a support system that provides volunteers with the necessary physical, intellectual, spiritual, financial, emotional, and personal support. A support system provides a way of affirming the volunteer. Affirmation, however, may be confrontation as well as a pat on the back.

Support involves two aspects: the *enrichment of personhood* and the *performance of tasks*. Both aspects are important for successful supervision in a Christian context. If the emphasis is entirely on the performance of tasks, the volunteer is treated as a “thing” rather than a person. Sooner or later the volunteer will “run dry” and be unable to perform tasks properly. Neither is the enrichment of personhood the only object of supervision. That would be a counseling relationship rather than a supervisory relationship.

The enrichment of personhood and the performance of tasks both are needed to have successful supervision. People grow and become enriched as they perform tasks. As they grow, they are better able to perform their tasks.

## Necessity of Volunteers

A democracy is dependent upon volunteers. Generally, Americans who are physically and mentally healthy have served as a volunteer of some kind. The church depends upon volunteers to carry out its ministries. These ministries also help the volunteers to grow as Christians. Without volunteers, churches would be unable to minister and the constituency would fail to grow through the exercise of God’s grace.

## Issues in Supervising Volunteers

The Goal of Supervision—The goal of supervision can be stated: “It matches a volunteer with a job to allow growth of the person and completion of the job.”

**Accountability**—When you share a task with volunteers, you, as the supervisor, are held accountable. To protect yourself, you should build a system of accountability with the volunteers you are supervising. The volunteers are also held accountable to you.

## Understanding Human Nature

From a theological perspective, each person is made in the image of God and suffers from sin. The supervisor should treat a volunteer with the respect and dignity due one made in the image of God, and help develop the processes to hold a person's sinful side in abeyance.

You will have a functional view of human nature. Researchers who have studied management personnel have found a variety of ways to discuss behavioral presuppositions. Douglas MacGregor<sup>1</sup> developed the ideas of "Theory X" and "Theory Y" behavior. "Theory X," or the custodial view, maintains that the supervisors are responsible for directing, motivating, controlling, and molding the behavior of workers to fit the organization. "Theory X" maintains that people are naturally indolent, lack ambition, dislike responsibility, passive, resistant to organizational needs, and want to work as little as possible. They must be rewarded, punished and controlled. "Theory Y," a supportive view of human behavior; contends that people are not passive and resistant; but may be motivated and matured, may assume responsibility, and may accept organizational goals.

Another theory, the "Theory Z" style, is a group process whereby the group makes decisions about management, procedures, and schedules. The group is the process in the decision making. Individuals gain their motivation by accepting the group process and decisions.

Your view of human nature will determine your style of supervision and will determine whether you prod people or whether you encourage them to organize their personal goals in relation to organizational goals, allowing them to use their own initiative.

## The Focus of Supervision

When the focus of supervision is *administration*, the supervisor works with the organization to provide the structure wherein the persons can work to carry out necessary tasks. This may include developing procedures and a calendar of activities.

When the focus is *finances*, the supervisor provides or plans the finances enabling others to accomplish a certain level of activity.

The focus may be upon a specific *task* assigned to a person who is helped by the supervisor.

The supervisor may help another worker deal with a *crisis* which arises but does not give general supervision between crises.

*Supportive* supervision involves regular meetings to provide sustained help whether in tasks, crises, or personhood issues.

Supportive supervision is the most rewarding, but each of the other kinds of supervision has its place. It is important that the supervisor be aware of each situation and of the kind of supervision required so he or she can intentionally and consciously move from one kind of supervision to another

## Ministry of Supervision

There are several ways to look at supervision, due to complex situations and differing circumstances.

## Models of Supervision

**Parental Model**—The first experience with supervision is in the family when parents closely supervise children. The baby is completely dependent upon the parents' supervision which becomes less intense as the child grows.

**Industry Model**—Industry is concerned with production and the manufacture of items. Supervision in industry includes overseeing the production line and people working there in order to maximize production.

**Academic Model**—In the academic community the instructor supervises students in order to facilitate learning. This is accomplished through assignments, lectures, and other learning activities.

**Craft Model**—Craftsmen, such as electricians, plumbers, and pipe fitters, have developed a system of learning by example, showing the apprentice how to do the work through actual experience.

**Penal Model**—The warden in a penal institution, supported by personnel such as guards, maintains discipline, and order among prisoners allowing a minimum of freedom.

**Clinical Model**—The medical profession uses a clinical model for supervision. A young medical intern participates in the treatment of patients and writes reports regarding the patient's condition and possible treatment for submission to the supervising medical doctor.

**Military Model**—This is a close-rank discipline and straight-line authority. Commands are given and strict obedience is expected.

**Business Model**—The boss apportions the work to the employees and sets deadlines. The boss is normally the one to give authority to do the task. A supervisor in this model is a "Mr. Answer Man."

**Orchestra Model**—The conductor guides the whole orchestra into faithful performance. The conductor is responsible. Supervisors often find themselves in a similar role, which is to organize, correlate, and bring together individual tasks to one great performance.

**Marriage Model**—Supervision is mutually shared by husband and wife to strengthen their love and to help develop and support one another. Enhancement of the lives of one another is mutual.

## Styles of Supervision

**Direct Control Supervision**—This particular style of supervision calls for a strong desire on the part of the supervisor to control. In this supervisory style, the supervisor desires to control volunteers as though they were pieces on a chess board. There are several types of supervision (such as business, industry, army, etc.) that can fall under the style of direct control. Direct control supervision represents a highly structured format of operation.

**Passive Supervision**—Passive supervision is the antithesis of direct control supervision. Passive supervision has been called no supervision by some. The passive supervision style can become a game where the supervisor does not take responsibility for supervising but nevertheless has indirect ways of letting volunteers know that certain expectations exist.

**Tacit Supervision**—This type of supervision is less responsible because the supervisor never admits there are requirements. Reprimand can occur at any time because there are no stated boundaries.

**Shared Supervision**—Shared supervision is when there are more than one supervisor involved in the supervisory process. This is a realistic kind of supervision for volunteers because of the involvement of multiple agencies that often relate to the mission volunteer. Shared supervision has some liabilities inasmuch as each party can play games with the others. Shared supervision requires open and honest communication on the part of all parties. In shared supervision, the covenant agreement is essential. The covenant agreement should spell out all the supervisory relationships and how they interrelate. Because the Southern Baptist Convention mission system is complex, sometimes our relationships reflect that complexity, causing ambiguity in understanding supervisory roles. To avoid this ambiguity it is suggested that all parties sit down together and negotiate a workable supervisory system.

It would be a fallacy to look for one role that is categorized as the ideal in all supervisory situations. Rather, it is more realistic to utilize the style appropriate for volunteer, setting, circumstances, supervisor strengths, abilities, preference, et cetera. Many times it might be necessary to employ more than one supervisor style with the same mission volunteer. Since you may operate first out of one kind of supervision and then another; it is important for the supervisor to be aware of the kind of supervision appropriate at the moment or for the particular task or person. If supervisors are aware of their kind of supervision, they can be in charge of the supervision rather than be at the mercy of the situation of persons involved.

## Types of Supervision

**Task Overseer**—The task overseer monitors tasks under his or her responsibility.

**Work Evaluator**—The work evaluator examines the completed work to ensure appropriateness and acceptability.

**Trainer**—The trainer helps others to learn particular skills needed for completing various tasks.

**Coordinator**—The coordinator organizes several activities or people to reach goals of the person, system, or institution. The coordinator ensures that each element moves with the proper timing and function.

**Resource**—The resource supervisor is an expert who, through knowledge and other resources, helps others accomplish a particular task. The resource supervisor may be called one or more times for assistance.

**Catalyst**—The catalyst seeks the appropriate time to react, and to instigate change in a person or an organization. The catalyst may be on hand a great part of the time, but acts only from time to time to cause change.

**Change Agent**—The change agent causes changes in persons or organizations through careful step-by-step planning. It is an evolutionary kind of supervision.

**Consultant**—The consultant contracts with one or more people. He provides the guidance, reflection and feedback to accomplish goals.

## Times of Supervision

Understanding supervision is dependent upon observing when supervision takes place. The time frame a supervisor chooses for exercising supervision gives a clue to the kind of supervision that will be exacted.

**Crisis Supervision**—Much supervision (not necessarily good supervision) is done on a crisis basis. The crisis supervisor says, “Whenever you have a problem, come see me.” Supervisors should always be open to the crisis situation that can invade the life and ministry of a volunteer, but supervision that comes only at crisis times reinforces a negative attitude about the importance of supervision. Supervisors who operate under crisis supervision may encourage the reoccurrence of crisis situations of volunteers. Volunteers who are suffering may even create a crisis in order to get the necessary attention from their supervisor.

**Occasional Supervision**—Occasional supervision suggests a nonscheduled, from time-to-time approach to supervision. Occasional supervision usually takes place when the supervisor has an agenda to discuss with the volunteer. The occasional supervisor style suggests the lack of a regularly scheduled time to deal with supervisory issues.

**Seasonal Supervision**—The seasonal supervisor recognizes special seasonal tasks that should be performed by the volunteer. These may be to fill out a quarterly report or to work on an annual budget, and so forth.

**Project Supervision**—The supervisor may call on the volunteer for a special project. When this kind of supervision prevails, the routine work of the volunteer is not the focus of the supervisory exercise.

**Routine Supervision**—The supervisor and volunteer covenant together to meet at a regularly scheduled time for a supervisory session. This allows the volunteer to avoid experiencing unnecessary anxiety about supervision since they can depend upon specific times to raise questions, express opinions, and receive information. The supervisor will also be more comfortable knowing they will be in touch with the personhood and task issues of the mission volunteer.

## Covenanting

People often shun the word “covenant.” However, people make covenants or agreements with each other all the time, whether we call it that or not. Covenants should be equitable and productive.

A differentiation between covenant and contract should be made. A covenant is made when people have a common purpose, thus they join together in a common task. A contract is made when people have either lost or do not have a common purpose and are assuming their own personal place. Also a clear distinction between job description and covenant should be known. A job description deals with the job or task being done without regard to the importance of the person. A covenant involves what part of the job or task is to be done in a given time with consideration of the person responsible for the task.

## Types of Covenants

There are three types of covenants: formal, informal, and tacit.

*Formal covenants* are written with the conditions, responsibilities, and expectations of all parties stated.

*Informal covenants* are stated but unwritten expectations. Most transactions are informal covenants and adequate for short-term, nondevelopmental transactions. Informal covenants open possibilities for “game playing,” and are subject to disclaimers (I didn’t say that.) or qualifications (But that’s not what I meant.).

*Tacit covenants* include hidden conditions, which neither party will admit to each other or to others. The tacit covenant benefits one party while keeping the other in the bondage of silence and intimidation. A tacit covenant can be changed, without notice, is never clearly defined and may influence areas other than those under covenant.

## Goals in Covenanting

Goals are perhaps the most important part of the covenanting process. The goals serve as a road map for the volunteer as he or she considers the tasks and working relationships.

*Institutional goals* of the church, association, or mission center should be stated clearly to the volunteer. It may be necessary to renegotiate the goals later.

*Supervisor’s goals* may be different from institutional goals. These may affect the way the supervisor interprets the institutional goals. The supervisor needs to share these with the volunteer. At times the volunteer may feel caught between two sets of goals-institution and supervisor-and have difficulty attaining both.

*Volunteer’s goals* may be general or specific actions they want to render and/or involve personal growth and fulfillment. The supervisor must understand the volunteer’s goals in order to motivate the volunteer and to help mesh the goals of volunteers, supervisor and institution.

## What to Include in the Covenant

**Needs**—Write down the needs that the volunteer will fill.

**Goals**—One or more goals should be stated. Goals identify the needs and should be clearly defined and be realistic, attainable and measurable.

**Activities**—There will be one or more activities, or action plans, listed for each goal. Activities are actions that lead to attaining the goal.

Evaluation—A place and date should be set to evaluate the accomplishment of the goal. The evaluation process should aid the volunteer in growth and task accomplishment. The evaluation should consider the agreed upon goals. The covenant should include the place, circumstance, and time when the evaluation was made.

## Other Considerations in Covenanting

### Expectations:

*Time*—The covenant should outline a specific, day-by-day time frame from beginning to completion of the volunteer's term of service. The supervisor may think the volunteer should work 10-12 hours a day while the volunteer wishes to work a half day. Time expectations need to be clear.

The covenant should state the beginning date and expected concluding date as it relates to the covenant. This kind of declaration does not limit the renegotiation process. The covenant date should ideally be set for one year. However, this may vary according to the specific needs of the volunteer or ministry setting.

Personal time needs to be part of the volunteer's experience. The supervisor should guard against a schedule that reinforces all work to the exclusion of personal and/or family time for the volunteer. The emotional demands of the ministry setting often exact a toll that can most effectively be dealt with by encouraging personal time each week for the volunteer.

*Work*—The type and intensity of work need to be defined before the volunteer comes and be listed in the covenant. The volunteer should not come with expectations that the work will involve construction and discover that he or she has worship responsibilities. The person who volunteers to do clerical work should not be assigned to babysit. The volunteer will feel betrayed if his or her expertise is not used.

*Behavior*—Supervisors sometimes have been surprised by the behavior of volunteers. This may involve dress, habits, or language. People often depend upon tacit covenants to control these situations, but tacit covenants are not adequate for volunteers from outside the community. The volunteer needs to be made aware of any behavioral taboos within the community.

### Relationship/Roles

The supervisor and volunteer should covenant together the relationship and roles to be fulfilled. The needs of both parties should be met. If the volunteer is a relational person and the supervisor is program oriented, this could cause difficulty.

### Supervisory Structure

The supervisor and volunteer should develop a supervisory structure for the job, including how often to meet, how to react in a crisis situation and how to evaluate week-by-week and at the conclusion of the relationship.

## Renegotiation

Circumstances and relationships may require the covenant to be evaluated and rewritten. This should be done by common consent and the adjustment mutually agreed upon. Notations should be placed on the original covenant indicating the changes.

## Supervisory Session

The supervisory session is one of the most important elements of the supervisory process. The success or failure of the supervisory experience stands or falls on what happens here. This is a structured time in which the supervisor and the volunteer are able to communicate issues related to task and/or personhood matters. The experience of ministry is not enough by itself. The volunteers should be able to exact the meaningfulness of the experience and assess how they used their skills. The most effective way to realize this result is through a supervisory session. The supervisor leads volunteers through exercises to help them better understand themselves and the actual performance in ministry. Elements of a supervisory session include:

- Pre-session work of the supervisor.
- Ritual of mutuality.
- Setting agenda for the session—supervisor's plus volunteer's.
- Discussion of personhood and task issues related to volunteer's life and ministry.
- Review of the supervisory session and planning for the next meeting.

The supervisory session begins with the supervisor's preparation before the meeting. Preparation is the key to a successful session. The supervisor should review tasks and personhood issues that should be reviewed during the meeting with the volunteer. Time should be spent before and after the scheduled session processing the elements of the meeting.

The supervisory session should begin with a mutual ritual because there is a psychological need to sense a kind of commonality. This period should not last too long or it may be counterproductive. One liability is to extend this period for several minutes so that supervisor and volunteer do not have to face confrontive issues.

The supervisor may review his or her agenda with the volunteer. This will make the volunteer aware of what is projected. Sharing the agenda also causes the supervisor to think through the goals for the session.

The supervisor should ask for the volunteer's agenda for the session. The volunteer may have a critical issue that needs the supervisor's attention.

As the conference progresses, the supervisor should review the period since the last supervisory session. The supervisor should learn how the volunteer feels about what he/she has experienced and how he/she perceives the ministry. This is a time of accountability and possibly confrontation and/or affirmation with regard to matters of personhood or task orientation. At this time the volunteer should also project his or her continued plans for

ministry and discuss them with the supervisor. This is the time when the heart of the supervisory session is approached. It represents a time of reflection, sharing, examination and discovery.

One of the most important things a supervisor can do is to help the volunteer realize how God is working in and through his/her life and ministry. Being able to sense God's moving in a person's life is a tremendous source of motivation. If the volunteer can recognize the moving of God in his/her ministry, the volunteer is likely to sense a feeling of worth and accomplishment.

Theologizing should be a part of every supervisory session. Develop, with the volunteer, the ability to think theologically. Theology is the arch that takes place when man meets man and God meets man. The arch results at the point of relationship realization.

The supervisor, following the session, should make notes on the impressions, expectations and issues that will be important for the next meeting.

## Motivation Factors

Motivation, an important factor in achievement and relationships, should be recognized by the supervisor. Motivation may be self-imposed or given by others.

Reasons for being a volunteer may change after beginning stages of the assignment. Altruistic motives may initiate a commitment, but other motives emerge as tasks become daily work.

The supervisor should understand the volunteer to be a unique individual and a special person. Understanding the volunteer as a person may help in understanding his or her behavior and in selecting the better method for motivation.

*Financial Reward* is considered the primary motivator. However, behavioral scientists have determined that monetary motivation is short-lived and often ineffective. Other motivators must be used with volunteers so they will understand why they are serving.

*Guilt may be a motivator.* Obsessive guilt may cause volunteers to act compulsively. Some supervisors motivate by using a person's guilt or by generating new feelings of guilt.

*Shame* is sometimes used by supervisors to motivate, accusing people of inferior work, threatening to send them home in shame or making them ashamed before God.

*Fear* or loss, physically or vocationally, motivate some people.

*Reality* becomes a standard to measure activities. Some people are not sensitive to the standards of others; however, they can be brought face to face with the reality of the outcome of their continued behavior.

*Love* causes people do things for others every day. You see it among friends and family as well as in a ministry setting. Because of love, mothers, ministers, and volunteers do things that they have no desire to do.

*Dreams* are one of the most powerful motivating forces. A person with a dream will work hard to make the dream a reality. A supervisor can share a dream with a volunteer, and together they can work to fulfill that dream.

Three distinct motives<sup>2</sup> that affect people's work-related behavior are: (1) the need for achievement, which is characterized by wanting to do personal best; (2) the need for power, which is characterized by the desire to influence (control) others; and (3) the need for affiliation, which is characterized by a concern with being liked and accepted in interpersonal relationships.

Frederick Herzberg<sup>3</sup> states that the motivating factors which contribute to job satisfaction are achievement, recognition, work itself, responsibility, advancement, and growth. The supervision of volunteers will include strategies for increasing motivation on the job.

Here is a summarized motivation from the volunteer's viewpoint with the following:<sup>4</sup>

If you want my loyalty; interests, and best efforts, remember that:

"I need a SENSE OF BELONGING, a feeling that I am honestly needed for my total self, not just for my hands, not because I take orders well.

I need to have a sense of sharing in planning our objectives. My need will be satisfied only when I feel that *my* ideas have had a fair hearing.

I need to feel that the goals and objectives arrived at are *within reach* and that they make sense to *me*.

*I need to feel that what I'm doing has real purpose* or contributes to human welfare—that its value extends even beyond my personal gain, or hours.

I need to share in *making the rules* by which, together, we shall live and work toward our goals.

I need to know in some clear detail just what is expected of me—not only my detailed task but where I have opportunity to make personal and final decisions.

I need to have some *responsibilities that challenge*, that are within range of my abilities and interests, and that contribute toward reaching my assigned goal, and that cover all goals.

I need to *see* that *progress* is being made toward the goals we have set.

I need to be kept informed. What I'm not *up* on, I may be *down* on. (Keeping me informed is one way to give me status as an individual.)

I need to have confidence in my superiors—confidence based upon assurance of consistent fair treatment, or recognition when it is due, and trust that loyalty will bring increased security.”

## Stages of Supervision

Within a supervisory relationship, both supervisor and volunteer progress through specific stages. It is important for the supervisor to identify and plan for the different stages.

### The Get-Acquainted Stage

In the beginning, the supervisor and volunteer need to share their pilgrimages in life, to understand each other and to see each other as genuine human beings who have a mutual Lord and ministry.

The “get-acquainted stage” should include a way to ritualize the new relationship. For example, in a Sunday morning worship service, special attention may be given to the volunteer through a special prayer dedication, a testimony by the volunteer and/or a note about the volunteer in the church bulletin. Written material should include biographical data and specifics about the volunteer’s assignment.

The ritual is the signal that the tasks have begun and the person now has responsibility. The supervisory structure should be high at first in order to give the conditions for possible renegotiations, for affirmation, and for feedback.

The “get-acquainted stage” is the time for the covenant to be developed. The supervisor should acquaint the volunteer with the structure which includes physical facilities, organization structure, and the functioning system.

### The Task Stage

The “task stage” is the period when the tasks are done by the volunteer. It is a time for continuous supervision with feedback in a routine manner highlighted by regular sessions with the volunteer. From time to time during the “task stage” the supervisor and volunteer may wish to go over and/or renegotiate the covenant.

The supervisor should be aware that any change may be interpreted as loss. Change is one of the most stressful elements that can invade the life of a volunteer. Excess stress often brings dysfunction, disorientation, and unhappiness. If a change in the covenant is made, the supervisor should be aware of this liability.

## The Termination Stage

Termination begins the first day the volunteer arrives. However, there should be a specific time that the supervisor consciously deals with termination feelings and reality. If it has been a good experience, the volunteer will face a sense of loss when leaving the situation and the people to whom he has ministered. It may be difficult to leave behind unfinished tasks. The volunteer who has not experienced obvious success may have feelings of frustration. The supervisor should deal with these and other feelings.

The supervisor should help the volunteer to recognize that there will be a change of relationship. The volunteer will no longer have an official responsibility and must “let go” of the work.

The “termination stage” should help the volunteer to realize and conclude his or her work. The supervisor can help the volunteer to recognize that the end is approaching and it is time to tie up loose ends that include task issues, role issues, and helps for transition. One liability is that it is easy to deny that the end of this relationship has come.

The “termination stage” should ritualize the conclusion of the volunteer’s work. This may be done in a church service, a reception, or other special event. Part of the public termination should be to clearly define future relationships of supervisor, volunteer, and congregation or institution.

## Problems Supervisors Have With Volunteers

Volunteers may create problems instead of being the answer to problems. Some possible problems supervisors may have are:

### Lack of Volunteers

Having an insufficient number of volunteers may be due to the agency furnishing volunteers or it may be due to supervisors’ inability to motivate volunteers. The supervisor may need to examine his or her method of motivation. Providing job descriptions is one way of presenting the need for volunteers.

### Incompetent Volunteers

Supervisors with incompetent volunteers face serious problems. The supervisor may spend more time helping the volunteer to do the task than it would take to accomplish the task without the volunteer. Incompetence may be due to lack of talent or inability or crises in volunteers’ lives, because they were put in the wrong kind of job or because of mental or emotional problems.

### Overqualified Volunteers

The volunteer may overwhelm the people by being too efficient. The volunteer may relate better to the community or be more creative than the supervisor and coworkers and, therefore, be a threat to them.

### Volunteer Turnover

Many businesses and industries experience rapid turnover in employees. This also has been a problem in the ministry. The problem of retaining volunteers may be related to the supervisor's administrative or motivational ability. It may be due to problems of the volunteers, such as instability, family problems, or interests at home.

### Excess of Volunteers

Volunteers sometimes face crises when there is no significant task to perform, due to a failure in preparation or because of an excessive number of volunteers for the limited number of tasks.

### Uncooperative Volunteers

Uncooperative volunteers may be due to their perception of the work, motivation, emotional difficulty, or lack of commitment. The supervisor should examine his or her style of supervision and also the circumstances to determine if the volunteer has adequate equipment and materials.

### Antagonistic Volunteers

Volunteers may cause conflict which becomes counterproductive. The conflict may concern ideas, lifestyles, personality clashes, personal relationships, work habits, or goals.

### Potential Problems Volunteers Face

A good supervisor will be sensitive and deal with problems volunteers have on the basis of reality rather than what should be. Some possible problems volunteers may have are:

**No Job**—Volunteers have offered a significant portion of their lives, have committed themselves to the Lord's work, but may discover there is no job waiting for them.

**Insignificant Work**—Existing jobs may be insignificant and unchallenging, not matching up to the expectations of the volunteer.

**Unclear Status**—Volunteers need to know their status in relation to the tasks, other people, and the supervisor. What is their authority? Is their expertise recognized?

**Inadequate Supplies**—Inadequate (or no) supplies may be disheartening to the volunteer with a significant job. Supplies should be ordered ahead of time whenever possible so as not to waste important time.

**No Recognition**—Everyone wants recognition for accomplishments. Some volunteers want private recognition; some want public recognition. Select the method most acceptable for the person and the situation.

**No Visible Progress**—Volunteers may have difficulty recognizing progress on complex, long-term projects. The supervisor can help the volunteer to keep the task in perspective.

**Lack of Supervision**—Volunteers walk into strange settings and may not know how to start the task or what is expected of them. This can be traumatic. The supervisor should help delineate expectations and responsibilities as well as find the best approach to the work. Volunteers, when finished with a particular project, may not know what to do next. The supervisor should provide direction to the whole realm of responsibilities. A poor supervisor may keep blinders on a volunteer and hinder the work.

#### Notes:

1. Douglas MacGregor, *The Human Side of Enterprise* (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1960).
2. Marlene Wilson, *The Effective Management of Volunteer Programs* (Boulder, Colo: Volunteer Management Associates, 1976), pp. 45-49.
3. Frederick Herzberg, *Harvard Business Review*, 46, 1, (January-February 1968): 53
4. Harriet H. Naylor, *Volunteers Today* (Dryden, N.Y.: Dryden Associates, 1967, 1973), pp. 64-65.

This material by Doran McCarty is based on an adaptation of *Supervision for Volunteers: A Practical Guide for Leaders Who Supervise Mission Service Corps Volunteers* originally distributed by the former Home Mission Board, SBC, and revised by David Bunch and Bob Mills. Used by permission.