

Why Do They Do It?

Understanding the Motivation of the Volunteer Sport Manager

Mel Welch
Leeds Metropolitan University, United Kingdom

Introduction

Much has been written about the management of volunteers, and much of it is relevant to the sport and leisure industry. However, most of the literature is based on the assumption that, even in a voluntary sector organisation, the volunteers are directed, organised, and managed by professionals. The volunteer offers to help, says “What would you like me to do?” and the manager directs them.

Typically, in the areas of community and social welfare, health-related charities, and education-based projects, the infrastructure is well-established, permanently based, and well funded. The staff carry the responsibility to deliver the project and the volunteer provides a (much-appreciated) extra pair of hands to help in times of need.

So is sport any different? The answer in much of Europe is emphatically “yes”. Sports clubs are, in the main, voluntary not-for profit organisations. They have members, not shareholders. They do not belong to any governmental organisation; and they rely largely or exclusively on volunteers. These volunteers are not only relied upon to do the routine, trivial and menial tasks; they also constitute the management, the technical experts, the board members, and the financial guarantors.

Strangely, the most pronounced examples of this phenomenon are found in Great Britain, where voluntary sports clubs first emerged, and formed themselves into national sports associations (eg. Football Association (founded 1863), Rugby Football Union (1871) and Amateur Athletics Association (1880)). Other nations which copied the model quickly realised that larger sports clubs, perhaps encompassing several sports, could be much more cost-effective; make more efficient use of facilities and resources; could employ staff; and so become less dependent on volunteers.

In England, there are an estimated 106,400 voluntary sports clubs¹. 36% of all the people in Britain who work as volunteers do so in a sports club. The value of that volunteer contribution amounts to 20 Billion Euros per year²; their work would need over 700,000 full-time staff to replace them.

Project/Plan

This presentation draws on experience of observing and recording the actions of volunteer sports managers in a range of sports, over a significant period of time. It will look at the demands placed upon the volunteer sports manager. Why does he/she agree to take on the role in the first place? What skills do they bring with them, what skills do they acquire, and what skills do they lack? What are the pressures, the frustrations and the stresses that they suffer? And what are the rewards that make them carry on, year after year after year?

Results and Discussion

What happens when they eventually give up, and hand over the reins? Does the club continue smoothly and serenely? Or does it leap ahead? Or slow down, wither and die? The answer is: It all depends

References

¹ Taylor, P et al. (2003) : *Sports Volunteering Study*, commissioned by Sport England from the Leisure Industries Research Centre, Sheffield

² Attwood, C. et al (2003) *2001 Home Office Citizenship Survey: people, families and communities*, Home Office Research Study HORS270, London: Home Office.

Contact co-ordinates author

Mel Welch, e-mail: m.welch@leedsmet.ac.uk

Carnegie National Sports Development Centre, Fairfax Hall, Beckett Park, Leeds LS6 3QS, United Kingdom