

Letter to the Editor: From the Eyes of the Executive Director

Dear Editor:

I wanted to respond to the recent letter to *BoardForward* from a volunteer.

As the Executive Director of a major social service agency located in the southeast, I really appreciate volunteers who know what they want and need from staff and other volunteers. Can you send me his name so I can ask him to serve on my Board?!

Since this volunteer was extremely forthright in saying what we as staff members should be doing, I felt it appropriate to cover the other side of the tracks and outline a list of expectations that I as a staff member have of a volunteer.

As a non-profit executive for more than 25 years, I have worked with numerous volunteers. Some have been great, some not so great. Some are a joy to work with, others a real pain! I would suggest the reason that some did not work out was because of improper training and no clear understanding of expectations on the part of both staff and volunteers.

Since I would like for future Board members and volunteers to be perfect, here is my wish list...

1. Serve on the Board or a committee because you want to offer your skills and business expertise to a non-profit organization that does good for so many people. If you agree to serve you must be able to attend meetings and functions. Please do not accept a volunteer role only to list it on your resume. I have had several volunteers do this, and no one benefits from this strategy.
2. Know that serving on a Board or committee can consume some of your valuable time. You are successful and have been selected by your peers, but this is an honor that does require a time commitment.
3. Know that serving on a Board or committee takes a commitment to share your talent with us. A CPA can serve on our finance committee; an attorney can advise us on real estate transactions, etc. You bring a particular expertise to our organization that we need for the benefit of many.
4. Know that serving on a Board or committee takes a financial commitment. There is an old adage in the non-profit world: give it or get it, preferably both! As a non-profit

organization, we rely on philanthropic support to provide so many necessary services to underprivileged children. In order to secure this type of support, our Board members and volunteers must show that they are committed to the cause because many of our prospects and donors ask what Board members and other key volunteers have done. If you lead by example and make a substantial personal and/or corporate gift to the organization it makes it easy for the average donor to say yes too!

Many non-profit organizations require a certain level of contribution from all Board members and some committee members. Although we do not specify an amount, I will certainly share with you what the largest and average gifts have been, and what we hope you would consider providing for us.

Additionally, we have no better fundraisers than committed volunteers. We rely on you to solicit funds from others to help the cause. If you are making a \$10,000 gift to our organization, you become very influential and persuasive when you ask your peers to do the same. You are putting your money where your mouth is.

5. Let the staff manage the minute details. Some volunteers like to micro-manage, and this is very counterproductive. You should be an idea person, a strategizer, a visionary.
6. Help us evaluate our policies and procedures. If you do not like the way meetings run, tell me. If you do not like our training manual for volunteers, help me make it better.
7. Be a goodwill ambassador for our organization. You have clout, recognition, and prestige in the community. Please use it to promote the services we provide for so many children. Along the same lines, by promoting us to your friends, you are probably in a position to help recruit more qualified volunteers. Volunteers are the lifeblood of this organization.
8. Review the job description of a Board member or for the particular volunteer role you have been asked to accept. We have job descriptions that outline all responsibilities so that everyone knows what is expected of them. Do not accept a volunteer role if you can not reasonably perform the expected duties.
9. Clone yourself! Sooner or later your term will expire, you will move, or you will be unable to participate at your current level. Help us recruit your replacement.

Please know that I am impressed with volunteers' ability to make things happen and appreciate so much, their commitment to help us. With a firm understanding of roles and responsibilities for volunteers and staff, we can be most efficient and help those that matter most.

Name withheld by request.