

Thursday, June 14, 2012

SOV - Save our volunteers

Have you ever considered how much we rely on volunteers in our Gender Diverse community? Everything from practical offers of help, through organising cafe and restaurant nights, to running TgR happens because of volunteers.

We all benefit from those people who are generous with their time, their skills and sometimes even accidentally their money.

But, in general, volunteers seem to get a rough ride, and few stick it out for very long.

Does anyone else wonder why that is?

What causes volunteers to burn out so often?

I have been volunteering for TgR and other organisations for over 15 years now.

And it's true to say that in that time I've had some pretty rocky times as a result.

So the fact I have survived probably means I have some experience to share.

On reflection I think I have learnt one important lesson:

"No matter how dedicated you are, your motivation to help can be easily undermined by the actions of a few"

How much we would all benefit if more people were empowered to volunteer more often in our community!

Here are two "volunteer killers" that personally affect me, and I suspect many others.

Killer 1: Selflessness

This is how volunteers kill themselves - by selflessness - doing things just for others.

It sounds great that you are putting all this time and effort into something just so that others may benefit.

But the harsh reality is that pleasing everyone is an impossibility

- organise a party in a secluded location and some will feel we are hiding from society; hold it in a public location and some will be excluded because they are not comfortable in public.

If you volunteer just for others, you will soon find that everyone is not grateful and supportive, and the negative comments from a few will leave you let down and your effort devalued.

In the past I have found that just one angry person can destroy all possibility of feeling the effort was worth while.

The solution for me? Forget the unselfish motives, and focus on ensuring that if you volunteer then you also personally enjoy and get something out of it (definitely not \$\$\$!). That way the effort is validated by what it meant to you, and the negative opinions of others lose their importance.

Killer 2: Helping from the side lines

This is how some destroy the volunteers - by their unsolicited suggestions of how things could be done differently, better, cheaper, or whatever. Often well-meaning suggestions, sometimes even valid, but always thrown at the volunteer with the implication that volunteers are there to do things the way others want it done. One thing that characterises all those who try to help from the side-lines "is that they have no intention of actually volunteering to do things better themselves.

It is time to realise that unsolicited criticism like this may actually be interpreted very negatively by the volunteer.

If the volunteer appears to be unwilling to accept your opinion it may be because :

- a) they are the one who has decided to do something,
- b) they expect to be allowed to do it on their terms, and
- c) the only thing they really want from you are offers of practical help!

Most of us want to improve, and in that context getting feedback is very important. But the right time to provide feedback is when the volunteer seeks it.

The challenge

Blog Export: Sensuous in Satin, <http://adrian.tgr.net.au/blog/>

There are some positive things members can do to ensure that volunteers are rewarded and encourage them to keep on *â€˜doingâ€™*.

Not killing off our volunteers so quickly may result in a better and healthier Gender Diverse community.

Things like:

â€¢ Helping ensure that volunteers enjoy their volunteering

â€¢ Remembering that it is better to have something done for the community, even if it isnâ€™t *â€˜perfectâ€™*, than to have nothing.

â€¢ Choosing the right time to offer feedback , and presenting both positive comments as well as your suggestions for improvement

â€¢ Offering to help, or even better, starting something for the community yourself.

Posted by Adrian in Gender Diversity at 11:44