

MYTHS ABOUT VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers are different from people in an actual work setting.

Volunteers are often motivated by different factors than are employees, so they generally must be managed differently than paid workers. However, the leader must allow individuals, whether volunteer or paid, to use their individual talents and skills in becoming a part of the organization. The leader must help volunteers become good workers, even if they are not on a payroll.

A leader or advisor should not expect too much from volunteers.

On the contrary, leaders and advisors have every right to expect a great deal from volunteers. However, these expectations cannot be kept a secret from members. They must be communicated clearly and directly, and such communication should be repeated when appropriate.

Volunteers should not expect too much from their leader.

While it is true that volunteers should not have unreasonable expectations, certain expectations are very appropriate. One reasonable expectation of a leader is that she or he will give appropriate feedback, monitor performance and respond appropriately to volunteers' performance. Leaders may inform volunteers of what they may expect from the leadership, solicit expectations from the membership, and/or negotiate mutual expectations. A volunteer agreement is an effective mechanism to formalize these expectations.

Volunteers on student program boards and committees are not important enough to worry about firing.

Not so! In addition to the value of program boards and committees as laboratories for applied learning, these organizations generally spend public funds (student activity fees). Therefore, accountability becomes a very real concern for leaders and advisors. The effective functioning of group members should indeed be a very important objective.

Volunteers are too valuable to be fired.

Although it is true that volunteers are the lifeblood of our organizations, it is precisely because they are so valuable that leaders or advisors should not allow volunteers to hurt organizations or other members through irresponsible behavior. If these persons cannot change, or if the leader is unable to help them become positive contributors to the organization, then they probably should be removed from it.

Source: Sara Boatman, "How to Fire a Volunteer," *Student Activities Programming*, March, 1981.