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## **Transition Strategies for the Volunteer World**

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### **(Editor-generated) Abstract**

*The author discusses the changing roles of professional volunteer managers in the 1980's as organized around seven transitions: changing volunteer participants, changing roles and systems, changing organization structures, pushes to collaboration, changing values, and the increased need for planning. Specific management strategies are described for each transition.*

### **(Editor-generated) Key Words:**

change, transition, management, strategies

This is the most exciting, challenging, vital, vibrant time to be alive and active in the Volunteer World. It is in transit. We are moving from the no longer to the not yet. Indeed, our arena might be characterized by these five Cs: Change, Challenge, Creativity, Choice, and Collaboration.

Nationally and internationally, the Volunteer World is in transition, it is moving from the past to the present, and from the present to the future. If we manage, indeed strategize, these transitions carefully we can impact the direction of change, and we can be proactive in directing the changes in ways we desire. The time between now and the changed situation is the "Transition State," and it is this state we must learn to manage. We must learn transition management skills and strategies.

I have selected seven transitions for this paper. I shall describe each one and suggest some of the Strategy Challenges we must meet as Transition Managers. The seven transitions are:

1. Changing volunteer participants
2. Changing money picture
3. Changing roles and systems
4. Changing organization structures
5. Pushes to Collaboration
6. Changing values
7. Increased need for planning

### **Transition No. 1**

The change is from limited participation to ever broader involvement of people and organizations. People range from: young to older; native born to newcomers; well-heeled to many economic levels; middle class to a variety of life styles; healthy to at-risk populations; white to more colorful and varied racial, ethnic, and religious groups.

Systems that are involved include: foundations; national coalitions; voluntary social agencies; government agencies; corporations; inter-system networks. Among the priorities these systems now have are emphases on volunteer person-power.

*Strategy Challenges: Transition Management*

It will be necessary to develop new and creative ways to involve and integrate new populations, and to become familiar and comfortable with organizations different from our own so that collaboration becomes easy and natural. We need to be clear about and proud of our strengths, skills, and knowledge, and know how to communicate these.

**Transition No. 2**

We are moving from a stance of plenty to one of doing more, better with less.

We have thought until recently that we have all the human and material resources available to us if we but knew how to tap them. We are now keenly aware that monies, materials, time, environmental and human resources are limited indeed, and that jobs are limited, the rate of unemployment is high, and it will probably remain so. Therefore we need to involve the unemployed populations.

*Strategy Challenges: Transition Management*

Our options include: to develop new and different funding patterns and sources; to barter for services, space, equipment usage; to find all the ways in which volunteers and professionals can extend and humanize our services; to learn to understand and utilize new technologies; to become more accountable and cost effective; to evaluate our services, to scrutinize our goal and mission statements and, if necessary, to reprioritize and re-order them or develop new ones; to utilize the corporate responsibility emphasis and commitment more than we have in the past.

**Transition No. 3**

The change is from limited, defined roles for volunteers to an expanded human resource development philosophy and practice. This includes the development of human service teams with different skills, knowledge, and resources—a combination of professional volunteers from a variety of backgrounds and disciplines. Volunteers will be working with caring, skillful, supportive professional persons in a variety of arenas, such as research, advocacy of all kinds, decision making, connecting disparate people and services, administrative assistance, fund finding, training of volunteers and staff, and giving direct services.

*Strategy Challenges: Transition Management*

- to develop flexible, realistic job descriptions for volunteers and staff
- to develop volunteer personnel policies
- to develop ways to communicate and work with Unions and professional associations
- to increase understanding and decrease conflict
- to develop new, creative ways to recognize the contributions of volunteers and staff
- to develop explicit career ladders for volunteers and staff
- to increase the possibility of equal opportunities to volunteer through creation of enabling funds for out-of-pocket expenses
- to open the system and its communication possibilities to give the best, most effective and humane service possible to the programs, clients, constituents, consumers, patients, patrons, members

#### **Transition No. 4**

There is a clear movement from hierarchical organization structures to flatter, more participative organization structures and communication patterns. This means participation in influencing the system at every level of the organization, including a change in leadership patterns and changes in meeting patterns to make meetings more participatory and productive. Open system and temporary system models will become a reality, placing responsibility and authority where action needs to be taken. Systems will need to be continuously open to change and experimentation, with personnel learning transition management strategies and skills.

##### *Strategy Challenges: Transition Management*

- to develop communication avenues between all parts of the system
- to offer leadership/management training opportunities in-house and outside
- to study organization structure and how services can be delivered most effectively
- to expose management persons to all of the alternatives of governance and management paradigms
- to see resistance to change as a natural phenomenon, and including resistant persons in all planning activities
- to change hours of service because 24 hour communities will demand different hours

#### **Transition No. 5**

From turfdom and territoriality we will move to collaboration and networking within and between systems and organizations. This is a key

transition which will make it possible to utilize each others' resources, ideas, knowledge, spaces and places. It will enrich all the participants and their client systems. It will be necessary to learn to accept differences of commitment on the part of different persons and groups. It will be important to communicate goals and purposes in clear, useful ways. Transition provides a beautiful opportunity to learn about and from others.

##### *Strategy Challenges: Transition Management*

- It will be useful and important to:
- develop skills and be willing to risk to initiate;
  - know what resources others have that you need;
  - be willing to share leadership and other resources;
  - document what you do so others can learn from it;
  - learn how to work productively with the corporate world and other systems.

#### **Transition No. 6**

We are moving from clear accepted norms and values to shifting and changing values. These include the following transitions: from rootedness to mobility; from commitment to temporariness; from respect for authority to questioning and confrontation of authority and expertness; from a definition of success meaning income and upward mobility to success meaning very different things to different people, i.e., visibility, making a difference, etc.; from accepted Judeo-Christian motivations to volunteer to a great variety of motivations, i.e., job explorations, cause orientation, meaningful retirement activities,

transition from one way of life to another.

*Strategy Challenges: Transition Management*

We shall need to: develop some temporary, short-term volunteer jobs offering choices/ alternatives to volunteers; initiate reciprocal evaluations and feedback (professionals and volunteers); consult rather than supervise; refer volunteers to other places and spaces; share staff and volunteer expertise across systems; develop new and different additional ways to recruit, place, and train both volunteers and staff through group interviews, computer hookups, telephone conferences, video cassettes, and portable, flexible, individualized training.

**Transition No. 7**

There is a push to move from little or no focus on the future toward more thinking about the future and how to plan to meet it. Included here should be: development of knowledge banks and literature about the character of the future, . and involvement of many to define preferred futures. Much knowledge is available about scenarios of the future, and many techniques have been developed to do realistic planning.

*Strategy Challenges: Transition Management*

Knowledge and skill must be developed: to utilize planning methods that focus on what can be, rather than only what we would like to have; to involve many people who will be affected by the plans in the planning or in influencing the planning; to analyze where we have come from, where we are, and where we are going and/ or

want to go; to know our "prouds" and "sorries"; to know our strengths and the things we need to change; to utilize left and right brain capabilities in thinking and planning; to take time to develop doable and realistic goals.

**Transition Challenges and Choices**

This leaves us with some challenges and choices:

To meet client and system needs in new and creative ways or deprive ourselves of much that is available and useful.

To involve and integrate additional populations or remain without the beauty of difference we so need to be creative and pro-active.

To involve all parts of the system in planning and change making or risk building or increasing the resistance to change.

To experiment or develop alternatives and choices or be a prisoner of the familiar.

To celebrate steps of movement and change or worry and be stressed by the gap between where we are and where we want to go.

To welcome today and look forward to tomorrow or prolong the problems and puzzlements of yesterday.

Lucky are we who live at a time of transition, for we have the opportunity to create, to change, to choose, to collaborate, and to celebrate that we are here as difference makers!!

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### **About the Author**

At the time this article was written, Eva Schindler-Rainman, D.S.W. was an internationally-known consultant and trainer in volunteerism and organizational management. She has authored or co-authored numerous books, including *The Volunteer Community*. She was the recipient of the 1983 Distinguished Member Service Award given by the Association for Volunteer Administration.