**Topic 9e3: Firing a Volunteer**

**Objectives**

The user will gain an overview and guidance for the termination of a volunteer's services from this topic.

**Student Preparation Required:**

* Familiarization with previous parts of Topic 9 addressing volunteer roles, descriptions and relations.

**Information**

Volunteers **can** be fired. No one likes it, no one looks forward to it, but the reality is that there are times when this is the only solution to a problem. As a leader, you have the responsibility to assure a cohesive (even if hectic) team that is goal focused, not dealing with disruptive, non- performing people. When you allow a bad volunteer to continue, it festers and degrades the morale of the entire team.

In business situations, there are regular protocols and procedures to terminate an employee. As a volunteer leader, you should have similar set processes that you can draw upon as needed. These should be well planned ahead of any need, allowing you to fall back to the plan and not get emotionally involved.

**Why Fire A Volunteer?**

Either of two basic reasons may be involved:

1. **Performance** - issues such as the quality, timeliness, reliability, training and professionalism of the volunteer.
2. **Conduct** - issues such as their honesty, honor, courtesy, respect for others and basic social skills needed to be part of a functional team.

The nice part is that conduct and performance are addressed in the job descriptions of ARES leaders. The bad part is that expectations for most rank and file members are not so well defined. In any case, you are far better to address problems early in their symptoms, not wait and hope they will "settle down" - they rarely do! Usually a negative behavior will only accelerate until it becomes a manager's nightmare and then you have the added problem of seeming to have condoned it.

**The Process**

Every group should have **in writing**the behaviors that will simply not be tolerated under**any** circumstance. (For example, threatening physical harm to another member.)

In addition, you should outline a disciplinary process. Most processes involve a graduated process moving from verbal warning, to written warnings, suspension and finally dismissal.   Each level of the process needs to be done on a face-to-face basis and usually, but not necessarily, involves higher and higher levels of ARES leadership.

Lacking a human resources department, you should alert and possibly even meet with your Section Manager, SEC and/or DEC if you go beyond a verbal warning.   No leader likes to be cornered on a personnel issue without background information.

Remember the goal of any warning or action is to change the behavior, not to punish.   Any such warning should be specific and include information about what and how to change - plus a specific timeline for re-evaluation of the change.

But what if you actually have to fire a volunteer?

Someone wisely wrote, "Not everyone wants to get fixed." Indeed, some personalities thrive on chaos, drama and confrontation. Sometimes, you simply are not going to win.

If you find that you must ask a volunteer to leave, the following pages have a few guidelines, based on the work of Steve McCurley and Sue Vineyard (see resources).

Never act out of anger. Go chill out first!

Have you worked through all the levels of the process? If not, is there a very good, defensible reason why not?

Schedule a meeting with the person, in a private setting.

Be prepared. The person is likely not going to happy with anything you say. This is not a time for winning friends. There is nothing left to debate. Rather, plan what you are going to say, possibly script your comments, and stay on task. Preparation also includes informing your DEC, SEC or SM of the situation, and the rationale for the action.

Have a third person in the room with you, preferably someone of the same sex as the person being terminated. This person does not need to say anything and serves as a witness to the situation. You can tell the person being terminated that you invited the third person as an observer.

State the reasons for the termination and present them in writing. Allow the person to sign the document indicating they understand what is being said.

Focus any comments **only** on the performance issues or how conduct impairs team performance and avoid personal issues or value comments.

Discuss any recommendations for future volunteer work with the person. This may include whether and under what conditions the person may return and volunteer again (if ever).

Secure the return of any keys, name tags, or other work-related items from the person before you conclude the meeting.

Current personnel practices generally include escorting the person from the premises following the meeting.

**Do everything you can to stay calm.**

Say only what needs to be said and nothing more. It is easy to start talking excessively when nervous and this could lead to confusion, mixed messages or incorrect interpretations of your actions.

Document the meeting. If possible, have your third person witness sign your report.

Be sure to exercise damage control. If the volunteer has friends among other volunteers you may want to let his or her friends know that the volunteer will not be returning. Although you must protect the confidentiality of the person let go, you also want to stem the tide of gossip and misinformation.

Do not provide any letters of reference for a fired volunteer.

**References**

More information on this and related topics is at:

* **www.volunteerhub.com/blog/difficult-volunteers/**
* **www.nonprofithub.org/volunteer-management/how-and-when-to-let-a-volunteer-go/**
* TERMINATE OR TOLERATE?

Dealing With a Problem Volunteer

**http://srdc.msstate.edu/trainings/presentations\_archive/2003/2003\_mm\_groff.pdf**

**Review**

Volunteers can be fired and there are occasions when this is the only solution to a problem that impairs the ability of an ARES team to function. Causative factors usually are performance or conduct issues. A standard, pre-determined, written procedure involving graduated steps is important and should be followed.

**Student Activities**

1. Roleplay a firing scenario with someone on your team. Make up a situation as you go along.   Let them try to aggravate you or get you to overreact. Note how hard it is to stay on topic and calm.
2. Now make up a prepared script or outline of how it **should** be done.
3. What are the standard procedures in place for your section?  If none, write up a draft process.

**Topic 9 Section E3 Knowledge Review**

In order to demonstrate mastery of the information presented in the topic, you will be asked a series of un-graded questions. There are approximately 5 questions on the following pages in multiple-choice or true/false format. Feedback will be offered to you based on the answer you provide. In some cases, you may be directed back to the area of the topic where a review might benefit you in order to find the correct answer.

Question 1

Which of the following statements concerning termination of a volunteer is most true?

1. They cannot be terminated, only transferred.
2. They can easily be terminated at any time without consequences to the team.
3. They can be terminated.
4. They cannot cause problems after being terminated.

Question 2

In a termination meeting, the leader should:

1. Respond politely to the volunteer's inquiries and arguments.
2. Have a script and stay on it.
3. Try to remain good friends.
4. Meet with the volunteer alone.

Question 3

Which of the following best describes a valid reason for delaying a termination, even though there is good cause for the termination?

1. Allows the volunteer to change for the better on their own.
2. May be appropriate if other process steps have not been followed.
3. Will always have a positive effect on the rest of the team.
4. Gives you time to delegate the problem to your SEC.

Question 4

Which of the following statements describing termination are false?

1. There are occasions where a termination is required to maintain the rest of the team.
2. Some people do not want to be "fixed" and thrive on discontent and drama.
3. In any termination meeting you should have a witness of the same sex as the volunteer being terminated.
4. Do not document anything - it can only be used against you in court.

Question 5

Which of the following should not be done concerning the termination interview?

1. Provide the person being terminated with a written (and oral) reason for termination.
2. Schedule a public meeting with the person and the rest of the team as observers.
3. Say only what you need to say, according to a prepared script.
4. Secure the return of ID cards and any other team property.

**Correct Answers**

1 c

2 b

3 b

4 d

5 b