

Working with Volunteer Auxiliary Boards

Paid Managers Reporting to a Volunteer Board

Across the country on any given day, gift shop volunteers are busy checking in merchandise, lovingly dusting shelves, and ringing up sales in their efforts to raise funds for their hospitals.

Many of these gift shops employ paid managers to run day-to-day operations and ensure continuity of management. And, in many of these shops, paid managers and governing volunteer boards share the full responsibility of decision making in their shops.

In these partnerships, it's important that both parties develop a synergistic relationship whereby each depends on the other and helps the other succeed.

Paid managers operating in a volunteer environment will be required to exercise many skills. They may often function as minister, ombudsman, controller, creative spark, friend, maintenance supervisor, motivator, coach and counselor—while always remaining credible, available and visible. Paid managers need to be able to make adjustments to be all things to all volunteers.

Constant practice and development of people skills are required. And because of an annual change of volunteer officers serving on various boards and/or committees, paid managers need to adapt and make quick adjustments to new leadership and different philosophies. Managers may also be challenged to subordinate themselves to many “bosses,” who often have different agendas. Sometimes this places gift shop managers between a rock and a hard place, requiring patience and a strong sense of diplomacy.

Above all, managers need to keep their eyes on shop objectives and move the volunteer and paid staff team toward meeting goals consistent with the board's goals.

Board Responsibilities

What can managers expect from a volunteer board of directors?

In order to remain vital, enthusiastic and involved, managers need volunteer board members to treat them fairly, be sensitive to the demands of their position, and to recognize the achievement of their personal and professional goals.

It is essential that the volunteer board of directors provide the manager with a clearly defined job description, one that will allow the manager to prioritize tasks.

Annual evaluations, carefully prepared and presented, will be a tremendous help to a paid manager. Evaluations need to be balanced, giving equal emphasis to successes as well as to managerial shortcomings. And a manager's performance needs to be measured against objective criteria, not opinion.

The manager should be provided with feedback in the form of constructive criticism, offered in a supportive climate that enhances productivity and morale. Feedback should encourage independent thinking, innovation and improvement.

The advantages of such an approach to evaluation are many. Paid managers will often respond favorably to assessments based on measurable criteria and to criticism based on objective facts rather than subjective observation.

Volunteer boards of directors need to allow the paid manager to manage. Evaluations should ensure that the manager will have an opportunity to respond to problem areas that they identify.

If the board allows for an occasional management error, members will also recognize the need to provide the manager with an opportunity to recommend an action plan for resolution of problems and to effect change.

The board should recognize the manager's contributions toward meeting stated and agreed-upon objectives. Focusing on the manager's achievements rather than solely on weak areas will both encourage and perpetuate excellence.

The paid manager and board of directors should find a "balance" that provides the greatest amount of satisfaction for the greatest number of people. When both the

manager and the volunteers find personal satisfaction, achievement and growth, the gift shop experiences the strongest return on its investment of resources.

Attention to basics like a clear outline of job responsibilities, careful annual evaluations, constructive feedback, and enough “leeway” to ensure that the paid manager has management styles and options is important.

Annual Financial Report

The shop manager should present the shop’s monthly financial reports to the Board regularly. This report should be totally separate from the Auxiliaries’ financial report.

The report should not only track gross and net merchandise sales but sales totals for each category. It is crucial that all operating expenses are tracked including incidentals like technology fees, equipment maintenance, postage, travel, office and shop suppliers, printing and copying.

And, lastly, it is important to know what the profit margin is for each department.