

Orientation and Training of Volunteers

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The gathering of a missions staff of volunteers is an exciting event filled with potential. Each volunteer represents an individual called of God to the task of missions. Each volunteer brings a set of his or her hopes, anxieties, expectations, needs, goals, and talents. The orientation process can serve to bring together these individual volunteers as a family bound together in a shared call. It can bind them in understanding, in purpose, and in mission. As such, the orientation process is an important function of ministry that helps assure a healthy and creative staff.

To invest yourself in the orientation process means that you hold several key presuppositions. In terms of theology, a desire for good orientation begins with a deep appreciation of the volunteer. There must be a sense of value for the work of the laity in the church and a desire to enable these volunteers to fulfill their call to be God's people. Along these same lines, a good orientation presupposes a desire to promote the unity of the church through binding the volunteer with you and your ministry. The corporate nature of the church is recognized and enhanced through the orienting of a staff.

A second set of presuppositions is based upon sociological distinctions. As a supervisor and trainer of volunteers, you must understand who the volunteer is as an individual and as a member of societal groups. Volunteers are concerned Christians who are answering a call to missions. They come from different backgrounds and age groups. Questions must be asked as to who these persons are: "What are today's college students like?" "What issues are senior adults facing?" "What dynamics operate in mission groups today?" Understanding the volunteer leads to a more productive relationship.

A final set of presuppositions concerns supervision itself. It is important to reiterate the fact that supervision is ministry and is even missions. The orientation and training of volunteers is an act of equipping the saints and, as such, deserves to be recognized as ministry. These presuppositions point us to the orientation process and call us to take seriously the training of volunteers in missions.

What Is Orientation?

Orientation is the process of locating oneself in relation to one's surroundings. As a process, it begins whenever one enters a new environment and continues as that environment changes. It involves determining one's position with relation to that environment and to particular persons, things, and fields of knowledge. Orientation establishes your presence and role in relation to all that surrounds you. Orientation enables you to find where you are and how you fit.

What Are the Results of Orientation?

The orientation process provides immediate benefits in terms of the supervisor-volunteer relationship and the ministry accomplished by the missions work. The supervisor will find that a good orientation lowers the amount of time spent in maintenance or administration. Further, such early time spent with the volunteer allows the supervisor the opportunity of awareness. The supervisor can gather personal data and impressions on the volunteer that can head off future problems and lead to better utilization of that volunteer.

The results of orientation for the volunteer focus on:

- the enhancement of personal and spiritual growth
- the diminishing of culture shock
- the creation of a team spirit
- the elevation of the importance of the volunteer and the missions task
- the preparation for specific ministries

What Are Some Principles of Orientation?

Orientation is an element of supervision and, as such, is a function of an equipping ministry. It is a process that begins before the volunteer arrives and carries over into a binding relationship. Orientation is best built on a relational approach that seeks to answer questions. Finally, it is designed to merge expectations, needs, goals, and actions of both sides of the relationship.

What Are the Goals of This Process?

A sound orientation has as its goal to provide understanding in three areas — relational, practical, and purposeful.

Relational goals are designed to (1) establish and enhance communication, (2) affirm the worth of the volunteer, (3) assure him or her of being in place, and (4) provide guidance that assures a successful beginning. Personal communication is needed between the supervisor and volunteer as soon as the appointment is made. A brief phone call provides a good opening to the relationship.

As the orientation process begins on the field, volunteers need to feel welcomed and needed. Further, their doubts, fears, and anxieties can be lessened simply by the structure of the orientation. They learn where they are and how they fit; thus, answering many of their questions. It is important to begin with healthy and wholesome relationships between supervisors and volunteers and among the volunteers themselves. Relational goals answer the questions: “Where am I going?” “Where am I?” “Who are you?” and “Who are they?”

Practical goals (1) provide for the understanding of tasks, (2) introduce the resources necessary for those tasks, and (3) provide the training in using resources and accomplishing tasks. At this point of the orientation, it is important to present the history and purpose of your ministry. Your personal approach to missions and to ministry is also valid material to share, although it would be unfair to expect all volunteers to always invest in your approach.

The goal is to enable the volunteer to understand what you are trying to accomplish with your ministry. Upon introducing the resources necessary for the tasks at hand, it is important to provide adequate time to become familiar with materials, equipment, and programs. Training to accomplish tasks is time consuming. Further, it is best if the supervisor does not assume that the volunteers have certain skills or talents necessary for the tasks. For best results, start from the beginning and slowly develop the skills. Practical goals answer the questions: “Why are we here?” “What is that?” and “How do I do it?”

Purposeful goals (1) establish a covenant, (2) bind the volunteers together as a team and family, and (3) provide the supportive structure within which the volunteers function. The use of covenants will be discussed further in this chapter, but it is important to note that covenants serve as a tool to define the working relationship between the volunteer and supervisor.

Binding volunteers together as a team and family is best done through special orientation events designed for that purpose. Common experiences through which they have played, suffered, prayed, and worshiped serve to bring them together and build community. A gentle and affirming moment of initiation (such as a sunrise hike and Bible study or giving of staff shirts) for each volunteer goes a long way to affirm and bind them. Ongoing staff meetings, worship services, evaluations, and celebrations provide the support volunteers need to perform ably. Purposeful goals answer the questions: “Who are you?” “How am I doing?” “How did I do?” and “Is that all?”

What Questions Should Orientation Answer?

The answering of questions from all parties involved provides a framework with which to structure your specific orientation. The following sample outline proposes several basic questions. There is plenty of room to add your own questions and to arrange for the specific use of time. Some orientations cover these areas in two days while others are afforded an entire week. You must balance the amount of time available, its use, and the material to be covered. These questions are designed to give direction to your efforts.

Where Am I Going?

- I. Before the Staff Arrives
 - A. Phone call and letter of greeting
 - B. Information packet
 1. List of what to bring
 2. Local maps and brochures
 - C. Prayer partners

Where Am I?

- II. Geographical
 - A. Tour the area

- B. Points of interest
 - 1. Historical sites, action sites, ministry sites, et cetera.
- C. Experience the setting

Why Are We Here?

III. Purpose and Background of Ministry

- A. What is your kind of missions?
- B. Goals of your mission work.
- C. History of your ministry.
- D. Personal approach to ministry and missions

Who Are You?

IV. People Involved in Ministry

- A. Staff
 - 1. Introductions
 - a. Supervisor(s)
 - b. Associational director of missions and staff
 - c. Local pastor
 - d. Relevant people
 - 2. Sharing time: Volunteers tell who they are
 - a. Personal interests, talents, situations, and so forth
 - b. Pilgrimage and calling
- B. Volunteer: Your new identity
 - 1. Covenanting: A process
- C. Staff initiation: Gentle affirmation

Who Are They?

V. Relationships

- A. Your supervisors
- B. Other staff
 - 1. Living in peace: staff rules
 - 2. Conflict management and discouragement
 - 3. Local churches
 - 4. Ministry sites
 - 5. Local culture
 - 6. Other groups active in the area

How Can I Keep Going?

VI. Maintaining Your Spiritual Level

- A. Time alone with God: Devotional encouragement and guidance
- B. Family groups or prayer partners
- C. Staff meetings and staff worship

What Is That?

VII. Equipment

- A. Tell them how to use resources necessary for the tasks.
- B. Show them how to use the resources necessary for the tasks.
- C. Let them practice with the resources.

How Do I Do It?

VIII. Methods of Ministry: Practical Training

- A. One-to-one witnessing
- B. Worship: Designed for ministry sites
- C. Program training: Vacation Bible School, Day Camp, Backyard Bible Clubs, et cetera.
- D. Special skills training: Music, puppets, clowning, and so forth.
- E. Other tasks relevant to your area

How Am I Doing?

IX. On the Job

- A. Covenanting process continues
- B. Reports and evaluations
- C. Time off: Supervisor time/volunteer time

How Did I Do?

X. It's Time to Go

- A. Closing of ministry relationships: Teach them how
- B. Preparation for re-entering the "regular" world
 - 1. What responses to expect
 - 2. Telling about their experiences
- C. Farewell worship and fellowships
- D. Summer evaluation

Is That All?

XI. You Are Still Important: A Continuing Relationship

- A. Staying in touch: Newsletters, et cetera.
- B. Praying for each other

These questions provide a sound outline for developing a notebook or handout of orientation materials for the volunteer. Such a tool is needed, along with a schedule of how it will be taught.

One of the central problems of the orientation and training time is that of readiness learning on the part of the volunteers. They are often overwhelmed by the tasks, materials, and culture before them and, as a result, fail to grasp what is being taught. Patience and the challenge of doing it themselves are necessary to develop teachable moments while using such an outline.

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