

BEING A VOLUNTEER SUPERVISOR

9 Common Mistakes



ALPHA KAPPA PSI

The Professional Business Fraternity

Introduction

As a supervisor, it's easy to get caught up in your responsibilities and forget about those you're leading. Try to avoid these common mistakes when working with volunteers.





Under-communicating

Don't let your volunteers fail by not providing them all the relevant information. It's better to give more information than not enough.

If you only communicate when you need your volunteer to do something for you, that doesn't foster a positive relationship. Too little communication can also lead to misunderstandings. Set up volunteers for success by giving them what they need ahead of time.





Managing Expectations

As a supervisor, remember that those you oversee are donating their time to the Fraternity.

Putting too much pressure on them and expecting more than they're capable of can cause unneeded stress and frustration. Incorporate constant communication within your team to ensure your volunteers remain productive and excited about their work.



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Forgetting to check-in

With so many responsibilities, it's common for a small task to slip your mind, especially if it was one you might not fully understand. Follow-up from a supervisor could be the one thing a volunteer needs to complete a task correctly.

As a supervisor, it's important to check in periodically to ensure your volunteers both remember their tasks and deadlines and to see if they have any questions. Even if a volunteer is doing well, checking in will remind them you are available to help. Frequently touching base can keep everyone motivated, on task, and successful.



The benefit of having multiple volunteers is the division of labor. Show volunteers you trust them by letting them do their own work.

While it is important to frequently touch base, don't hover. Some volunteers may want or need additional assistance, but trust your volunteers to use their experiences and backgrounds to accomplish tasks and make the right decisions. If they need help or guidance, give them time to ask you.



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Projecting overly strong opinions

As leaders, other volunteers emphasize your words and actions. Being overly opinionated can influence your volunteers in ways you won't anticipate.

Opinions are personal, and projecting those on others can prevent volunteers from forming their own thoughts. Sometimes, those opinions can be misinterpreted as fact as well. Unless directly requested, consider keeping strong opinions to yourself to refrain from creating a hostile environment or a misunderstanding.





Being inconsistent

When volunteers notice a variety of policies and expectations, it's difficult to know what to uphold. Maintaining consistency will keep all volunteers on the same page.

As a supervisor, volunteers will look to you for knowledge and guidance. Inconsistency of policy terms, communication, and expectations will lead to confusion and more frustration down the road as volunteers question what is and what is not correct procedure. It could also cause them to lose trust in your abilities as a leader.

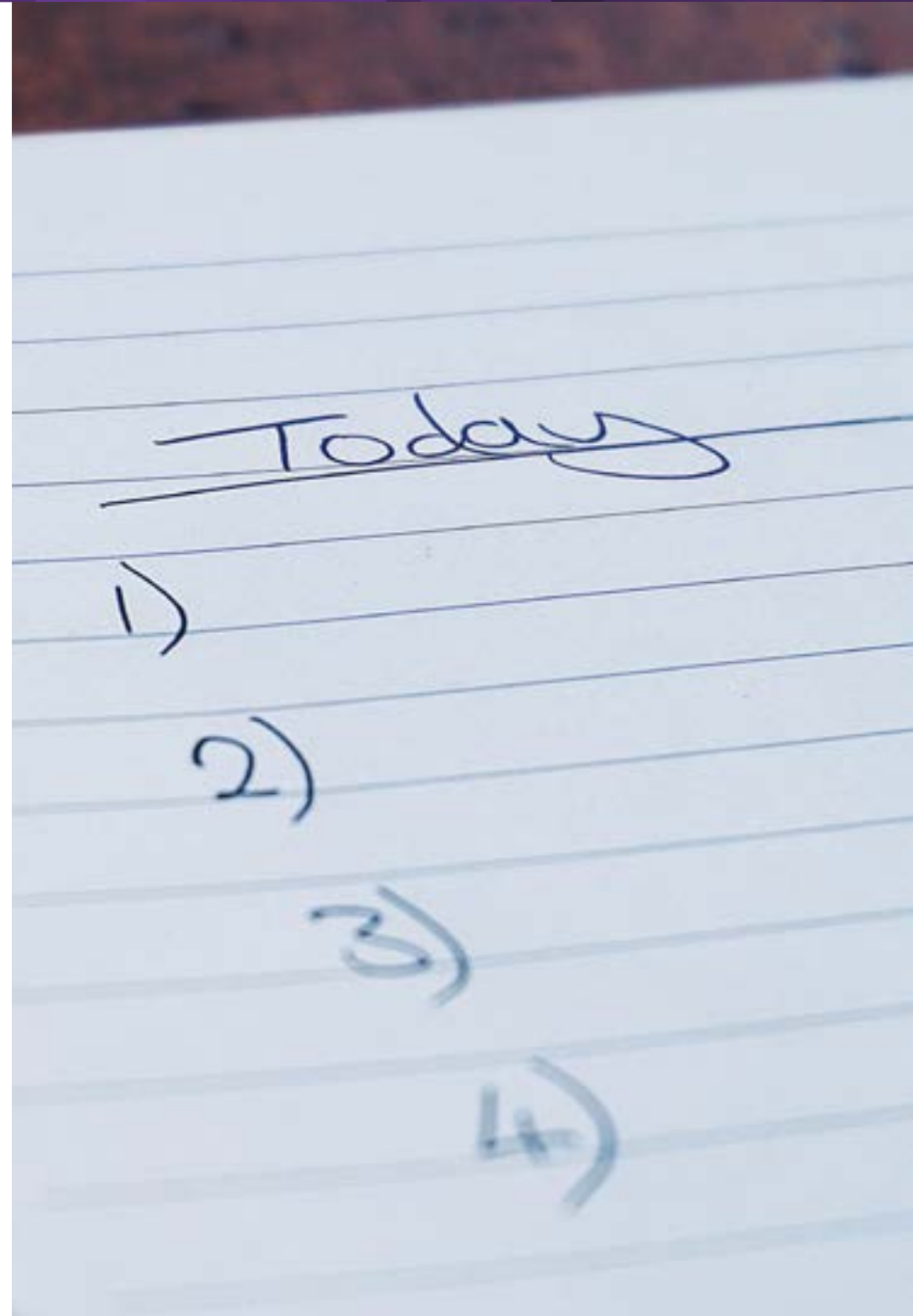




Forgetting follow through

Just as you expect volunteers to stick to their commitments, they expect you to do the same. Remember what you promise to do and ensure you complete it.

Forgetting to follow through can cause frustration for others involved in the project and create animosity in a group. Once you've lost a person's trust, or gain a reputation of being forgetful, it's difficult to regain their trust or change their perception of you.





Volunteering someone without permission

As a supervisor, you might see talents in your volunteers and want them to explore their potential. Ensure volunteers are open to the opportunity before suggesting their name.

As you develop relationships with your volunteers, you might want to recommend someone for a new role. Before nominating someone, ask in advance if they would be interested in the position or project. Asking first will eliminate uncomfortable conversations afterward if they don't have the time or aren't interested.





Dismissing new ideas

New sets of eyes and ears bring new sets of ideas. Use this as an opportunity to explore something new rather than shutting it down.

If a volunteer has a new idea, don't immediately dismiss it. With a different perspective, they might see a solution you hadn't thought of, or a new way to implement an old idea. New doesn't always mean bad, and sometimes change is necessary, so always explore the option before turning it down.

The best way to learn is through practice, and the same is true with supervising. As you work with your volunteers, take cues from them to identify how you can improve.

“Nobody checked in with me. The only communication I ever received ended up coming from the Heritage Center that went out to all volunteers. There is very little motivation to stay involved when the person in charge of you doesn't even know you exist, or at least it felt that way.”

– Jessica Hill, former chapter advisor

“Ask questions instead of making accusations, and remember that a leader's job is to enable the success of the subordinates, not stifle creativity.”

– Mike Dickerson, Fraternity president



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More in the [Being A Volunteer Supervisor Series](#):
Creating Positive Dynamics | Working With New Volunteers



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