

# Volunteer Burnout “Symptoms, Signs and Solutions”

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WEBINAR  
SERIES **FOR ARTS**  
PRESENTING



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# Reminders

- You can hear us, we cannot hear you!

## Can't hear?

- Try turning up your volume
- Call in by phone or use your computer headphones

**Have a question?** Use the chat, any time. Will have time at the end and after the webinar.

## Downloads

- Webinar recording
- PPT Slide presentation
- Handouts: 4 Signs of Burnout and 6 Ways Non Profits Can Prevent Volunteer Burnout
- Additional resources at the end

# Learning Objectives

In this webinar we are going to cover the following:

1. What is volunteer 'burnout?'
2. What signs should we watch for?
3. What does the volunteer feel who is getting burned out?
4. What does the organization see?
5. What are the causes of volunteer burnout?
6. Solutions or tips to avoid burnout in your volunteers.

# What is Volunteer Burnout?

## THE FOUR STAGES OF BURNOUT

According to Mark Gorkin (AKA "The Stress Doc") there are four stages of burnout:

- Physical, mental and emotional exhaustion
- Shame and doubt
- Cynicism and callousness
- Failure, helplessness and crisis



Volunteer burnout is just like work-related burnout -- only you're not getting paid to barrel through it.

**“Burnout is when our most committed and passionate volunteers have just had enough.”**

I think we see the physical, mental and emotional exhaustion of stage 1 first. Then we see the volunteers begin to be negative, critical of the organization. This is the personal translation of their fatigue into words.

Have to remember: Volunteers come to us to do great work. They don't volunteer to do bad work. But how they work and what we ask of them is important.

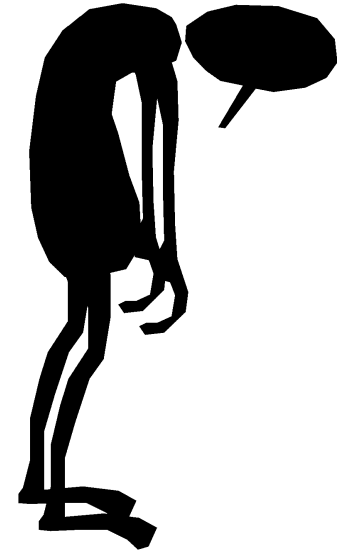
# QUIZ: What are the signs to watch for?

Which of the following signs have you seen from volunteers? Check as many as apply.

1. Volunteers - lose enthusiasm for the mission of the organization.
2. Volunteers find criticism in small things. Lots of complaints.
3. Volunteers tell others that they worry about their volunteer job even when they are not there.
4. Volunteers act uninspired when they are there.
5. Volunteers are cranky with other volunteers, clients and staff members.
6. Volunteers not showing up or calling in to cancel.
7. Work performance issues; assignments not completed.
8. Volunteers complain that it is no longer FUN to be here.

# What does the volunteer feel who is getting burned out?

- Tired and fatigued and stressed
- Resentful and at wits end
- Their volunteer work is no longer fulfilling so they disengage.
- They start making excuses (often health-related) for not attending to responsibilities.
- They feel taken advantage of: too much work and too few volunteers to do it. Where are the others?
- They keep saying yes ....but don't want to.





# What does the organization see?

The organization sees the end result of burnout being translated in the following ways:

1. Volunteers are not showing up...work is not getting done. So someone does more to catch up.
2. Volunteers say 'yes' to us without the enthusiasm.
3. The culture of the organization shifts to one of stress... dissatisfaction...complaining...no fun...all work no play.
4. Mission, goals not reached.
5. Membership/services decline or are modified/cancelled.
6. Increasingly more difficult to recruit new volunteers and/or retain the ones that are there.

# **QUIZ: What are the causes of volunteer burnout?**

## **Check off what you believe are the causes of burnout.**

1. We ask other busy volunteers to do more (using the mantra “if you want work done, ask a busy person”).
2. We don’t have a recruitment plan. We just keep using the existing volunteers because they are loyal and committed.
3. No one is keeping their eyes tuned to volunteer/unpaid staff management.
4. We don’t set clear expectations for roles. We do not have written position descriptions.
5. We don’t have an understanding/policy that allows volunteers to say “NO” and be respected for saying no.
6. We don’t have a recognition strategy.
7. We don’t plan well; keep work practical and well executed.
8. We are the cause of all of the above.

# Solutions or tips to avoid burnout in your volunteers.

1. **Develop a recruitment process.** Make sure you always have enough volunteers for the work to be done. Stagger recruitment; have some volunteers available for emergency; some long term; some short term. Recruit from diversity.
2. **Create Better Volunteer Positions.** Make sure volunteer position descriptions are realistic and clear. Time commitments, expectations and responsibilities need to be communicated. Allow volunteers to say NO and have back up plans. Revisit tasks and make sure roles are not boring. Combine to make more exciting. Eliminate some roles or find better ways to do them. Match volunteers with skills to roles for better long-term satisfaction.
3. **Better Project Management.** Review each event/project and make sure to select the right number of volunteers. Select volunteers with the skills and experience needed to do it well and right. Too many volunteers causes discontent and too few...leads to burnout.

**4. Better Planning & Resource Development.** Plan out a project and create a resource binder of the logistics. Spend time listing all the tasks; deadlines; create a work plan from start to finish. Have the volunteers complete the project with an evaluation, then update the resources for the next round

**5. Interchange Responsibilities.** Sometimes long time volunteers will be reenergized with new opportunities. Make sure they have the skill but try switching up responsibilities...could make for a better trained group, more cohesive and less turnover.

**6. Communicate Better.** Make sure you know your volunteers so that you can detect the signs and adjust. If volunteers know you are approachable and invested they will more likely be honest.

**7. Recognize Volunteers.** Don't wait for a once a year recognition event. Thank volunteers on the spot, face to face and informally throughout the year. A thank you goes a long way at the right time.

**8. Volunteers have rights.** Make sure volunteers are respected and understand that they have rights as volunteers. To be treated fairly; not to be abused. Develop a list of rights if you do not have them. Like the right to say no to an ask to help.

# Case Study “A” ...let’s think about what we have learned.

*John was a founding member of the Theatre Group. He is totally committed to keeping the organization on track. He attends all functions/sits on the board/helps out with building sets and takes tickets if needed. John can be called upon whenever an extra hand or head is needed. He never says no. Many have noticed however, that John is aging; not doing the good work he used to do. His partner has been ill lately, but John keeps coming out.*

**Given what you have learned today ...look at the list provided and check off what would you do if you were the President of this Association?**

# Dealing with John...

I would

- ☐ Give John the opportunity for a sabbatical
- ☐ Take him for a coffee and have an honest talk
- ☐ Help him balance his life
- ☐ Focus on what skills he has and ask him to just do those jobs
- ☐ Consider not to ask John to do any more work
- ☐ Talk with other senior volunteers and ask them not to assign any more roles to John
- ☐ Get a committee to help recruit 'set builders' and 'ticket takers'

# Case Study “B”...

*“ Mary has been a very active volunteer for 6 years. She handles the telephone for the art museum and is often a greeter on special opening nights. For the past few months, other volunteers have noticed a change in her attitude. Once positive, she is now very negative and finds much to complain about. She even complains to the visitors as they arrive. Several volunteers refuse to work the same shift. Mary recently called in sick several times and yesterday showed up late to a major event.”*

If you were responsible for volunteers performance what might you do? ...check out the list below.



# Dealing with Mary...

I would:

- ☐ Arrange to meet Mary for coffee and talk about what is happening
- ☐ Look at developing a team of front desk phone volunteers so that if Mary is late or sick there is a back up.
- ☐ Take Mary off the greeter list immediately and explain why to her
- ☐ Arrange to meet Mary and have a hard conversation about what she is feeling; find ways to support her and develop an action plan together.
- ☐ Arrange to look at position descriptions to determine length of terms for any one position
- ☐ Develop a list of the “rights of volunteers” and share this fully with volunteers and staff. Make ‘saying NO” a right of all our volunteers.

# An AHA moment

When you avoid volunteer burnout...those volunteers are satisfied, committed to your cause, more likely to go out and recruit others to help, and feel honored and happy with their volunteer contributions.

This all leads to increased RETENTION.

Volunteers increasingly want this commitment to be fun and engaging...NOT like work.

So make volunteering a special opportunity and you will grow your volunteer/unpaid human resources.

**Simply:** QUIT asking the same volunteers. Keep an eye out for “John” as he does additional work without being asked.



Questions posted today....or email me...



# Resources

1. Charity Village. [www.charityvillage.com](http://www.charityvillage.com). Click on Topics and do specific search for Volunteer Burnout. 3 good articles. *“Volunteer Fatigue: What Impact”* by D. Lockhart; *“How to Avoid and Manage Burnout”* by L. Gotlieb and *“When is a Volunteer Burnt out?”* by B. Raymond.
2. Google “Slide Share” and there are a number of videos on volunteer burnout

Please share your feedback by completing the survey below.

[TAKE SURVEY](#)

If you still have questions  
please contact me and I  
will try to help you!

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Next topic.... Strategic Planning

**PART 1: Understanding and getting started on Strategic Planning**

May 4, 2016

**PART 2: Strategic Planning - From Vision to Reality**

May 11, 2016

[SIGN UP](#)

Please note, you must register for each session separately.