

Ending a Volunteer Relationship

Once documentation and coaching has been completed and expectations set, and there does not seem to be a change in sight, it is time to terminate your organization's relationship with the difficult volunteer. The same terminating practices used to fire a staff member should be used with a volunteer.

Before the Termination Session

- What is the best approach I can take with this volunteer? What are their "hot buttons?"
- Have I considered all possible reassignments?
- Has all training been offered?
- Could suspension help me gather any additional information?
- **A final consideration:** "Does the punishment fit the crime?" Make absolutely sure that termination is the appropriate next step if suspension or reassignment is not possible.

As Steve McCurley writes in *"How to Fire a Volunteer and Live to Tell About It,"*:

1. **Meet Privately.** Respect the volunteer's need to process this information without observation from others. If the conversation gets heated, it could also preserve your dignity.
2. **Be quick, direct, and absolute.** Drawing out what needs to be said only builds bad feeling and makes the situation more stressful. Unapologetically state that the organization no longer needs the services of this volunteer. Do not respond to accusations or explanations. Wait out any tirade and politely ask them to leave. Be clear. The worst thing possible would be to have them show up for their commitment the next week.
3. **Announce, but don't argue or negotiate.** It is too easy to fall back into the pleas or excuses of a volunteer, particularly when their poor performance was not due from lack of trying. If you followed the process, all excuses would have been heard.
4. **Do not provide emotional support.** The volunteer had an opportunity to receive coaching and support earlier. If this was still an option, you would not be terminating them.
5. **Follow-up with a letter.** Document the situation until the end of the relationship. Put a copy of the letter in the volunteer's hard file.