

Dealing with Difficult Volunteers

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Volunteer Toronto

Who We Are

We are a charitable organization striving to increase the positive impact that volunteering has on the City of Toronto. We inspire, inform and connect volunteers and the organizations that need them.

What We Do

We provide in-house, online and on-demand training and have a resource library covering a wide range of volunteer management topics.

How We Learn

We stay up to date on current legislation and best practices, conduct original research, learn from sector experts, and get feedback from our extensive network of non-profits.

What Defines a “Difficult” Volunteer?



Breaks rules or boundaries

Oversteps/overstays, tries to take control

Fails to meet requirements

Performance vs. Conduct

	Performance Issues	Conduct Issues
What the Issue Looks Like	Gaps between what is expected and what is actually happening	Concerned with behaviour (attendance, dependability, work attitude.)
How to Solve the Issue	Can usually be solved on-site, by providing more information	Will not be solved by providing more information about tasks and often require a follow-up conversation

Policies & Procedures

Help keep volunteers accountable
& organization compliant

Policies to ensure safe and
healthy working environment

Code of conduct –
following expectations

Volunteers should know the duties of the role and
consequences for failing to complete these duties

Determines the responses/reactions

Questions to ask yourself:

- Do you have specific guidelines on expected volunteer performance?
- Are volunteers aware of policies related to behaviour and conduct?
- Do you have a policy in place for dealing with incidents of poor performance or behaviour?
- Do you have policies & procedures on workplace health and safety and violence & harassment prevention?

The Importance of Boundaries

Boundaries

Keep volunteers focused on the work of the role

- Focus on duties & expectations of the role
- Maintain importance & value of volunteer's place in the organization

Help protect clients, the volunteer & the organization

- Assessing risks – boundaries can minimize emotional/physical risk
- Training to do their job safely & effectively
- Affect organization capacity

Why Do Volunteers Break the Rules?

- To fill perceived need
- Disagree with reasoning behind rules
- Don't know they're violating boundary
- To fulfil emotional need
- Did it before and no one said anything
- Burning out
- 'Sneaks up' on them

Why Volunteers break rules

- Don't know what to do
- Don't know how to do it
- Don't know why it's done that way
- Have competing priorities
- Personal problems
- Mixed reactions to rules

Can be a mix of reasons or even something else

Managing Problem Situations

It's important to give feedback to address important issues right away when possible

When it happens
Address the volunteer informally

The next shift
Follow-up and ask what happened

Next scheduled evaluation
Talk about improvements & growth

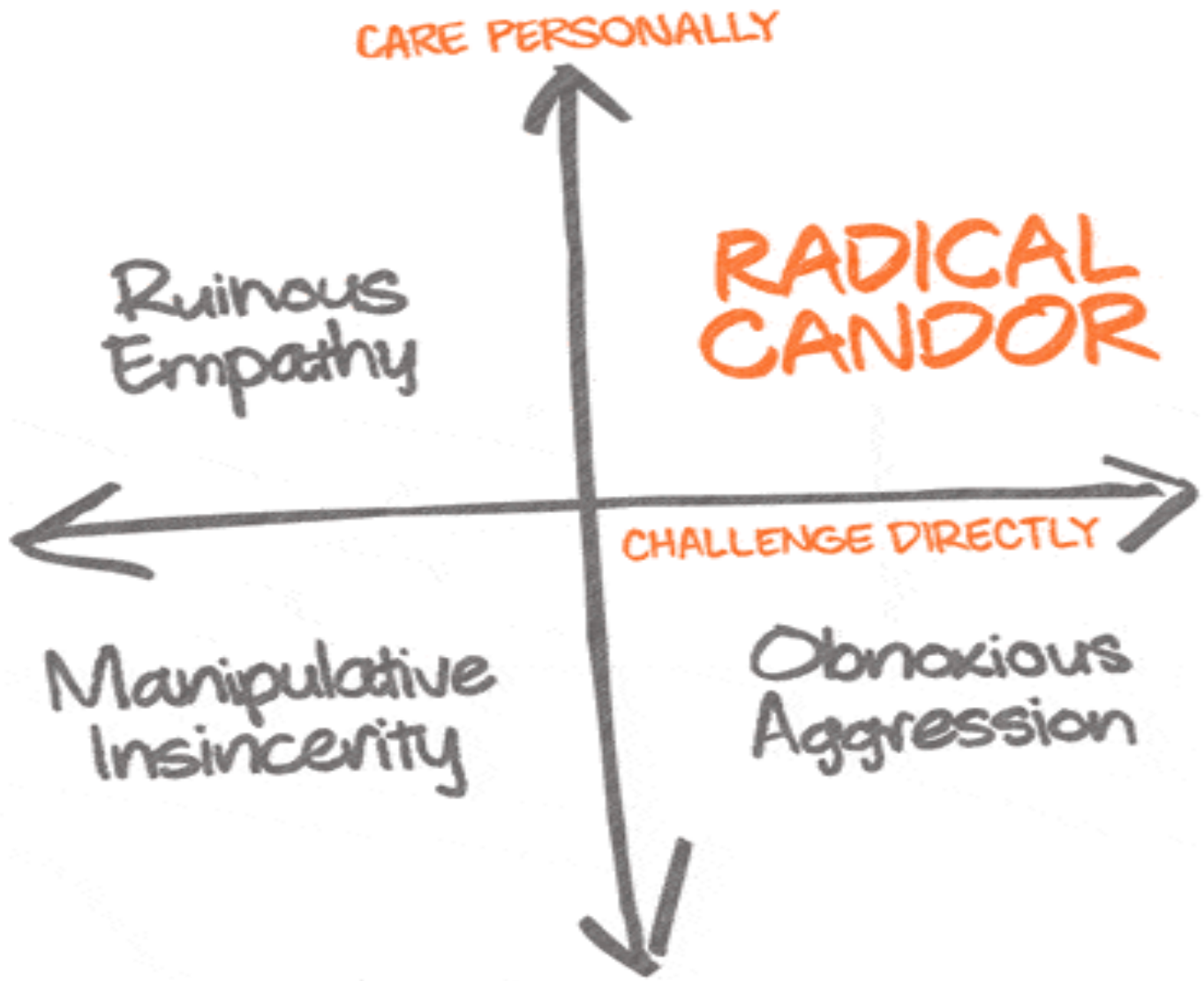
Giving & Receiving Negative Feedback

Negative /
Constructive
Feedback

Vital to grow, change & improve
Highlight why feedback is negative (impact)
Include suggestion for improvement

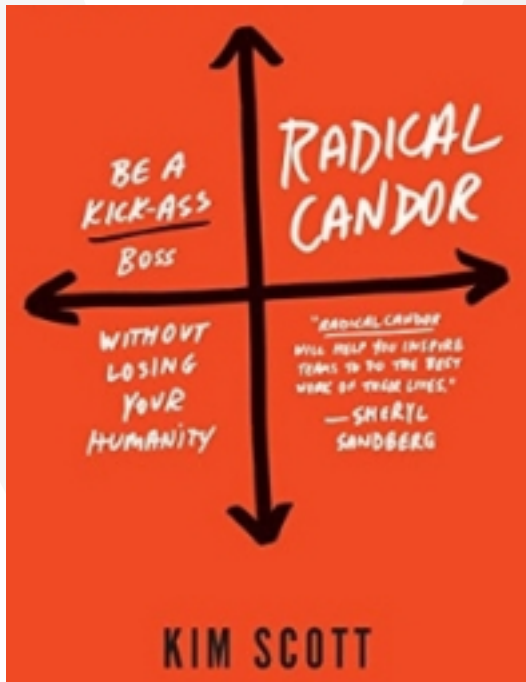
Model providing negative feedback in a
respectful way so that volunteers do the same

Embracing this feedback helps you
best meet the needs of your volunteers



Kim Scott explains...

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWaJ2pkDiWU>



Radical Candour looks like:

“Excuse me Bob, but I think you’d want to know. There’s a stain on your shirt.”



Obnoxious Aggression looks like:

“Hey everybody, check out the lunch Bob has on his shirt.”



Manipulative Insincerity looks like:

“I’m want to ask Bob to cover an extra shift on the weekend. So I’m not going to tell him about that stain on his shirt.”



Ruinous Empathy looks like:

“Poor Bob, he’d just fall to pieces if I told him about that stain on his shirt. I’ll pretend everything is fine.”



Providing Constructive Criticism

Plan what
you're going
to say

Follow-up
as soon as
you can

Respect
privacy

Focus on
the
behaviour,
not the
person

Specify
changes

Document
the follow-
up

DESC Statements



Description of the problematic behaviour – specific, factual, based on feedback or observations

Explanation of why it is a problem – impact of the behaviour on you, the organization, other volunteers

Specify change that you would like to see – how can the volunteer change, express confidence, ask for suggestions

Consequences of making the change – positive consequences, motivating for the volunteer

Give it a try!

Taking Corrective Action

Corrective Action Continuum

(Adapted from Best of All by Linda Graff)

Satisfactory Performance	Minor Performance Issues	Significant Issues	Insurmountable Issues
Reward good performance Positive Feedback	Provide coaching/mentoring Provide training Modify position	Formal intervention (meetings, written warning)	Dismissal

Step 1 – Clarify the Rules

Performance
Coaching

Did the
volunteer know
what to do or
not to do?

Were they clear
on the rules &
why they're in
place?

Did they
misunderstand
the rule?

Ask the volunteer what they thought they did wrong

Opportunity to clarify rules &
discuss why they're in place

Step 2 – Identify the Problem

Shine a light on why the rule was broken

Volunteer personal issue affecting their performance

Aspect of their relationship(s) that impact behaviour

Consider the people involved, location & all the details

Step 3 – Assess Barriers to Improvement

Can the volunteer improve? Can they continue in their role? Can the broken rule be mended?

Ask the volunteer!

Volunteer may not be able to continue in the role due to the issue

Address volunteer needs in determining barriers

Barriers

No desire to solve the problem

Reluctant to change shifts

Pushback to suggestions for improvement

Step 4 – Offer Solutions

How can a volunteer improve?
How can you support their improvement?

Coaching volunteers will only work if the volunteer understands & agrees that there is a problem that needs to be resolved

Ensuring the volunteer understands the rules, their impact

Following rules can improve the volunteer's work

Communicating with the volunteer – checking in



Putting It Into Action

Clarify the
rules

Identify the
problem

Assess
barriers

Offer
solutions

Scenario 1 & 2

Everyone together

Case Study 1: What do you do next?

- Arnold has volunteered with you for the last 15 fairs and seen the fair grow in popularity over the years.
 - Before the most recent fair, he wanted to initiate a new program that would get high-risk kids more involved.
 - However, the program planner told Arnold that he needed to fill out a project proposal, address the risk management issues and wait for a response. Arnold called it a “mountain of bureaucracy” but submitted the proposal.
 - He never heard back before the fair began, so he ran his program regardless.
 - He has broken the rules but says all he wanted to do was help some kids. **What do you do next?**
-
- **Rules? Problem? Barriers? Solutions?**

Case Study 2: What do you do next?

- Caitlin is a new volunteer, and this is her first fair. She is working in the beer garden, helping to check IDs and move people through as the lines are quite long.
- She seemed very driven and dedicated to helping out and was attentive in training.
- When you go to check on her, however, you notice she is just letting people through to help the line move quicker without checking IDs, and then stops to talk to some of her friends which holds up the line once again.
- You take her aside on her next break to talk to her about not following the rules. **What do you do next?**
- **Rules? Problem? Barriers? Solutions?**



Questions?

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