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Using True Colors® to Match Individual's Personality Traits with the Appropriate Volunteer Role for Success

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Abstract. Just as there are different reasons that people volunteer in the community, each volunteer has specific values, different needs to be fulfilled, and different strengths to offer to Extension programs. Understanding these characteristics and utilizing them in assigning the appropriate volunteer role will result in more success in their volunteer experience. Utilizing True Colors® when assigning volunteer roles and developing working groups and committees has proven effective in our county 4-H programs. Conflicts between volunteers who do not work well together have been lessened due to reassigning them to roles that best fit their personality types.

INTRODUCTION

In our county programs, we have found that it is important to understand and identify the values, needs, and strengths of volunteers to ensure success in their roles within Extension programs. It is important to intentionally select volunteers for the roles to which they are best suited (Penrod, 1991). Just as there are different reasons that people volunteer, each volunteer has specific values they bring with them, different needs they want met in order to be fulfilled as a volunteer, and different strengths to offer Extension programs. In a descriptive study of volunteers in Ohio, Schmiesing, Soder, & Russell (2005) found that altruistic values motivated individuals more than the other aspects of volunteerism did. When Extension professionals understand these characteristics and utilize them in assigning appropriate volunteer roles, individuals can be more successful in their volunteer experience.

True Colors®, a personality assessment instrument, is used to categorize personalities into 4 quadrants that foster an environment of understanding and collaboration. The assessment uses the colors orange, gold, green and blue to differentiate the four central primary personality types. Its methodology helps individuals to better understand themselves and how the different personality types interact. Understanding this dynamic can be helpful, especially when the success of an organization depends on the effective communication between and collaboration among its employees and volunteers (True Colors®, 2020; Miscisin, 2001).

PERSONALITY TRAITS AND APPROPRIATE VOLUNTEER ROLES

An Extension professional versed in True Colors® can provide personality-specific insights to their volunteers. In reliability and validity testing, True Colors® showed considerable merit in precisely assessing and defining psychological types and temperament theory (Whitchard, 2013). According to True Colors® every person is a unique mix of these personality (color) traits with varying degrees of dominance. Moreover, the following descriptions and techniques provide general suggestions when assigning the best role to volunteers when the dominant part of their personality has been identified (True Colors, 2020; Miscisin, 2001.)

BLUE VOLUNTEERS

Individuals with a predominately “blue” personality value acceptance and belonging. They are people oriented, shy away from conflict, and are usually guided by feelings and emotions. They enjoy motivating and encouraging others. These volunteers like working in groups and easily cooperate with others. They are adaptable and can fit many roles within Extension programs, specifically those responsible for coordinating large groups and working with youth. Blue volunteers may not be as successful in positions that require dealing with conflict, such as an

advisory council chair or fair chairperson. We have found that blue individuals may not be comfortable making decisions that could result in making others unhappy. The caring blue volunteer may clash with the more no-nonsense green volunteer.

ORANGE VOLUNTEERS

Individuals with predominately “orange” personality traits are spontaneous. They like informal environments, are creative, work well with others, are willing to take on challenges, and are confident and comfortable in new situations. These types of volunteers excel in working directly with youth, taking on tasks that require a lot of creativity, and managing tough situations, including those causing conflict. The orange volunteer can make things happen, will think outside the box, and thrives on change. They will challenge those who always try to stay “inside” the box. A predominately orange volunteer may struggle in positions that require adhering to structure, details, and routine. An orange volunteer may be an effective 4-H club organizational leader but may struggle with portions of that role that require attention to detail, reporting, and/or paperwork. The spontaneous orange volunteer may clash with the more planned-in-advance gold volunteer.

GREEN VOLUNTEERS

The predominately “green” volunteer thrives on knowledge and learning and has high standards for themselves and others. They value learning, and their interest in 4-H would primarily be helping youth learn, taking on intellectual challenges, or being the problem solver. Strong green people are more comfortable working independently but are okay with groups if these groups have a purpose. They do not deal well with small talk or gossip and would be best in a leadership position that encourages use of their unique problem-solving ability. Volunteers with a strong green personality do well in times of crisis and are best at dealing with situations rationally. The intellectual green volunteer may clash with the emotional blue volunteer.

GOLD VOLUNTEERS

Individuals with predominately “gold” personality like structure and being in control of groups or projects put in their charge. They thrive with routine and adherence to policies and procedures, and they are usually highly organized and value planning ahead. Gold volunteers easily handle projects that require a lot of planning and organizing. These volunteers are effective 4-H club organization leaders, advisory group officers, and fair or event planning chairpersons. Strong gold people are often assertive about their method of doing things and at times feel that their way is the only right way. At times, they do not work collaboratively with others. For example, we have seen two gold volunteers who run a 4-H club clash continually because both like to be in control and have specific ways of doing things. Sometimes, a stronger gold volunteer may challenge the authority of Extension staff. In this instance, finding roles for each volunteer in which they can have control within acceptable policy parameters and also feel “in charge” may lessen tensions. In addition to clashing with each other, gold personalities may also clash with adventurous orange individuals, whom they feel are disorganized.

CONCLUSION

Because personality conflicts can sour valuable volunteers, True Colors® is an excellent tool for being proactive in assigning volunteer roles and developing working groups/committees to avoid clashes that detract from being productive. We have used True Colors® successfully in our county programs for over 20 years and have found that conflicts between volunteers who do not work well together have been lessened due to reassigning them to roles that best fit their personality. We have found that matching personalities with volunteer roles is one effective way to enhance volunteer satisfaction within their roles and minimize conflict for the program overall.

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Using True Colors® to Match Individual's Personality Traits with the Appropriate Volunteer Role

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