

SERVANT LEADERSHIP: RACE ORGANIZERS, VOLUNTEERS, AND THE
MARATHON INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

SERVANT LEADERSHIP: RACE ORGANIZERS, VOLUNTEERS, AND THE MARATHON INDUSTRY

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This thesis describes the use of servant leadership by experienced marathon race organizers. A qualitative study was conducted to reveal how servant leadership principles are present in race organizers' volunteer programs. Robert K. Greenleaf coined the phrase "servant leadership" in 1970, which describes a leader focusing on the moral, emotional, and relational dimensions of ethical leadership behavior, rather than "competency inputs" or "performance outputs." In other words, a servant leader/servant organization aims to collaborate with the follower and wants the follower to become more independent, confident, and autonomous. Questions are developed based on the servant leader literature to provide in-depth knowledge of the leaders' interactions with their volunteers. Findings from the qualitative analysis of the reports will aim to provide insight into helping special events organizations develop and grow a volunteer base, create servant-led events, and improve over organizational performance.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Alexis de Tocqueville once said, “by dint of working for one’s fellow citizens, the habit and taste for serving them is at length acquired.” Tocqueville, a Frenchman and political scientist and historian, provided an insightful analysis of the social and political systems of the United States in *Democracy in America*, which he wrote following a nine-month visit in 1831-32. In this book he described the American phenomenon of creating “associations” of all types including professional, social, civil, and political. It is thought that his discussion of associations was Tocqueville admiring evidence of philanthropy.

Today, philanthropy is known as the donation of financial support and volunteer resources to the not-for-profit, non-governmental organizations that strive to serve the public good and improve the quality of human lives (Huebler, n.d.). Tocqueville believed that voluntary service increasingly drew a person to virtue: “In the United States, as soon as several inhabitants have taken an opinion or an idea they wish to promote in society, they seek each other out and unite together once they have made contact. From that moment, they are no longer isolated but have become a power seen from afar whose activities serve as an example and whose words are heeded” (Tocqueville, 1840, p. 599).

Born and raised in an aristocratic family (meaning one of the highest social class), Tocqueville became an advocate of reform in his own country, serving not only as a governmental employee, but also as a student of civil society (Huebler, n.d.). While

writing *Democracy in America* he became an advocate of both democracy (elected representative government) and federalism (power distributed among the national government, its states, and their municipalities). As France ultimately moved toward democratic rule and struggled with defining the role of the monarchy and nobility, Tocqueville saw the deterioration of aristocracy as irreparable:

Aristocratic societies always contain...a small number of very powerful and wealthy citizens each of whom has the ability to perform great enterprises single-handed. In aristocratic societies men feel no need to act in groups because they are strongly held together...A nation in which individuals lost the capacity to achieve great things single-handed without acquiring the means of doing them in a shared enterprise would quickly revert to barbarism (Tocqueville 1840, p. 597).

Tocqueville knew that Americans had embraced the idea of working in groups to help others achieve goals, not single-handedly; that these “associations” were formed because other businesses could not survive without them. This was a practice unknown among the aristocracies of France and England. He believed that by forming and joining associations, Americans are making known the issues that are important to them, their families, and their communities. Providing voluntary resources is a major observation we learn from Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*. Almost 200 years later, the United States continues to illustrate the value of providing voluntary resources, both individually and as a group, stronger than ever.

Harvard University's Robert D. Putnam would think otherwise about Americans. In *Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital*, Putnam declares that since the 1960s, there has been a decline in social capital because of a decline in social organization participation. Putnam names groups like labor unions, religious associations, and parent-teacher organizations that have continually lost numbers because people are "flying solo" and are less likely to get together with others in small groups. His argument is that more people are bowling than ever before, but membership in bowling leagues has been at its lowest of all time: "between 1980 and 1993 the total number of bowlers in America increased by 10 percent, while league bowling decreased by 40 percent" (Putnam, 1995).

Putnam suggests that more women in the workforce (increase in average number of hours in the work week/decrease in the amount of time and energy to put towards outside activities), the mobility of today's society (easier for people to move and move more often), the increase in divorces and the decrease in number of children per family, and technology leading to an "individualization" of society, make people more introverted and self-centered (e.g., people spend less time with groups watching TV or surf the Internet alone, which yields "passivity"). He admits that volunteering had increased in the 1970s, but the activities were too individualistic, like one-on-one tutoring, not resulting in social "ties" he calls "social capital." He argues that the more we come together in groups to give blood, vote, or just share a beer, the more "civically" involved we will be.

Putnam was right in that some of the more mature associations had lost members, but what he failed to realize was that some of them had become old-fashioned or irrelevant, and new ones had taken their place. For example, the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) dwindled most likely because many parents had distanced themselves from it and created their own “PTAs” like Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) or some with no official affiliation with the original group, but clearly inspired by it (Talbot, 2000). According to the *Encyclopedia of Associations*, the numbers rose from 10,299 in 1968 to 22,901 in 1997. Small groups like book clubs, prayer fellowships, and support groups were prospering. Both volunteering and charitable giving was rising. While bowling decreased by nearly 40 percent between 1980 and 1993, Talbot (2000) pointed out that a massive rise in youth soccer leagues balanced things out. This was not “the extinction of civic life but its reinvention.” The same applies to the marathon industry; these events are popular in the grand scheme of things, but it is growing and alive with enthusiasm and energy.

Nearly 20 years later after Putnam’s book was published, there has been a recent upsurge, peaking in 2011. The number of volunteers has reached its highest level in five years, according to The Corporation for National and Community Service, host of the most comprehensive collection of information on volunteering in the U.S. In 2011, 64.3 million Americans volunteered in a formal organization, an increase of 1.5 million from 2010. The volunteering rate increased nationwide by 0.5 percentage points to 26.8%. Altogether, Americans volunteered approximately 7.9 billion hours in a formal organization with a value of \$171 billion. The global economic crisis has hit small-scale

events reliant on participants, which in turn, means more labor ends up being placed on volunteerism resources. Therefore, the growth of a volunteer labor force has become indispensable. Most recreational professionals that have planned projects or events are aware that they could not successfully execute their events without the work, knowledge, and time donated by volunteers (Flood, 2005).

I examined how race organizers' servant leadership skills contribute to retention tactics and impact volunteers' experiences at marathons and ultra-marathons (road, trail, and mountain path). 10 expert race organizers of well-known, esteemed marathons and ultra-marathons in the United States were interviewed ("expert" meaning having at least five years of experience race directing and/or volunteer coordinating, with the exception of one organizer). Additionally, "well-known" and "esteemed" does not necessarily mean the "biggest.") Servant leaders empower and develop people; they show humility, are authentic, accept people for who they are, provide direction, and are stewards who work for the good of the whole (Van Dierendonck, 2010). Marathons (26.2 miles on foot) and ultra-marathons (anything beyond 26.2 miles, normally beginning at 50k, or 31 miles) are special sport events that serve as excellent models for other special sport events that demand a volunteer labor force. "Special sport events" are events held annually or irregularly, as opposed to events that involve school or league competitions (Dwyer & Fredline, 2008). These are also referred to recurring sports events (RSE). The Super Bowl is a special sport event, but not the football games leading up to the Super Bowl. Major special sport events include World Cup events, the Olympic Games, or the America's Cup—also known as special mega events (SME). Minor special sport events include

competitions that are smaller in nature and scope, like invitational tournaments, annual races, or state/national championships. Annual races are the focus of my thesis.

Marathons are all-day or all-weekend affairs that require significant help beyond paid staff members. In this industry, volunteers could be asked to report to duty at early hours of the morning, navigate throughout the wilderness or spend time in one location for several hours. The success of a race demands many volunteers with jobs that require manual labor (lifting heavy objects), strong interpersonal skills (remaining calm under pressure, maintaining a positive disposition, and communicating reports or updates), and physical stamina (“setting up camp” for several hours or being “on the move” for several hours). Almost all race organizers host multiple events throughout the year, known as an event “series.” Even if a race organizer manages just one event, developing good relationships with volunteers results in volunteer retention. Repeat volunteers allow him/her to produce the same results year-after-year, grow, become more creative, and improve the overall quality of the event. Retaining volunteers may be even more critical than recruitment for the survival of organizations that need volunteers. At the same time, volunteers who quit after a short time are costly. When volunteers quit, organizers must put more resources into marketing to, recruiting volunteers, and training new volunteers.

Much of the literature emphasizes that the key is to understand volunteer motivations. Find out what people like to do -- and can do well -- and then let them do it (Flood, 2005). This is an enormous piece of the volunteer puzzle—and this knowledge significantly contributes to volunteers showing up to an event. However, it is the experience at the event and after the event that determines the overall impression a

volunteer gets—and decides whether or not they will come back again. The initial and final interaction a volunteer receives is not with the runner, but with the race organizers. There is little scholarly research on the perspective of organizers of special sport events in general, let alone their philosophies on volunteer retention. There are a number of established scales/questionnaires (e.g., Laub's Organizational Leadership Assessment) that measure the degree of servant leadership in an organizational setting. I believe qualitative methods are more significant than quantitative because they illustrate organizers making sense of their philosophies, backed by specific examples of successes and failures:

Social scientists have long known the weakness of such [quantitative] methods in assessing the complexities of the human condition. Sciences advocating strict rules of measurement usually operate in a linear fashion to show causal relationship between select phenomena; but have been long known to be weak in providing insight on the relationships between the contexts and processes of human social life, and the “meaning” that humans attach to social and physical phenomena (Denzin, 1970, p. 30-31).

Additionally, “It is not against a body of uninterpreted data, radically thinned descriptions, that we must measure the cogency of our explications, but against the power of the scientific imagination to bring us into touch with the lives of strangers” (Geertz, 1973). Qualitative research can make way for magical sense-making moments as my interpretation, fueled by my professional and personal experience of the marathon culture, meets at a crossroads with these strangers' stories and explanations. The goal of my

thesis is for special sport event organizers to learn and adopt some of the same philosophies and tactics as the 10 organizers reported when developing and sustaining a volunteer base. Therefore, the following four areas examined for this thesis are:

- how volunteers are retained under servant leadership. Event organizers require volunteers repeatedly for future events
- how volunteers are trained, assigned tasks, and positioned in the field under servant leadership
- how race organizers view responsibilities of volunteers, their role amongst the organization as a whole, and how they communicate this
- how race organizers foster a reliable, committed, and “happy” volunteer labor force under servant leadership.

My thesis focuses on volunteer outcomes due to the various interactions from race organizers and their staff. Volunteers are involved with the organization similar to paid staff. They, too, become people who provide recreational services to the public. My goal is to evaluate a race organizer’s philosophy, tactics, and thought-process through a servant leadership lens. Through the servant leadership lens, I considered “KASA”: knowledge, attitudes, skills, and aspirations of race organizers (Henderson & Bialeschki, 2010). I also looked at “quality improvement” and “outcomes measurement.” Quality improvement focuses on “point of service” (the environment provided by the organization and race staff) while “outcomes measurement” focuses on the resulting program impacts on the volunteer. Race organizers can involve the volunteers in shaping programs as well as showing stakeholders that an organization/event is committed to

positive human development, through its volunteer force. Involving the volunteers in representing an organization's true colors shows that an event organizer is accountable to its volunteers. While interviewing race organizers, I asked questions that covered "participant outcomes" (motivation/satisfaction, changes in attitudes, how individuals interact), "program quality and improvement" (effective leadership, promotion of program, participant gains, risk management), and "personnel" (performance appraisal, assess training needs, provide feedback for improvement) aspects of servant leadership and volunteerism (Henderson & Bialeschki, 2010).

Both "formative" and "summative" assessments were made while interviewing the 10 race organizers. Formative evaluates the volunteer program objectives such as efficiency and effectiveness in addition to the processes and progress toward goals of the program. This type of evaluation suits studying the marathon industry because these organizations use volunteers year-round. Because multiple events are held per year and recur annually, changes can be made. Summative evaluation focuses on the end of a program. Summative evaluation is important for accountability purposes, which is vital for a volunteer program since organizers are dependent on these people. Summative can help to determine if the race organization produced the intended effects for its volunteers. Within summative assessment, I used the "experimental" (a program causes a intended effect or specific outcome) and "therapeutic" (the impact or value of a program) designs (Henderson and Bialeschki, 2010). Do a race organizer's actions have a direct impact on a volunteer's experience? Halle et al. (1991) found that the frequency and quality of social interaction was just as valuable as the physical aspect of the leisure program. In my

thesis, the quality of social interaction is examined through the experimental and therapeutic designs.

I used an “interpretive” paradigm when analyzing the data, some of which is presented as an ethnography. “Ethnography” is the study of the socio-cultural contexts, processes, and meanings in cultural systems (Whitehead, 2002). Ethnography presents the world of its host population (race organizers) in human contexts of thickly described case studies (the specific experiences of each race organizer). By presenting the data in the form of ethnography, I hope to appeal to the members of the marathon community: both organizers and runners who take part in the discourse that encompass marathon events (Goodall, 2000). I also located gaps in the literature and found patterns among the data to identify a few areas that can fill those gaps.

“Interpretive paradigm” says that not one, but many answers, perspectives, and truth can be found within a research study (Henderson & Bialeschki, 2010). Interpretive paradigm also posits that different perceptions, descriptions, and interpretations can be found from the same study. Creswell & Miller (2000) state that when taking an interpretative approach, the researcher must maintain an open-ended and contextualized perspective (sensitive to place and situation). Interpretive paradigm means prolonged engagement in the field in which I participate. Fetterman (1989) explains “working with people day in and day out for long periods of time is what gives ethnographic research its validity and vitality” (p. 46). In addition to the time spent interviewing the research participants (10 race organizers), I have worked in the running industry for three years, served as a volunteer, and interacted with race organizers that work directly with

volunteers. I have observed numerous interactions with race participants and organizers alike and rely on this fieldwork to form some of the ethnography. Finally, I have participated in four out of the 10 race organizers' events and volunteered in one of the race organizer's events; therefore, I have seen the success of almost half of the interviewees' volunteer programs from a runner and volunteer perspective. These are all ways of employing an "etic" approach to ethnography, which means supplying an outside perspective to interpret the data. While "etic" is valuable, it is useful to remember anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski's words—the object of ethnography is "to grasp the native's point of view...to realize *his* [sic] vision of the world" (1922, p. 25). While reporting the data, it was crucial to maintain an objective point of view and establish "emic" validity, meaning learning the world of the marathon industry from the interviewees' responses. It was important to not allow personal experiences to inhibit the data from its true form. The ethnography written is a reconstruction of the race organizer's construction of their own world (Whitehead, 2002).

When analyzing the data, I used thick, rich descriptions so that readers could truly understand the culture and experiences of the race organizers. Thick descriptions are "deep, dense, detailed accounts...thin descriptions, by contrast, lack detail, and simply report facts" (Denzin, 1989, p. 83). I established credibility by giving as much detail as possible and described the relationship race organizers share in specific situations with their volunteers. Clifford Geertz (1970) defines "thick descriptions" as adventuring "in" to the interviews, in this case. He uses the analogy of 'winking.' When someone winks, it is not just the act of blinking at someone with one eye. People wink for specific reasons,

like to gain someone's attention or communicate a certain message. When the 10 race organizers explain how they operate when developing volunteer programs, where are these philosophies originating from? A "thick" description of winking would be the "meaning behind it and its symbolic import in society or between communicators" (Geertz, 1970). Geertz asserts that when writing an ethnography, the researcher must "treat human behavior as symbolic action, which signifies the question as to whether culture is patterned conduct or a frame of mind." I am interpreting the interviews as if I were interpreting "phonation in speech, pigment in painting, line in writing, or sonance in music." Each of those changes the meaning of the object, whether it's speech or a painting or a book's plot.

Further, when using the interpretive paradigm, I "disconfirmed the evidence" (Creswell & Miller, 2000) or established initial themes/categories seen among the interviewees' responses and then searched through that data for evidence that is consistent with or disconfirms these themes. In this process, I relied on my experiences to determine what was consistent with themes and what was not. This represents an interpretive approach in that analyzing and reporting the findings relies on examining all of the multiple perspectives of a theme/category. The search for disconfirming evidence provides further support for the interview's credibility because reality, according to interpretive paradigm, is "multiple and complex" (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

CHAPTER 2: UNDERSTANDING THE MARATHON INDUSTRY, VOLUNTEERISM, AND SERVANT LEADERSHIP

The Marathon (and Ultra-marathon) Industry

A marathon is a footrace of 26 miles, 385 yards (26.2 miles). The event can take place on roads, wilderness trails/dirt roads, or mountain paths. The most common type — the road marathon—is any footrace conducted on a course not specifically designed for athletic competition, which can be accurately measured using a calibrated bicycle (Association of Road Racing Statisticians). The opposite of this would be a track event, which is a race that takes place on a circuit specifically built for athletic competition.

An ultra-marathon is any organized footrace extending beyond the standard marathon running distance. Ultra-marathons typically begin at 50 kilometers (k) and can extend to massive distances (Association of Road Racing Statisticians). The most common ultra-marathon distances are 50k (31 miles), 50 miles, 100k (62 miles), and 100 miles. Ultra-marathons are most commonly run on trails and mountains, but several are held on a mixture of roads, trails, and mountain paths, and a few with “extreme” conditions (e.g., Badwater Ultramarathon with temperatures reaching up to 120° F). Ultra-marathon racing is much older than the marathon (which originated with the first modern Olympics in 1896) but only recently has the sport has been recognized by the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF). In 1991, the IAAF extended official

recognition to the 100-kilometer event. Since then, the 100k event has replaced the marathon as the longest running distance recognized by the world athletics governing body (Sayer, 1997).

The marathon's inception is said by legend to have taken place unintentionally in 490 B.C. by a Greek soldier, Pheidippides, who ran the 25 miles to Athens from the town of Marathon to announce a battleground victory over the Persians (James, 2009).

“Greetings, we win!” he exclaimed—then collapsed and died. Not for another 2,000 years would the marathon make a comeback at the restoration of the modern Olympic Games in Greece in 1896. In that event, 17 runners ran 40k, or 24.8 miles. Then, in 1908 the marathon course at the London Olympics went from Windsor Castle to the royal box at the Olympic stadium in White City because some sources say the Princess of Wales wanted her children to watch the start of the race from their home (James, 2009). The length of the race changed for some years after, but in 1924 that specific distance —26 miles, 385 yards (26.2) — was made the worldwide standard (James, 2009).

An estimated 800 marathons are now held around the world each year, 20 of them with 10,000 or more finishers. The three largest marathons in the U.S. in 2012 were the Bank of America Chicago Marathon with 37,475 finishers, Honolulu Marathon with 24,069 finishers, and the Marine Corps Marathon with 23,519 finishers. In 100 years, record times have dropped from close to three hours to close to two hours. Kenyan Patrick Makau has the current record that he set in Berlin in 2011 with a time of 2 hours, 3 minutes, 38 seconds. Britain's Paula Radcliffe set the women's record in 2003 in London in 2 hours, 15 minutes, 25 seconds. In 2012, the median time for a male

marathon runner was 4 hours, 17 minutes, 43 seconds with the female marathon runner being 4 hours, 42 minutes, 58 seconds. Table 1 shows USA Running's chart of the progression of marathon finishers over the last 35 years.

Table 1. Year Estimated U.S. Marathon Finisher Total

1976	25,000
1980	143,000
1990	224,000
1995	293,000
2000	353,000
2004	386,000
2005	395,000
2006	410,000
2007	412,000
2008	425,000
2009	467,000
2010	507,000
2011	518,000 (all-time high)
2012	487,000 [*]

*For the first time since 2001 the estimated number of U.S. marathon finishers dropped from a record 518,000 in 2011 to 487,000 in 2012 (a 6% decrease). However, similar to 2001, most of the drop can be due to a rare situation; in 2001, it was post-9/11 travel affecting participation rates for fall marathons, and in 2012, it was the cancellation of the ING New York City Marathon, the world's largest marathon with more than 47,000 finishers or 9% of the 2011 overall finisher total. There has been a great increase in estimated marathon finishers over the years. In the world, more 70,000 people complete ultra-marathons every year. The marathon distance is more popular, but both industries are growing each year.

Volunteerism

What is volunteering?

In *A Dictionary of Nonprofit Terms and Concepts*, a “volunteer” is defined as “someone who performs, even for a short period of time, volunteer work in either an informal or a formal setting.” It is through volunteer work that this person provides a service or benefit to one or more individuals (they must be outside that person’s family), usually receiving no pay, though people serving in volunteer programs are sometimes compensated for out-of-pocket expenses (Stebbins, 2009). Or, an organization could pay for certain expenses to allow people with limited financial resources to participate (Dekker & Halman, 2003). One donates their time, rather than goods. Therefore, donating blood, money, or clothing is not a form of volunteering because no volunteer ‘work’ is involved (Stebbins, 2009). Volunteering means that people give their time freely; they are not required to volunteer (Dekker and Halman, 2003). It is “the act of freely helping others without regard to financial and/or materialistic gain” (Fischer and Schaffer, 1993, p. 13). Finally, volunteering is “uncoerced help offered formally or informally with no pay done for the benefit of both other people and the volunteer” (Stebbins, 2004, p. 5). Volunteering can allow people to represent “who they are” (Baldwin & Norris, 1999, p. 13).

What is the best way to manage volunteers?

Since volunteers are one of the most valuable assets of an event, organizers must build a “guiding strategy to support the overall mission and objectives” of the event (Nassar & Talaat, 2009). Planning a volunteer program contains costs, improves quality

outcomes and improves organizational effectiveness. Productivity, high performance, positive attitudes, and good morale result from an effective volunteer management system. The services that volunteers provide create an atmosphere of continuous learning and sets precedents for future recreation professionals (Flood, 2005). Additionally, it is equally important to have properly trained professionals who know how to work with volunteers to create an atmosphere of productivity for the organization as well as the volunteers who freely provide their services. Volunteers allow paid professionals to devote more of their time to performing needed functions vital to the survival of the organization (Lauffer & Gorodezky 1977). Organizers need to supply volunteers with the proper training, gratitude, respect and communicate high expectations. Event organizers need to make responsibilities clear and keep the morale high for volunteers. What special sport organizers need is a depiction of these actions. My thesis aims to fill a void of research by illustrating the methods that special sport organizers use to create the aforementioned requirements of a “successful” volunteer program.

A volunteer manager is one who establishes and maintains a creative environment. The main focus is for volunteers to want to work together toward the same goals, which align with the organization’s values. To not understand what volunteers *really* want and need from their experience is the main hurdle for people showing up (Flood, 2005). Therefore, it is important to communicate ahead of time that volunteers can ask questions that will make their experience better. It is suggested to be willing to meet individually with volunteers and listen to their questions and problems (Solutions, 2007). In addition, it is crucial that volunteers have comprehensive and easy-to-understand instructions. It is

important to make sure they know what their duties and restrictions are. Finally, and most importantly, tell them how significant their job performance is to the organization (Major, 2002).

One of the best pieces of advice race organizers can consider is to harness volunteers' passions (Major, 2002) and recruit volunteers for more than just labeling envelopes, answering phones, and completing other administrative tasks. Organizers should learn their own leadership styles and skills. Choosing volunteers with leadership potential and involving them in planning and organizing the event is advantageous for the race. It is good to remember that many volunteer leaders find working on a community event a refreshing change from their day jobs, and they can bring fresh perspectives and passion to the race. One volunteer commented in Allen and Shaw (2009) that "being able to answer questions about your locality and where the sports fields are, all that sort of thing that was good to be able to have that knowledge."

Volunteers may be professionals in other fields and would like to use their skills on the job. To provide volunteers the best experience possible, managers could invest some time to understand the level of interest of the volunteer to the activity. If rapport is built and a relationship is established, volunteers might feel the want to return to volunteer at the next event, or again the following year. Volunteers are giving their time for free. Special sport organizers (e.g., race organizers) must continue to fuel their motivation post-event.

One must assume a volunteer does not know how to complete a task. Volunteers are professionals or experts in other areas and are therefore capable, intelligent people.

But because these people have jobs or interests outside of the volunteer job, a race organizer must be explicit in his/her instructions (Major, 2002). Further, each volunteer should feel empowered to use his/her talents, experiences, and creativity to get the job done. To make sure each volunteer can use his/her skills, a staff liaison should make sure that no tasks are duplicated or forgotten, and report the jobs accordingly to volunteers. If these volunteers do not have access to appropriate tools and information (or there is a duplication of jobs) they may be more a hindrance than help. Additionally, a race organizer can simplify registration and information-sharing through a website tool, like a “volunteer module.” A volunteer module can register volunteers and report the number still needed to reach the goal. Also, to spark the excitement among outside networks, a race organizer should encourage the sharing of volunteers’ personal stories at the event through social media, an e-newsletter, etc. (Edwards & Kreshel, 2008).

The importance of understanding volunteer motivations

To understand why people help charities, Bendapudi, Singh, and Bendapudi (1996) examined the donor’s decision process. They found that the image of the charity, cause of the need, and the portrayal of the beneficiary determined whether donors even perceived that the need existed. The same concept can apply to volunteers at special sporting events: “By formalizing the motivational routes—to gain rewards or avoid punishments, to reduce personal distress, to alleviate the other’s need—we enrich current understanding of the helping decision process” (Bendapudi, Singh, & Bendapudi, 1996). Selling the idea, selling the imagery, selling the adventure or unique experience of an event could be the ultimate way to attract volunteers. Potential volunteers must know that

a need exists—special sport event organizers must constantly communicate that they are needed for several reasons.

Finally, corporate human resources departments view participation in a quality event as an opportunity for team building and boosting employee morale. Marketing departments understand that greater involvement in an event increases the corporation's visibility in the community, both during the event and through the media coverage surrounding the event (Major, 2002). Presenting these opportunities to local companies is a great way to recruit large volunteer groups. Because corporations feel more connected to your organization's mission after serving in the trenches, they are more likely to support your events and year-round activities with enthusiasm.

So... Why volunteer?

Volunteers do not give their time because of one specific reason, but several. Motivations can include reasons like “volunteering makes me feel better about myself” and “volunteering at this marathon is worthy of my efforts and attention” (Strigas & Jackson, Jr, 2003). Volunteers can gain self-satisfaction and personal growth from their experience with volunteering (Nassar & Talaat, 2009). They can develop their personal and professional skill sets and enhance their confidence and self-worth (Nassar & Talaat, 2009). People will volunteer to “support a national team, improve community spirit, and strengthen the community image” (Bang & Ross, 2009). Volunteers work for free for the camaraderie and to know they are part of a larger, supportive group. They also like being a valued participant rather than a spectator, receiving “insider” enjoyment, and taking pride in achievement (Campbell, 2009). Volunteering also gives inexperienced

volunteers the opportunity to interact with and ask questions in person of other people in the organization (Major, 2002).

Monga found that volunteers participate mainly due to ‘affiliatory’ (attachment) reasons to the event. Bang and Ross (2009) show similar findings; when a person is ‘attached’ to the city or region, that connection may transform into a relationship with teams, causes, or organizations located in that city or region. “It is in this context that volunteering for an event could form a link to the community, with the primary motivation being to support and facilitate the success of the event hosted by the community” (Bang & Ross, 2009). Also, there are potential benefits of being associated with sport, health, and fitness, as well as being part of a legacy for the larger community (Misener, Doherty, & Hamm Kerwin, 2010).

Bang and Ross (2009) also found that volunteer motivations for smaller special sport events are similar to the motivations to volunteer at ‘mega’ sporting events. Big or small, the event benefits from receiving volunteer support in both situations. Bang and Ross (2009) found that volunteers wanted to satisfy a desire for “belongingness to sport related events,” and they will often volunteer for an event, no matter what the size (Bang & Ross, 2009).

McGillivray, McPherson, and Mackay (2013) studied the 2010 Delhi Flag Handover Ceremony (DFHC) to learn the motivations of volunteers. DFHC was a project delivered by Glasgow Life on behalf of the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games Organizing Committee. The Handover Ceremony reflects the passing of responsibility for the Commonwealth Games from one host (Delhi) to the next (Glasgow). The

researchers examined how local, regional and national identity affected volunteer experience of DFHC, the volunteers' experience of the DFHC project, the way the DFHC team was recruited, selection and training of volunteers, and past experience and chance of volunteering again post-Delhi. The volunteers reported a strong desire to represent their cities, country and host organizations. At first, volunteers expressed that they were motivated to participate because of the 'once in a lifetime opportunity,' as the DFHC team advertised, but the research suggests that representing the nation (Scotland) and being part of a major event became more important motivating factors for volunteers (McGillivray, McPherson, & Mackay, 2013). Another study found that positive connections among the different participants of the event also spread to the volunteers' connection with the city. They reported feeling that they were part of something happening in and important to their city (Allen & Shaw, 2009).

At DFHC, volunteers adopted a 'Team Delhi' label—an unofficial exclusive club/group associated with volunteering. Volunteer numbers within this group increased by two-fifths from the year previous, showing the positive outcomes not only for the volunteers, but also for their host communities across the country. Because of the success of DFHC, new volunteer communities were created. As seen from the DFHC case study, special sport events can advertise the social benefits of volunteering (Allen & Shaw, 2009). Misener, Doherty, and Hamm Kerwin (2010) found that the sport volunteer experience did indeed provide an opportunity to add health benefits as well as social contact and friendships. My thesis aims to divulge this type of experience—the event organizers' methods of encouraging the sharing of experiences in the design of volunteer

programs. Further, my thesis aims to depict how special sport organizers serve their volunteers and make volunteering appealing, fulfilling, and transformative.

Jarvis and Blank (2011) found that volunteers worked for free either to obtain a new learning experience, to gain a new experience or to meet new people, or to feel like a part of a community. This can foster feelings of competence and self-confidence (Allen & Shaw, 2009). Volunteers strategically choose the events for which they volunteer. Stebbins (2009) notes that individuals will lean toward events where they believe they will “reap valuable positive, personal, nonmaterial rewards such as experiencing pleasure, developing oneself (e.g., learning something, acquiring a new and valued skill), and expressing already-acquired skills and knowledge.” Han (2007) and Jackson, Jr. and Strigas (2004) also discovered that young college students hoped to gain some practical experience toward paid employment. Schools reward volunteer service with extra credit in class, as well.

Handling the challenges of volunteerism

Volunteers can sometimes have too much to do without enough direction/support (Doherty, 2010). This causes volunteers to feel “personally inconvenienced” and can lead to a lesser chance of volunteering again: “Sometimes you get criticized for trying to help and that is the most frustrating part. You give your time and you get criticized. I can’t change and if you want me to change, I will have to resign” (Misener, Doherty, & Hamm-Kerwin, 2010). This finding poses a valuable learning opportunity for special sport event organizers. My thesis aims to portray examples of ways to overcome this organizer-volunteer hurdle through servant leadership. Pitfalls of the volunteer

experience such as not enough help to get the job done, changes in management, feeling tied down by the volunteer role, and differences of opinions can actually become positives: if volunteers persevere through these situations, they can achieve their goals and express themselves (Stebbins, 2005). These challenges can even become stimulating and keep volunteers mentally active (Narushima, 2005). Through the challenges, event organizers must cut themselves 'slack.' No volunteer program is perfect and if a job is understaffed with employees, or if a post is lacking proper leadership, an organizer should keep in mind that "career volunteers occasionally need to persevere. People who want to continue experiencing the same satisfaction in an activity have to meet certain challenges from time to time" (Stebbins, 1998, p. 71).

To prevent (or overcome) downfalls, special sport event organizers should maintain open, up-front communication, schedule meetings well in advance with volunteers, and guarantee enough volunteers to share the load on the day of the event (Doherty, 2010). Event organizers should make sure that volunteers have that opportunity to fulfill their social growth needs by working closely with other volunteers, as well as meeting event participants and visitors. Where it is not possible to make sure that volunteers have contact with visitors, it may be even more important to promote a positive working environment of friendship/teamwork among the volunteers (Doherty, 2010). Volunteers are also great resources for providing constructive feedback in bettering the volunteer (and event) experience (Jarvis & Blank, 2011).

Training and professional development should also be conducted with the volunteers, depending on what each volunteer indicated as their strengths. Charitable

organizations (e.g., Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America, hospitals) routinely screen volunteers before accepting their help. If a volunteer is identified as motivated by social rewards (e.g., praise, recognition), the organization may be better off placing the volunteer in a high-visibility position (e.g., as a receptionist) than in a low-visibility position (Omoto and Snyder 1989). Once jobs have been designated, then supervision and evaluation for outcomes and modifications must occur (Nassar & Talaat, 2009). Dekker and Halman (2003) suggest that one of the reasons that volunteer turnover may be so great is the result of receiving insufficient training. Without good training, volunteers may not be able to do their assigned jobs well or to get the intrinsic rewards they expect. In order for volunteer training to be effective it needs to focus on the attitudes, knowledge and skills required to perform specific tasks. Even though volunteers have different investments in the organization than paid staff members, every volunteer appreciates the investment of training they receive in order to make them perform better at their jobs (Flood, 2005).

Stebbins (2009) studied French-speaking volunteers in Calgary and Edmonton, Canada. Many said they wanted to give back to their “local language community.” However, when it came to choosing the specific activity to work in, individuals were picky, or “self-interested.” They ‘selfishly’ approached what should be a ‘selfless’ activity. However, there is no denying that individuals prefer certain activities to others; sport organizers cannot use a ‘one-size-fits-all’ method of assigning volunteers to jobs. Therefore, Nassar and Talaar (2009) suggest “grouping volunteers together in terms of character assumed, their requests, previous experiences, skills, physical abilities and

responsibilities.” Poor matches will result in dissatisfied volunteers and staff members as well as increased volunteer turnover. Volunteers who are not placed in a comfortable role can potentially hurt future recruitment efforts if they leave with a negative experience and attitude (Flood, 2005).

Not every volunteer will have the chance to work in a location they desire. For every special sport event, there are unglamorous jobs. The willingness to do even the ‘awful’ or ‘boring’ tasks reflects “self-determined forms of extrinsic motivation” (Allen & Shaw, 2009). These types of jobs are not naturally interesting or enjoyable and therefore not intrinsically motivating. However, volunteers have the ability to see the importance of these jobs for the event to be a success (Allen & Shaw, 2009). The findings of my thesis aim to show how that importance is communicated and resonates from organizer to volunteer as well as uncover how race organizers incentivize, motivate, and inspire volunteers to enthusiastically partake in volunteer work.

In overcoming many obstacles, it is wise to conceptualize different “degrees” of volunteering (no help, token help, serious help) instead of a dichotomy of helping or not helping (Bendapudi, Singh, & Bendapudi, 1996). Individual volunteers cannot always be neatly compartmentalized either as career or as marginal volunteers, or as more or less committed than other volunteers (Cuskelly, Harrington, & Stebbins, 2003). Once an organizer can accept the varying degrees of volunteerism, this will help him/her situate the volunteer where he/she would be most helpful (Monga, 2006).

Showing appreciation

Extrinsic rewards are one of the best ways to recognize and thank volunteers.

Race organizers could give volunteers T-shirts or other 'swag' items, free breakfast or lunch, etc. (Monga, 2006). At the Georgia Marathon, Han (2007) found that young college students were motivated by "material" things like complimentary gifts (T-shirts, goodie bags, free tickets) in deciding whether or not to volunteer for the event. Almost half of the volunteers from a gymnastics event said they could see themselves volunteering again, but suggested more team-building activities. Jarvis and Blank (2011) found the motivations of volunteers at the 2007 World Artistic Gymnastics Championships to be extrinsic; they were looking for more to do while in the area for the event. Volunteers suggested that event organizers provide tourism activities like sightseeing tours or coupons good for restaurants, hotels, museums, etc. In Campbell (2009), a volunteer remembered, "At lunch on the last day all the [organizers] in the dining room stood up and gave us in the kitchen a great big cheer. You don't do it to get praised, but it still felt good to be appreciated."

Formal recognition systems are helpful mainly in satisfying the needs of the volunteer who has a need for community approval. These volunteers may very well feel more motivated and honored by a system which recognizes the achievements of "their" clients, and also recognizes the contribution that the volunteer has made towards this achievement (Flood, 2005). Extrinsic motives such as rewards, recognition and expectations of others have been reported in the volunteer motivation research, but seem to be secondary to volunteers in some studies (Allen & Shaw, 2009). My thesis aims to depict that extrinsic motivations may be more salient than research has suggested. Volunteers probably would not admit to enjoying recognition or praise and thanks.

Special sport event organizers have the ability to report from their point of view how volunteers respond to that type of reward.

It is imperative that event organizers remember to show appreciation “in order to serve as an internal reward” (Bang & Ross, 2009). Event managers must also encourage awareness for the importance of volunteering at the actual event as a means to successfully complete the event. Event volunteers tend to be more satisfied when they feel they helped make the event a success: “When volunteers feel that they are truly needed and responsible for the event, their job performance may be improved” (Bang & Ross, 2009).

Regardless of what the task is, recognition is important (Fisher & Ackerman, 1998). In an experiment by these researchers, Group 1 conducted clerical tasks that were not highly visible to others in the group (i.e., stuffing envelopes, making copies, etc.) whereas Group 2 conducted tasks were much more visible (i.e., working in a snack booth serving other parents and volunteers). One might expect that recognition would be less important for the socially visible tasks in Group 2 because others would already notice and have the ability to reinforce the behaviors. However, this was not the case as recognition was also effective in Group 2.

Servant Leadership

“More than any other leadership theory, [servant leadership] explicitly emphasizes the needs of followers” (van Dierendonck, 2010). Robert K. Greenleaf (1904-1990) is credited with coining the servant leadership concept. According to Greenleaf (1969, 1977), a leader’s focus must be that of the follower and his/her needs. Like the

follower, the leader too, is a servant. The servant leader's main goal is to serve and meet the needs of others, which ideally should be the main source of motivation for even taking up the leadership (Russell & Stone, 2002). The servant leader does not serve with a focus on results. Instead, the servant leader focuses on service itself (Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2003). The servant leader's first priority is developing a relationship with a follower, before achieving any end results occurs. Servant leaders trust their followers to take on tasks that are in the best interest of the organization (Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2003).

Servant Leadership Defined

- Melchar and Bosco (2010): wisdom (knowledge of the industry and the organization), organizational stewardship (ability to ethically connect organizational with personal goals), and altruistic calling (put the needs of followers first)
- Laub (1999): develops people, builds community, displays authenticity, provides leadership, and shares leadership
- Reed, Vidaver-Cohen, and Colwell (2011): interpersonal support (helping others succeed, promoting employees' leadership potential, wholeheartedly listening to others, sharing decision-making, treating employees with dignity and respect, and acknowledging when organizational morale is low), egalitarianism (two-way, multi-directional relationship with followers, not top-down or superior v. subordinate, and shows interest in learning from employees and/or followers) and moral integrity (gains employee trust and fosters transparency and honesty throughout the organization, willingly admitting mistakes)
- Parris and Peachey (2012): generating a shared vision dedicated to helping others, building a caring and loving community, and creating the freedom and resources for followers to become servants themselves
- Spears (1995): listening (emphasizing the importance of communication); empathy, (understanding others and accepting how and what they are); healing; awareness; persuasion (seeking to influence others relying on arguments not on positional power); foresight (foreseeing outcomes of situations and working with intuition); stewardship (holding something in trust and serving the needs of others); nurturing the personal/professional growth of followers; building community (emphasizing

that local communities are essential in a persons' life)

- Babakus, Yavas, Ashill (2011): the genuine and authentic care and support of subordinates; walk the talk and truly serve subordinates
- Ebener and O'Connell (2010): recognizes a person's gifts and talents and invites them into full participation in the organization; invites and inspires the followers to freely choose; inspire being a role model
- Chung, Jung, Kyle, & Petrick (2010): trust in leader and leader's support; help subordinates set and achieve their work goals; use processes (e.g., decision making) in determining how to have reward systems; develop a culture of serving others, which encourages followers to serve the organization and further the community in which the organization is embedded

These eight definitions can be boiled down to *Dirk van Dierendonck's six characteristics of servant leadership*, which portray the essence of "servant leadership."

Therefore, van Dierendonck's definition will be used throughout this document in response to the findings from the 10 interviews. The six characteristics are as follows:

- 1) Empower and develop people:** to enable people, foster a proactive, self-confident attitude among followers and gives them a sense of personal power
- 2) Humility:** to put one's own accomplishments and talents in perspective; to admit that he/she can benefit from the expertise of others
- 3) Authenticity:** to be true to yourself, accurately representing—privately and publicly—internal states, intentions, and commitments
- 4) Interpersonal acceptance:** to understand and experience the feelings of others and where people are coming from; to let go of mistakes and not carry a grudge into other situations; to adopt the perspectives of other people; to be warm, compassionate, and forgive others; to create a climate of trust where people feel accepted, are free to make mistakes, and know that they will not be rejected

5) Providing direction: to ensure that people know what is expected of them; to make work dynamic and “tailor made” (based on follower abilities, needs, and input); to provide the right degree of accountability

6) Stewardship: to take responsibility for the larger organization and to go for service instead of control and self-interest; to act not only as a caretaker but also as a role model; to set the right example, to stimulate others to act in common interest; to inspire social responsibility, loyalty, and teamwork

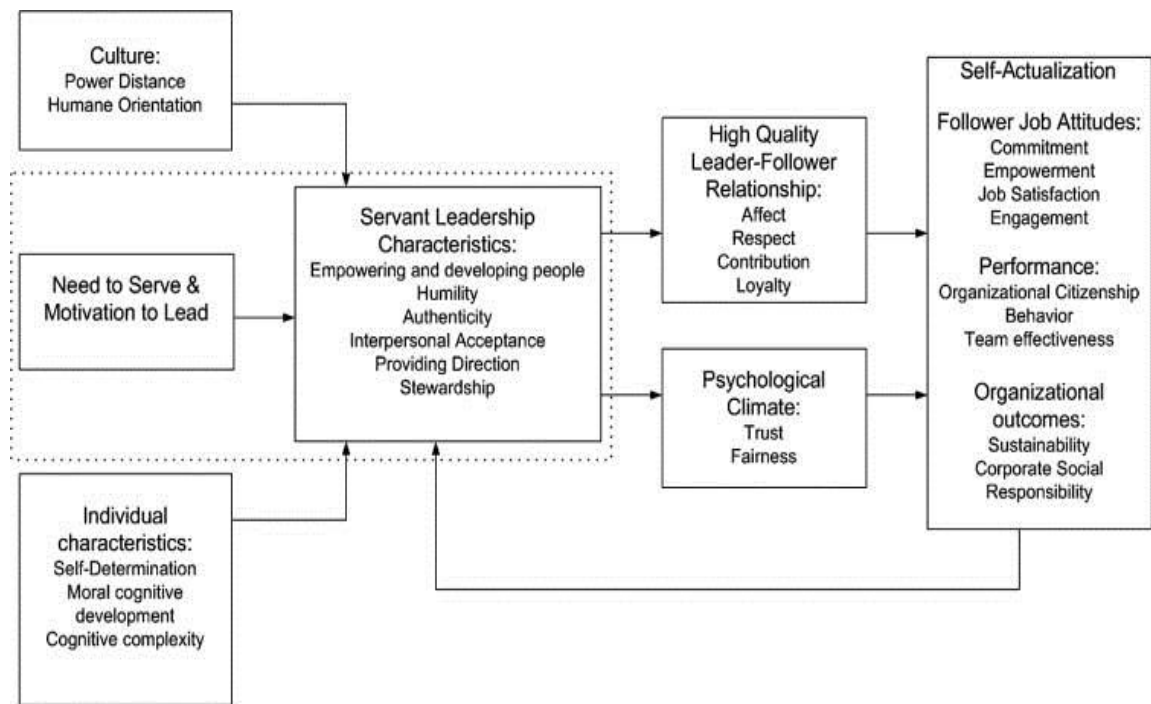


Figure 1. A framework that illustrates van Dierendonck’s six characteristics.

Figure 1 shows that there must first be a motivation to lead and a need to serve. Second, the six characteristics are seen in the center box of the chart. By exhibiting these six characteristics, the leader shows affect, respect, contribution, and loyalty. This builds a climate of trust and fairness. Under servant leadership, a follower may feel a stronger

urge to stay committed, feel empowered, experience job satisfaction, and be fully engaged in the job than under a different kind of leadership style.

Limitations

Limitations to this study include participant bias. When only portraying the race organizer side of the volunteer-organizer relationship portrays one side of the relationship. Another limitation includes self-reporting. Since I interview the race organizers firsthand, I run the risk of not receiving a 100% accurate portrayal of the relationship between organizer and volunteer. For example, I could be told several great methods of providing volunteers with direction, but if those tactics are not actually implemented, then servant leadership is not at work. When an interviewee self-reports, he/she may feel pressured to constantly present him/herself in a positive light to the researcher, also known as the Hawthorne Effect. A solution to this problem could be to interview co-workers of the race organizer. By interviewing a colleague of the organizer, the researcher may find more information about the organizer's faults/weaknesses as a servant leader. If the researcher learns more about how a servant leader *struggles* with his/her responsibilities as a servant leader, this could make for an interesting study.

The number of participants used for the study could be seen as a shortcoming. 10 participants are good, but not great. Five to ten more participants could make the study stronger in reaching saturation. There are a number of areas discussed by interviewees that need to receive multiple similar findings to reach saturation. Topics that received noteworthy ideas but did not reach saturation include race organizers describing feeling a sense of humility when working with volunteers and how race organizers represent the

organization's mission and goals when working with volunteers. Another limitation includes receiving some email responses versus phone. The researcher simply does not yield the same rich results as he/she could in a phone call, where follow-up questions are asked, clarification is given, the interviewee feeds off of reaction of interviewer, and so on. Some race organizers did not have time for a phone call or felt more comfortable typing responses than sharing verbally. If this is the case, the researcher needs to recruit more participants willing to share responses over the phone. Finally, the research conducted in this study does not examine the level of satisfaction of volunteers when working with these servant leader race organizers. To learn if this method truly is effective in bettering volunteers' experiences, it is important to receive their input.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

There is still much to be examined through a servant leadership framework. Seldom is research on servant leadership used as a method of managing volunteers in special sport events such as the marathon. My thesis aims to uncover descriptions of a servant leadership approach to foster sound volunteer programs in an ever-growing industry that heavily relies on a volunteer labor force. My thesis explores the race organizer's relationship and interactions with the volunteers reported *from the race organizer's point of view*. Studying volunteerism and sports through semi- or un-structured interviews, especially as illustrated in Parris and Peachey (2012), Allen and Shaw (2009), Misener, Doherty, and Hamm-Kerwin, (2010), and Jones (2012) proves qualitative research to be the best method for providing rich portrayals of the process, interactions, and philosophies of race organizers leading volunteers to serve as integral parts of an event. Therefore, the following research question is proposed for this study:

Research Question: How do race organizers describe how they invest in, manage, and maintain volunteer programs through servant leadership?

Participants

The participants for this study consisted of 10 current race organizers (five male, five female) throughout the United States. The criteria set is that participants had to be a current Race Director, Operations Manager, or Volunteer Coordinator. These individuals

in these positions work with volunteers more than any other staff members in the marathon industry (e.g., Marketing Director, Logistics Manager, Database Administrator, etc.) Additionally, the 10 race organizers had to be part of race organizations known for their prestige, history, or popularity (but *not* field size) within the marathon industry—all qualities that *possibly* point to strong leadership within volunteerism.

A participant must be a current member of a team that executes a marathon or ultra-marathon* footrace that requires a volunteer base for the event to be successful. The event must occur annually and it is ideal if the race organizer works with volunteers at multiple events throughout the year. Race organizers come from a variety of events, including being within the top five largest marathons in the U.S., the “toughest” marathon in the U.S., and one of the largest race series in the U.S. My goal was to include a sample of participants who work in various environments and geographic locations. Out of the 10 race organizers, two work on the west coast, three work in the Midwest, and five work on the east coast. Out of the 10 race organizers, five work for road marathons and five work for trail/mountain marathons.

I initially contacted this purposive sample of participants via email (please see Appendix A for sample email). When a race organizer agreed to participate, I acquired his or her written consent to comply with the university’s Institutional Review Board policies.

*The race organizers interviewed for this thesis are expert organizers of the marathon and ultramarathon distance. However, 10 out of the 10 the organizers execute events in other distances including the 5k (3.1 miles), 10k (6.2 miles), 10-miler, and half marathon (13.1

miles). For purposes of learning about the organizer-volunteer relationship, the marathon and ultra-marathon are the focus because of the high demands placed on organizers due to the length of the event and therefore a greater need for volunteers and greater amount of time given, energy expended, and emotions invested.

Procedures

I received approval from the Institutional Review Board from the Office of Research Integrity & Assurance (please see Appendix B for official letter stating approval) and then contacted each participant about the study. After scheduling the interview at a time convenient for the participant, seven out of the ten interviews were conducted via telephone and three of out the ten interview responses were sent via email. The phone interviews lasted between 30-45 minutes. I used semi-structured, in-depth interview questions (please see Appendix C) to prompt discussion regarding servant leadership qualities between race organizers and their volunteers' prior, during, and after race day. The interview protocol was designed for participants to describe their experiences they have had with working with volunteers in executing their event. The interview process allowed the participant to partially control the direction of the conversation depending upon their experiences and interests. The descriptive interview questions included grand tour and experience type questions to gain similarities and different perspectives with each interviewee. Also, accompanying each question were a couple probing questions (e.g., "What do you mean by...?" and "Can you give me an example of...?") I urged the participants to expand on responses by giving personal

accounts to gain a better understanding of what servant leadership looks like between race organizers and volunteers. This enhanced the clarity and richness of the responses.

The interview questions were organized around a number of areas, including: (a) the race organizer's history of involvement in volunteer management; (b) impact of race organizer's interactions with volunteers before, during, and post-race day; (c) impact of delegating tasks to volunteers and training of volunteers; and (d) holding volunteers accountable, solving conflicts, weakness, and other questions on involvement with volunteer management.

I audio-recorded and transcribed the interviews on a laptop computer, removing all identifying information from the transcript. The digital audio recorder containing the file was kept on a password-protected computer, at which at the end of the study was destroyed to ensure privacy. Anonymous transcriptions will remain saved on computer.

Analytical Procedures

Once the interviews and transcriptions were complete, I coded the data. Using the process of open coding to find common themes among each participant, the goal was to unitize data according to the research questions (e.g. all comments about delegating tasks, all comments about motivating and inspiring volunteers). I also used the process of axial coding - the goal being to identify the causes, contexts, conditions, actions or interactions and consequences of a particular category, like the impact of showing appreciation/thanks towards volunteers.

Coding the data enabled me to record common themes among the participants as they relate to the research question. Throughout the coding experience, I aimed to find constant comparisons with the data. Much of the coding was devoted to generating categories about (a) the race organizer's amount of involvement with managing volunteers, (b) impacts of volunteer training/task delegating, (c) topics discussed between race organizers and volunteers, (d) examples (stories) of servant leadership among race organizers and volunteers and (e) signs that servant leadership is evident between race organizers and volunteers. Finally, I employed selective coding which aims to uncover the core category that centers the main explanation of how servant leadership qualities are shown and communicated to and within volunteer individuals and groups. This form of qualitative analysis allows for discovery rather than testing/verification of a phenomenon. The final themes are presented within the findings section and subsequently discussed with respect to the literature on volunteerism, servant leadership, and marathon industry (Misener, Doherty, and Hamm-Kerwin, 2010).

Servant leadership has been measured in several ways, quantitatively. Laub (1990) developed a survey used to determine the extent an organization has a servant leadership culture. One questionnaire focuses on the organization and the other on leadership—this survey reflects the organization as a whole, its top leaders, and the experience of the follower. The second instrument that has been used is Page and Wong's (2000) Servant Leadership Profile. The greatest problem of this measure seems to be the factorial validity (van Dierendonck, 2010). Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) introduced an instrument aimed to measure the 10 characteristics described by Spears to which they

added an 11th characteristic: calling. For each characteristic, five to 7 items were developed. Fifty-six items were tested on face validity. Exploratory factor analysis resulted in a five-dimensional instrument. Unfortunately, an attempt to replicate their findings with a South African sample failed, indicating that this instrument might actually be only one-dimensional. Van Dierendonck and Nuijten (in press) created 99 items that represent eight dimensions of servant leadership. In three steps, a combined exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis approach resulted in an eight-dimensional measure of 30 items. The original development samples were in Dutch; confirmatory factor analysis for an English-language (U.K.) sample confirmed the factorial structure. It seems to be the only instrument with a good factorial structure that covers all six key characteristics of servant leadership.

Using van Dierendonck's six characteristics, I implemented a qualitative approach, and returned to the data "over and over again to see if the constructs, categories, explanations, and interpretations make sense" (Patton, 1980, p. 339), a sense-making process. I also applied the process of axial coding to identify the causes, contexts, conditions, actions/interactions and consequences of a particular category, like race organizers providing direction to volunteers (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 246-252). A qualitative, interview-driven method was chosen so that the experiences of the participants could be evaluated in complete detail. The open-ended questions used in the in-depth interviews with the 10 participants were designed to allow for the best opportunity to collect necessary data for analysis. A driving goal of the research was to try and determine what the necessary and sufficient conditions were in order for an

organization to sustain servant leadership (Jones, 2012).

In the ethnography, I will tell two stories: one is about the culture of volunteerism within a running community and what this means through the perspective of the race organizers, while the other is the one about me as the researcher and how I did this research (Goodall, 2000, p. 120). In my ethnography, the analysis and coding of the several conversations I had with the race organizers (in addition to my interpretative reflections on the meaning of them) become parts of the overall process of finding patterns that are capable of suggesting a narrative or story of my interpretation of this culture (Goodall, 2000, p. 121). A narrative inquiry approach explores individuals' understandings of their experience in the context of their everyday lives, while simultaneously looking to the wider social and cultural resources on which people draw to help them make sense of their lives (Campbell, 2009).

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Race organizer profiles are below. The participant names have been changed and the names of events they manage are not mentioned.

Don, 30 years as race director for over 70 ultramarathons
Art, 20+ years in ultramarathon industry, president of running club of 500 members
Marcy, 13 years as volunteer coordinator
Randy, 12 years as race director
Bill, 10 years as operations and volunteer coordinator
Fiona, 10 years as race director
Shelly, 10 years as volunteer and operations manager
Karen, nine years as operations and volunteer manager
Sally, six years as race coordinator, including volunteer management
Jack, one year as volunteer coordinator

The following quotes from the respondents above have been organized into one of van Dierendonck's six servant leadership characteristics. The quotes stand alone and act as snapshots and descriptions of race organizers at work using a servant leadership style. Below each bolded subtitle includes a short synopsis of features of each characteristic of servant leadership.

Humility: Motivation of race organizers to be servant leaders

Race organizers are humbled by the selfless acts of volunteers. The symbiotic relationship begins when race organizer witnesses a volunteer serve the runner, just as a race organizer should. The volunteer is an extension of the race organizer. The volunteers show just the same enthusiasm and investment in making sure the runners succeed as the race organizer does. The race organizer is inspired by such selflessness and therefore

continues to want to serve his/her volunteers. It is a beautiful cycle of serving others – and in the end, this service benefits the quality of the marathon’s execution. To the race organizer, this is a rewarding part of their job, understanding what is happening here.

- “At the 100-mile race we put on, some of the runners will arrive at an aid station and they’re tired and they’re sore and they want to quit. But the volunteers will pop their blisters for them and feed them food, and encourage them to go on and do everything they can to not give up. There’s a lot more to it than just standing and handing out water.” – Art
- “A lot of volunteers are past participants, and through that experience, they realize how much goes into executing not just a marathon, but a weekend full of events activities. Volunteers always mention they’ve participated and now it’s time to give back.” –Karen
- “Probably where I have the least trouble getting volunteers is [our main] 100k which starts at 12:01 a.m., in the winter, in the middle of night, in the cold. I have less trouble getting help for that than I do for other 50ks I direct, during the daytime in nice weather. You have to sell the race. You have to sell the fun. I think people look for adventure.” – Don
- “Our volunteers are also participants. They’ll volunteer at packet pickup on Friday and run in the race on Saturday.” – Bill
- “Aid stations are very social. The volunteers know a lot of the runners. People who run several races want to give something back...Plus, they get to see all their friends.” – Art
- “The volunteers are more surprised and gratified by the participants’ reaction to them being there. Time and time again, they just can’t believe people are actually thanking them. A runner will go by, and say “Thank you for being here.” I get that comment so often. Anybody likes to be appreciated.” – Marcy
- “Some of our volunteers get up at 3:30 in the morning and get on a van to ride to the top of a 14,000 foot mountain in a snow storm to work a race. I’m always amazed these people show up. Some don’t, things come up. But it’s so refreshing when you see these people come and they’re ready to go. Otherwise you couldn’t have the race.” -Randy

Empower and develop people: Providing volunteers with the tools to succeed

Race organizers want their volunteers to do the job and do it well. Race organizers simply do not have the time to babysit volunteers. Therefore, it is imperative they provide the volunteers with plenty of direction so they can work independently and cohesively within a group, when applicable. If the race organizer puts the time in before the event to prepare his/her volunteer with lots of communication, this greatly lessens the chance of volunteer mishaps, like no-shows or late arrivals at work position, misguiding runners on the course, misplacing bags at baggage, or treating a runner with disrespect.

- “As a rule, which is always true, when someone tells you ‘I have a group, I’m bringing 30 people’, you can count on about five people coming. It is never as many as a group will tell you. The more people hear from you, the more likely they’ll stay on board. They will lose momentum if they only hear from you a couple times in six months.” – Fiona
- “You’ve got to educate your volunteers. I usually have a meeting and give them handouts. I try to get them to go their aid station before race day if at all possible. When they don’t do that, especially up a mountain or a tricky place they might get lost.” – Don
- “You have to assume the volunteers don’t know. Never assume. Never assume when someone says, “Oh yeah, I’ll be there Sunday at 7 a.m.” You need to follow up a few times to confirm. You also can’t assume they know what the responsibilities are. It’s better to assume they know nothing. Your job is to teach them and train them. If they don’t know what they’re doing, it falls on the events side of things.” – Shelly
- “I provide volunteers with a “cheat sheet” at packet pickup and registration. This sheet has all of the information on how to use the computers for registration, the check-in process, what to say to participants, and what they receive with their race entry.” – Jack
- “You have to have a plan from initial contact to final confirmation. Volunteers also need maps, report times, and directions. –Sally

- “We give a handout that says, ‘This is how you set up a stop, how you hand out water’, it’s a five- page PDF with pictures. Once it’s created, it’s very easy to get that to individuals.” – Bill
- “The main tool is always a wealth of information. They want to know the ‘when’, the ‘where’, the ‘what’, and the ‘how.’ You have to be detailed. The more info they have, the better. Every volunteer is different. They need guidance. A lot of times, they want to feel needed. You run a fine line of having too many volunteers to not having enough. They need that sense of necessity. You want to give them free range, like ‘When you get there, figure it out/use your best judgment’ but I find that most of them more than agreeable to take instruction.” – Marcy

Providing direction: Volunteer training and delegation of tasks

If a race organizer appoints a leader or captain who can spearhead the setup and execution of a volunteer post, this can dramatically improve the volunteer experience. Large groups especially need this leadership throughout the entire event, not just prior from the race organizer. This leader or captain can be a staff member or “key” volunteer that has proven his/her skills/commitment to the organization. The race organizer places trust in these individuals to see to it that the post operates smoothly. Online modules are becoming more popular for a volunteer signup method. This allows the prospective volunteer the freedom to choose what job he/she would like to fill. Prior to the event, one-on-one meetings, emails, phone calls, or kick-off events establish a personal relationship of the organizer with the volunteer. This contributes to higher volunteer attendance and satisfaction, as seen from volunteer feedback.

- “For our year-round volunteers, we have committee meetings that members are expected to attend. All of the key volunteers are usually assigned volunteers to work under them, and it is their responsibility to ensure everyone is up to speed on their role and responsibilities. For our year-round volunteers, we provide an extensive volunteer manual and within it are policies, procedures, and expectations that we set.” – Karen

- “It is our full responsibility to prepare the volunteers for their day on the job. It’s more than collecting names and phone numbers and passing that on to committee leads or race director, it’s getting the volunteers ready. Help coordinate the activity, educate them on what the job is, how they need to prepare/dress, etc. so when they come that morning, they’re on time, they’re prepared, they know who to report to, where they’re going, and what their responsibilities are. We’ve got 700 volunteers during the weekend. I can’t contact every one of them on race day so we’ve got to do the preliminary prep work to educate and coordinate the volunteers.” - Randy
- “It starts by understanding what they’re volunteering for. We’ve made an effort to improve our volunteers’ perspective online. They can check on individual assignments, read the synopsis for the assignment as in “You can expect to be here, for this length of time, this is how we recommend you dress’, etc. That way, they choose the better position.” – Bill
- “The process is simplified by the fact that we have modules online...there are few assignments for water stations and course marshaling – these are strictly for group assignments—we don’t let individuals sign up because we want that to be cohesive, like a high school team, where they know each other, or they are used to their leader.” – Bill
- “We have a race committee for every event. The core members are full-time staff and we have another 20-50 key individuals who will be in a specific area: at dry bag, packet pickup, course marshals... every committee member is responsible for briefing volunteers. For example, at the finish line, there is an overall finish line coordinator along with individual committee coordinators for medal, water, food, and post-race gifts. So, volunteers will be told, ‘You will report to the finish line and check in with coordinator’, and they’ll tell them, ‘you’re volunteering for this...here’s where the finish line is’, they give them a map, ‘you’re going to report to...’ and give name...It would be impractical to try and actually assign groups to specific spots ahead of time. For example, a high school group was told to do medals and that would have worked fine if all groups showed up in equal numbers. But it became difficult to manage when some would show up, but not all people show up. It becomes much easier to manage when all 100 people are sent to the finish line and are then broken up in 25 people per group depending on who is there.” – Bill
- “In the time leading up to the race, it’s very rare that assignments would be made on race day because it’s all part of the planning process, the race director has to know who’s available for what. Usually the race director will ask the volunteers if they have preferences for the different jobs they do.” – Art
- “To organize volunteers at aid stations, there’s always an aid station captain and the race director can communicate to the aid station captain how he needs things to go at

that aid station and then the captain to see to it that his volunteers execute the plan. The aid station captain is a mini-race director. He's responsible for getting all the supplies, getting the volunteers organized, seeing that everything goes as it should."
–Art

- “We create a volunteer module based on event needs.” – Sally
- “The registration system (great to have an online option, if possible) needs to have clear job descriptions that include; volunteer duties/expectations, shift time, contact information should they have any questions leading up to the event. On event day, it is critical to have a volunteer lead go through the day with the volunteers, reviewing duties/expectations. It is important for the volunteer to have a day-of contact person (volunteer lead, event staff, etc.)” –Karen
- “We use an online volunteer registration system for assigning volunteers to certain tasks for our events. The online process is great, it allow volunteers to sign a waiver. Using an online system ensures volunteers are given all of the details they need upfront, they understand the commitment they are making. They can also choose a job that suits their needs. On the day of the event, we have volunteer leads assigned to each area (Packet Pick-up, Registration, Fluid Stations, Course Marshals, etc.) who provide instructions to the day-of volunteers. The volunteer registration website also displays a job description, and a week out from our events, we follow-up with an email to all volunteers regarding their role for the day, etc.” – Karen
- “At an aid station or water stop, it's always wise to appoint a group leader for each group. Group leaders needs to be enthusiastic and motivated. They might entice the group to do things, bring music and have a good time with the aid station. If you leave it up to each individual and you don't appoint a leader, people can feel lost. When you just tell them, “Go off and do this” you have this group of five or six people without a group dynamic. It's always good to say, ‘Hey you're in charge of this’ - it goes a lot smoother.” – Fiona
- “Instead of having 5400 individual volunteers, we work in groups. A lot are associated with a non-profit group, like a church that has 50 members assigned to a water stop. We have training meetings, not for all 50 people in that group, but one or two of the group leaders. We also get them together and have a “trial race.” Our race is in May and there's another big city race in March and we work a food station, just to give everyone a trial run. Then they are responsible for going back and instructing all the people at their station. For our expo volunteers, they come an hour before they're actually supposed to work and we have a quick tutorial. You can say a meeting is mandatory, but there's always some group leaders that I have to meet with individually.” -Marcy

Empower and develop people: Dealing with the “unglamorous” job

Race organizers know how to empower and develop people’s skills even through the mundane, ugly jobs of a marathon event. Communicating that unglamorous jobs are usually the most integral parts of the marathon can inspire someone to go the ‘extra mile’ to pitch in towards those unpopular positions. Trash pickup, baggage security, and course marshaling are a few examples. These jobs can actually require the most attention to detail, drive, and skill; if a volunteer *knows* this, they are more likely to rise to the challenge. The only way a race organizer can solidify a team of volunteers that ‘gladly’ partake in the ‘unglamorous’ jobs are if you reinvent what it means to participate in these types of jobs. One option is to reward groups monetarily (this would be cheaper than hiring a professional service to pick up trash, for example). Another option is to host appreciation parties, individually introduce these volunteers to staff, allow staff to engage with these volunteers, and allow these volunteers to share their experiences post-event. Sometimes the best stories about interactions between volunteer-volunteer or volunteer-runner come from those ‘unglamorous’ jobs.

- “I’ve noticed that volunteers would much rather work at registration, entering runner information and giving them their bibs then work at bag check where they have to take the bags and sort them for later. Both are equally important, but the less glamorous jobs are often looked down upon by many volunteers.” – Jack
- “You have to let them know how important they are. Sometimes your most unglamorous jobs are the most important jobs.” – Don
- “It’s all in the phrasing! We push ‘support your runner’, ‘show your pride’, ‘support the troops’ messages. Putting the job in text imparts it into the brain. Volunteers look for what they see and remember.” – Sally
- “Communicate the benefits we will see by getting the “tough” job done. It’s also important to say “thank you” right off the bat.” – Karen

- “We provide fundraising opportunities for non-profits. Because of this, we tend to have an easier time filling the more difficult positions.” – Karen
- “The least glamorous job that I always have is [for someone] to stand at an intersection to [lead runners] to go the right way. People are always happy to help at a water station, an aid station, but it’s very hard convincing them to stand all by themselves in a vest. You can be in that position for a long time. I always tell them that they probably have the most important job ever, make sure people are going the right way.” - Fiona
- “Tell them just to have fun with it, like if they want to bring music or have a sign to cheer runners on. Enticing people to have fun with whatever task they have is always good.” – Fiona
- “There are many unglamorous jobs, like the volunteer on the corner, showing everyone the turn—their job is easy. And they probably feel like ‘I don’t need to even be here’, but if they’re not there, people will go the wrong way! I try to instill in them, ‘Yeah, you’re going to feel like you’re not doing anything’, but it *should* be really boring. If all goes well, you’re going to feel like you’ve done nothing, and that’s because you were there and nothing went wrong. If things go bad and you become really busy, that’s not a good sign.” – Marcy
- “Everyone wants to hand out those medals at the finish, especially sponsors. Nobody wants to stand at the compost bin telling runners to throw their banana peels in there, or stick their hands in the plastic bin to get out that banana peel and throw it in the compost bin. Our green team people do that. Instead of policing the garbage cans, we try and make it an educational thing. Like yogurt containers, the supervisor told runners that containers of yogurt are recyclable, but the lid is not. One goes in the trash and one goes in the recycle bin. I heard the volunteers make it as a lesson in composting and recycling. They put a twist on that. Also with the course marshals, I tell them, ‘The police really love you, but they’ll never tell you that.’ When a volunteer is not there, the police will tell us they’re ticked off. Some volunteers are really intimidated by that, like they have to stop a freight train coming. No, they don’t have to be at a major intersection, the police will handle that. No one wants to feel under-qualified, but they do want to feel like they’re needed.” – Marcy
- “The toughest one is post-event clean up. Everyone is tired. It’s late in the evening. But for this specific job, I hired the Boy Scouts and donated to their troop. It’s not fun, but they know they’re getting money. Describe the job very specifically and then reward by whatever means you see fit.” - Randy

Interpersonal acceptance: Treat like a staff member, remember he/she is a volunteer

Race organizers will not make a volunteer feel self-conscious or guilty for making a mistake. Race organizers can struggle with walking this delicate line of treating a volunteer like an employee (hold to high standards, have high expectations) but remember he/she is a volunteer (not hold responsible for “serious” mistakes, practice patience). Having said that, race organizers are not afraid to be firm with volunteer and have high expectations of volunteers. In fact, communicating high expectations to volunteers can entice them to take the job seriously and ‘get’ more out of the experience knowing they are responsible to the organization. Race organizers are not afraid to ‘let go’ of a volunteer if they are compromising the integrity of the marathon or will rearrange their position to something more appropriate for their personality or physical capabilities (per feedback from other volunteers or by trusting his/her own ‘gut’).

- “Our key volunteers are dedicated enough where we hold them accountable. Accountability does exist and can play a part maybe in a more drastic situation like taking an aid station away from a captain who continually has let the event down. But it’s hard to fire a volunteer.” - Art
- “If a problem or conflict is compromising the safety of an event or the integrity of the organization, it is essential that it be addressed immediately. If there are issues that can be addressed after an event, it is important to do so in a timely manner. It is also important to provide examples of why things were a problem or caused conflict. Perhaps if someone has a weakness in a certain area, maybe they are just not a good fit for that job.” – Karen
- “It is always important to communicate the importance of volunteerism and share the impact and value their service has on the organization and community. With that, should there be conflict or issues, people realize the how their interactions and contributions can affect an event.” - Karen
- “You have to learn how to give them direction without treating them like your employees. You can’t strong-arm someone into coming. If they tell you the night

before they can't make it, you can't do much but have a 'plan b.' All you can do is communicate with them as much as possible." – Fiona

- "If someone volunteers to help [and something goes wrong] they're not lazy--it was your mistake for not giving them the right information." – Fiona
- "You walk a fine line. You can't be bossy but you can't let the inmates run the asylum." – Marcy
- "Sometimes we'll get a group where they'll want to work registration, or need sit-down jobs, or they're not early morning folks, so the afternoon 2 o'clock shift works beautifully for them. But sometimes that doesn't work out. It's a fast-paced job and some people don't perform well under pressure. Then you have a problem from the event side. But with who is there, you have to go with it, and make it work." – Marcy
- "Our event goes off at 6:30 a.m. on a Sunday. Some volunteers have to be there at 5 a.m. That's part of their accountability—just to show up. We work with these non-profit groups. Not only are they accountable to me, but to their group leader. They don't have to see me on Monday morning, but they'll have to see their group leader at school or church or at the next club meeting. In that sense, they're probably more accountable to that organization than to our marathon." – Marcy
- "One year we had a volunteer not at their post, and some of the half marathoners missed their turn. The volunteer should have been there, but it's a volunteer. We don't blame that volunteer for not being there. We should have had signage, a police officer, a sandwich board with a turn signal, so in case a volunteer is not there, it's a fallback." – Marcy
- "Volunteers are not like employees where you can give reviews, you can rate them, you can fire them. It's a different management style. You have to coax them, and thank them, and make them feel important. Some people haven't worked out and we've moved them to a different position, or sometimes we don't invite them back. Or, if I have them come back I better position them, or say 'No, thank you' on their application, which I have done before." – Randy
- "I try to remember who that ["problem volunteer"] was and ask them to not help again. You want to get people who are responsible. Trust your gut feeling. Sometimes I have a gut feeling where I don't know if someone's able to complete a task and sure enough, it turns out it's not good. You have to make judgments in a very short amount time - follow your judgments." – Don

- “If I see a volunteer is not vocal enough in one role that requires this characteristic, I will send them to another role and have someone else take over. I try to do my best to match personality type with the job.” – Jack
- “We have 9000 assignments. I’ll tell the group leader, ‘You know your group better than I do. I’ll need to know the makeup or characteristics of your people.’ Not to be derogatory, but if the volunteers are old or need to sit down, they don’t need to be working at a water stop. If they’re young kids and have a short attention span, they may not be real good working the registration area. They may be better at stuffing bags or poster-rolling where they can talk and not pay attention but still get the job done.” – Marcy

Stewardship: Race organizers show loyalty, exhibit teamwork, and serve as role models

Race organizers will not leave volunteers ‘in the dust.’ They will not abandon them; they will make sure they are prepared for the job, and if they are not, they will become available to assist when needed. Race organizers are not afraid to participate in the same jobs as the volunteers (e.g., picking up trash). They treat the volunteers as equals. It is the responsibility of the race organizers to sell the event; the race organizer is part of this process. If they want volunteers to return, they have to show volunteers that they believe in the spirit of the event. Showing volunteers that managing marathons is a passion (and full-time job!) can inspire the volunteers to become just as invested. It is easy to downplay volunteering at a marathon because the sport is so simple. Marathon running may not seem like an activity where you can ‘give back’ to humanity. But race organizers can show how this is completely the opposite – volunteers have the ability to make a difference in people’s lives. If the race organizer exhibits this behavior, it can become contagious.

- “You have to sound like it’s going to be fun, challenging, neat. You have to make it fun for the helpers. They have to *want* to be there and then they have to *want* to come back - because you don’t pay them.” – Don

- “Most of them have the best of intentions, they may not always know what to do, but they want to be there and help. I walk over very nice and say, ‘Hey guys! How’s it going? You know what I could use your help with? It’d be so awesome if we could get this trash up.’ You make it a fun job: ‘The faster we do this, the faster we’re out of here. Ready, set, go!’ I’m also not above picking up trash myself, so if they see that I’m gonna get in there and do some of it too, they’re more willing to help too. Get them started, re-direct the behavior. Regroup and remind them what they’re there for.” – Shelly
- “Runners are crazy, especially at the start line. They’re pretty hyped up. I don’t think a volunteer deserves to have to feel the wrath of some crazy runner. They’re not getting paid to be there. It’s not right for the runners to treat them that way. The runners don’t always treat volunteers with respect...[For example, if there’s a] disagreement about corral assignments, the race coordinator and security personnel will need to protect them.” – Shelly
- “I allow volunteers to answer questions [of runners and spectators]. If I see them struggling with a question, I always step in. I also make sure that anyone who is complaining comes to see me and does not take their frustration out on the volunteers.” – Jack

Authenticity: Race organizers uphold mission and goals of the marathon organization

Race organizers take the time to teach volunteer aspects of race management.

They do not ‘dumb down’ the job, they explain it as he/she would execute in their daily job. It is the responsibility of the race organizer to be as transparent as possible. They are not afraid to explain how serious a job is to the organization and what it means to runners in terms of having an exceptional experience. If the behavior seems complacent or if the group energy has been deflated, it is the team captain/leader’s (appointed by the race organizer) job to raise the spirits and/or redirect the behavior of volunteers. There is also a great importance in showing appreciation to volunteers in special ways that allow the race organizer and his/her staff to individually thank the volunteer. The mission of the marathon should be to deliver an exceptional experience to both runners and volunteers;

in this, race organizers can encourage the sharing of stories, feedback, and anecdotes to make the event better.

- “They need an enthusiasm for what they’re doing. It’s a pretty simple matter to get them organized and executing the game plan on race day. The most important thing is enthusiasm and a willingness to join in on a group effort.” – Art
- “You will have, especially with a new group...complacency. If it doesn’t go well, I ask myself, ‘What did I not give them?’ Or I go to committee members, and ask ‘What did you see go wrong?’ Or I go to the group [and ask], ‘I heard there were some problems. How did it go?’ I’ll go to both sides. I like to give every group the benefit.” - Bill
- “I ask them, ‘Please tell me what areas of the event could we have done better’ and ‘What areas not related to your assignment that you observed could we have done better?’” – Bill
- “If you have repeat offenders, it is your responsibility to remove them from the database, allowing another reliable person to register.” – Sally
- “With our year-round volunteers, as a staff, I think we do a great job of working with our key volunteers to allow them to take ownership of their role. We do set annual goals and I think it is through this exercise we are able to work together to identify strengths and weaknesses, and from there, we can build out a plan to reach our goals.” – Karen
- “I always ask for volunteer feedback every year. They’ll tell me, ‘You hadn’t explained so and so’, so then next year I’ll remember that I have to let them know how it happens, because last year I wasn’t clear.” – Fiona
- “Lead by example and transfer your enthusiasm, [create a] sense [that this is] an exceptional experience.” -Marcy
- “We invite high school track teams to apply to work at the aid stations. There are four stations. We have a competition. They dress up with themes. This year, one was circus, one was disco. And then the runners vote and according to their votes is the amount of money that is donated to each school. They’re rated on a scale from 1-4. The 1st place vote gets about 60% of the money donated and so forth. So it gives the students more of an incentive to really make it fun than just show up, throw on a silly costume, and not do much. You have to really work for that money. It’s called the “High School Challenge.” People love it. \$4-500 for the track team is a lot of money. We’ve given up to a \$1000 to the teams before. So you’re giving back to the school,

you make it fun for the students to participate, and you make it enjoyable and entertaining for the runners as well. It's a great program.” - Randy

- “For the lead volunteers, I rent out a Mexican restaurant right next to the finish line. I buy pitchers of margaritas and beers and appetizers and we just come in and really enjoy our accomplishment. We work so hard, it's not like ‘Oh thanks, we're done, everyone go home.’ They want to share their experiences, share their stories, and let their hair down a little bit after three days of very hard work. That costs me a lot of money, but it's well, well worth it. You want these people back.” – Randy
- “From the operations aspect, you're always learning. [Volunteers will say], ‘How about this next year?’ or ‘The runners really liked this.’ I also learned what really excites them, what motivates them, what causes them to have fun. Pike's Peak Marathon was voted, tied with the New York City Marathon as the most fun marathon. Runner's World [magazine] called and told me that, and I said ‘You're kidding me!’ We have probably the most difficult marathon in the U.S. [but] it's fun...and the [runners will say] it's because the volunteers are having fun—and so it's contagious.” – Randy
- “Without constant [communication], you lose volunteers. Other commitments or fun activities come up, and they go that direction. Weather is also detrimental to volunteers. One rain drop or cold day and 75% of your volunteer force doesn't come to support!” - Sally
- “We work with a number of school and community groups who like to work the fluid stations. This area provides a great opportunity for groups to come together and work together as a team while cheering on the participants as they make their way to the finish line. I often hear that organizations use our event as their annual volunteer opportunity and they love coming back year-after-year.” – Karen
- “After the event, it is important to follow-up with a “thank you” email. Highlight the successes of the event, and mention how they made that happen because of their contributions. Ask for feedback on what went well and what could be improved upon.” – Karen
- “You want people to have a positive experience and come back. You don't want to have to reinvent the wheel every single year.” – Fiona
- “To be honest with you, if somebody doesn't want to do something, I would rather not give them that job and find someone else more willing to do it, than give someone a job that really doesn't want it, because then you risk them not doing it properly.” – Fiona

Humility: Showing appreciation to volunteers

There are many ways to express gratitude to volunteers. The most popular response was to truly engage with the volunteer – not via email, not via a letter of appreciation, but a phone call, a party, a banquet, a handshake, or a conversation. Make a lasting impression and encourage the volunteer to talk about their experience. Sharing it with the person who creates the event is rewarding to the volunteer but also for the race organizer because it fuels the desire to continue serving the running community.

- “You have to reinforce to the volunteers that their job is very responsible. In my pre-race emails, I thank them for accepting the responsibility of being a volunteer -- their presence, experience, enthusiasm, knowledge is important.” – Marcy
- “Personal interaction...face-to-face, on-one-on, verbally. Not in an email or letter, but ‘Hey Joe, I really appreciate what you did, you did a great job today, I got a lot of great comments about how well that aid station went.’” – Don
- “T-shirts, a personal letter of service, thank you letter, sometimes students or military volunteers can accumulate points for advancement. More and more our volunteers come as groups and we make donations to those groups, for example boy scout troops and high school teams.” – Bill
- “We’ve done volunteer parties, pizza parties a few weeks after the race.” – Shelly
- “The race director will get in touch with all volunteers and personally thank them. Every summer we hold a volunteers party and invite all the volunteers throughout the year to come, meet the runners, and the runners get to meet the volunteers. There’s a lot of overlap. There are also people who only volunteer and don’t run. This gives the runners a chance to personally thank the volunteers. – Art
- “[During the event], I always make sure to tell my volunteers that they are doing a good job. I let them know that without their help the event could not have been such a great success. This is truly the case, without volunteers the events would be much harder to manage.” – Jack
- “This year we’ve started sending handwritten “thank you” cards from the staff for volunteers who have participated in 3+ events over the course of the year/gone above-and-beyond on certain occasions.” – Karen

- “During National Volunteer Week this past April, we spent the week saying “thank you” in different ways. Hand written cards, social media, a group run for our key volunteers out of our office...” – Karen
- “We have 144 nonprofit groups comprise our 5400 volunteers. Those nonprofit groups receive a donation based upon the number of volunteers and their assignments. Those groups use [our marathon] as a fundraiser...these groups can earn anywhere from \$350 to \$2000. One church [got] \$900 for their youth group. We also have really cool T-shirts. You can never underestimate the value of a T-shirt. Especially kids. This year, we had one of the local casinos throw a volunteer appreciation party. The casino was a sponsor. They gave us food, drink, and some door prizes. That was well-attended. Unfortunately, you had to be 21 to attend the party, so that’s hard for me to swallow. About 65% of our volunteer base was eligible to attend the appreciation party. Next year we’d like to something at another venue for the younger volunteers. It’s expensive to throw a party for 5400 people. Luckily, the casino was willing to throw in the buffet, drinks, and door prizes because they figure, ‘Hey we got 3000 people here who might spend \$100 in the slot machines.’ They approached us about hosting the party. Now we want to do that for the younger set. Our donations we gave to the volunteer groups totaled to \$100,000. That was a big thing, but we know going in that it comes out of our bottom line. We could not run the event without our volunteers.” – Marcy
- “I immediately follow up with a thank you note. Sometimes it’s hand written, sometimes it’s an email... I always offer everyone a race shirt and either a race discount or free entries into other races whenever possible. I also offer to help someone with their own race if they help mine. – Fiona
- “After race pizza party, that type of thing. I have levels of doing that. The key positions, we call them our “Ops team volunteers.” These are people working eight days before the event, put in difficult situations on a mountain, taking supplies up, hiking supplies in...I treat them as best I can. At our meetings we don’t just get together. We go to a restaurant, have pizza and beer, and build a sense of family or group feeling because these people you want back and you want them motivated. They could decide ‘I’m mad, Randy is treating me bad, I’m just not going to show up’ or ‘I’m just gonna walk away.’ There’s nothing preventing them from doing that. It’s not like a job, so you really want to foster the good volunteers, those that are critical so you don’t have to train a whole new staff. Just make sure they’re having fun, that they’re enjoying what they’re doing—and that they get a sense of accomplishment. I think a lot of people do it so they get a ‘thank you’ for the day. They may not get that at work, ‘Hey thank you! Great job, I really appreciate it.’ That does wonders for people, that sense of accomplishment...the idea that ‘I did something good, I contributed today.’” - Randy

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This chapter reveals what the quotes in the previous chapter signify, in terms of how race organizers have the ability to make a direct impact on volunteer experiences, how to improve volunteer retention rates, and how fellow race organizers can benefit from these servant leadership snapshots and descriptions used in the marathon industry.

Discussion

Humility: Motivation of race organizers to be servant leaders

A cycle is at work among volunteers and race organizers. Volunteers actually have the ability to inspire race organizers to be servant leaders; this happens when organizers see a volunteer's willingness to give back to the running community. Organizers explain the lengths volunteers take to make a runner's experience all-the-more comfortable and smooth. Popping blisters, arriving at 3 a.m. to report for work, and volunteering in the winter are just a few acts of kindness seen by race organizers. These acts portray the volunteer role as more than just "standing and handing out water." At marathons (and other footraces), the initial task is given to volunteers (e.g., hand out water, pick up trash as runners come by, provide a change of clothes). What makes this act an impressionable and meaningful one is the way in which volunteers approach it. My respondents gave several examples of the lengths volunteers took to ensure runners were being "taken care of." Race organizers found this "refreshing." Many of them have a

desire to serve the running community, a community that provides them happiness. As we will see later, this is an example of “stewardship” or showing loyalty to a community that has served them time and time again. My findings reveal that a symbiotic relationship exists between the organizer and volunteer in terms of inspiring each other to serve the other.

Karen and Bill note that volunteers are participants and participants are volunteers. Aside from receiving happiness from events and how *well* they are executed, some runners recognize or become exposed to the immense amount of time and resources required to execute a marathon. Because of this, they want to “give back” to this community. After my first year of college, I knew I wanted to be involved in sports. As I attempted to find my “place” in the wide world of sports, I eventually found a calling to work in recreational and amateur athletics. As a participant of several races, I felt a great urge to become someone who could be on team that produces events. I had an urge to serve the community that had given me so much—sense of accomplishment, confidence, and self-worth. I wanted to help create this opportunity for others. On a daily basis, I feel a symbiotic relationship between organizer and participant. I play both of these roles—and I like interchanging the two roles. I can understand why these race organizers feel a desire to give back to the running community by empowering their volunteers to empower participants.

The race organizers also recognize that volunteers look for a fun event, an adventurous event, and a social experience. Understanding volunteer motivations and expectations helps organizers to better serve their volunteers. Volunteering is a social

activity and attracts many groups of friends/co-workers/family members. Organizers can better plan in positioning groups at jobs and learn how to serve groups of people and balance the expectations of individuals and groups.

Another area I observed is race organizers recognizing that volunteers can feel humbled by their own volunteers. Marcy explained that she received the same comment time and time again. Volunteers like to feel appreciated, but are simply moved by the grace shown by runners, the ones exerting themselves for hours at a time. This in turn, inspires organizers to serve their volunteers with the same graciousness. Organizers witness volunteers selflessly serve the runners. Again, a symbiotic relationship exists here. When a runner sees a volunteer serve him/her, he/she may become inspired to serve for the same purpose eventually. A race organizer witnesses the two parties interacting and connecting, thanking one another. Both the runner and volunteer are exerting themselves on the same day and are each thanking one another, supporting one another. A race organizer trains a volunteer to represent the organization and in turn, displays the true nature of the organization back to the organizer. The organizer is able to feel satisfied that their job has the ability to coordinate such a beautiful moment. This realization then humbles the organizer and he/she wishes to continue to serve those around him/her.

Empower and develop people: Providing volunteers with the tools to succeed

When someone tells Fiona they are bringing 30 people, she writes down “five”—a method surely used by other event planners. The importance lies in the effort organizers put forth to ensure that at least those five, if not 15 volunteers actually show up on race

day. This is a first example of creating the organizer-volunteer relationship months *prior* to the event: “The more people hear from you, the more likely they’ll stay on board. They will lose momentum if they only hear from you a couple times in six months.” Servant leaders do not just communicate that their job is on so-and-so date and at a specific time. They communicate the importance of their position, their gratitude to the volunteers for volunteering, and their excitement to share this experience together. They want the follower to know that they are making a difference and are contributing to a production. From both a volunteer or organizer perspective, both parties enjoy receiving communication from the other. Both parties “win” this way. They both feel important to the other and in turn, can create a servant relationship. The volunteer wants to give back; the organizer wants to create a special, meaningful experience for the volunteer so they will want to volunteer time and time again.

Education is paramount for organizers to provide volunteers. Meetings are held with group/captain leaders, and handouts, “cheat sheets,” maps, and directions are distributed. Organizers capitalize on the importance of detailed reports for volunteers. It is the servant leader’s responsibility to provide them with a “wealth of information.” It is crucial to assume they know nothing about where to meet, what the job entails, or how to do the job. Every volunteer is different. The servant leader approaches each volunteer with plenty of information, equipping them with the training needed to serve others confidently and independently. Finally, the race organizer should make the volunteer feel they are needed: “Some volunteers are really intimidated by [course marshaling], like they have to stop a freight train coming. No, they don’t have to be at a major intersection,

the police will handle that. No one wants to feel under-qualified, but they do want to feel like they're needed," says Marcy. This is why race organizers need pre-race planning. They need to determine all the positions needed for race day, and as specifically as possible. Even volunteers that feel confident showing up on race day appreciate that "wealth of information" that they can run with once at their position/job location. As a volunteer, you want to feel needed. It is the organizer's responsibility to provide them plenty of information to get the job done, but also include how important their job is. These are some of the intangible tools needed to share the best volunteer-organizer relationship.

Providing direction: Volunteer training and delegation of tasks

There are several agreed-upon tools used to train and assign tasks to volunteers in a servant-led way, which means setting up volunteers to succeed and feel organized, calm, and *needed*. Committee meetings with year-round volunteers and group leaders/captains are held to ensure all group members are up to speed on responsibilities, expectations, and procedures. Similar to "it's more than just standing and passing out water," it is more than just "collecting names and phone numbers." Organizers must provide detailed instructions—everything from how to conduct the activity, how to dress, who to report to throughout the day, and so on. It is imperative for the organizer to fulfill this role because he/she cannot be in contact with each volunteer throughout the event. In fact, it is unlikely a volunteer would be able to get in contact with the race organizer during the execution of the event. The organizer should not abandon the volunteer but inform them of a reliable point of contact they can reach out to if needed. This is a way of

serving the volunteers; you can make them feel as though they can operate independently by providing a backup staff member to assist if needed. The organizers interviewed recruit between 50-5400 volunteers at their events. No matter how many volunteers are assigned to a job, volunteer groups must feel comfortable operating independently *and* cohesively. Volunteers appreciate servant leadership because most volunteers are strangers to each other. For them to feel like they can work together and get to know each other, they need to be ‘set up’ in a way that makes them feel comfortable in their surroundings.

Taking the volunteer assignment process online has become an advantage for race organizers. Volunteers can sign up online through an online module, read up on assignment synopses, understand expectations for various jobs, and sign waivers. This way, they choose the “better position” and expedite the “nitty-gritty” administrative components of signing up as a volunteer. Additionally, when a volunteer can choose a position best suited for his/her personality, abilities, or passions, an organizer will have more efficient and happier volunteers. Making the sign-up process simpler, faster, convenient, and informative, the volunteers are more likely to commit to the position. The organizer acts as a servant leader by allowing the follower to choose how they would like to serve others, bestowing in them trust with various positions. Interestingly, some organizers require that certain assignments be reserved for groups only, who have known each other previously, because they “want cohesive[ness]...where they are used to their leader.” This also instills trust within a group, but organizes according to familiarity of team members. This method is especially helpful for today’s generation. I appreciate

online modules for volunteer jobs because you can peruse the specific jobs and responsibilities and choose the task that best suits your own personality and skills. Also, when you arrive on race day, you are aware of your task, who to ask for, and have some time to prepare for the day. This makes me want to become a regular volunteer because the race organizer understands that I have a life outside of the marathon and need time to prepare.

As previously mentioned, race organizers often assign a team leader/captain to certain jobs. “They might entice the group to do things, bring music and have a good time with [it]. If you leave it up to each individual and you don’t appoint a leader, people can feel lost.” Without a group leader, it makes it that much harder to spark that “group dynamic.” I have learned as a race organizer, that sparking conversation among groups of volunteers that are strangers helps get people on the right foot with each other. Creating a common ground for everyone helps ‘break the ice’ and you can leave this group knowing they can communicate with each other comfortably. Also, assigning a lead staff member who practices servant leadership especially ensures that this group will work cohesively. Race organizers even have “trial events” for the volunteers at other large races in the same city so they can practice their skills before the actual event. Servant leadership is at work as the organizers take steps to make sure volunteers feel comfortable and confident to work independently on race day. Allowing volunteers to participate in a “trial event” also gives the race organizer an opportunity to connect with the volunteers personally and feel more confident about the workers going into his/her event.

Empower and develop people: Dealing with the “unglamorous” job

It is inevitable that there are “tough” jobs that must be assumed by volunteers. “Volunteers would much rather work at registration, entering runner information and giving them their bibs than work at bag check where they have to take the bags and sort them for later. Both are equally important, but the less glamorous jobs are often looked down upon by many volunteers,” explains Jack. Or, “Nobody wants to stand at the compost bin telling runners to throw their banana peels in there, or stick their hands in the plastic bin to get out that banana peel and throw it in the compost bin.” This is not a big surprise, but all marathons have “unglamorous jobs”—and some are the most important of the event. These include course marshaling (standing at intersections, corner, or turns directing runners), trash pickup, and baggage security or managing baggage drop-off (runners stow their belongings in a special area while running).

A servant leader must communicate to the volunteer how important this job is before and during the event. Describing the importance on a broader scale (“look at the bigger picture”) can help fill these spots: “We push ‘support your runner’, ‘show your pride’, ‘support the troops’ messages,” describes Sally. If you communicate the benefits you will see by getting the job done, this connects “unglamorous” with “hard worker” and “accomplished” and “influential” as opposed to “boring” and “tiring.” I have worked unglamorous jobs both as a staff member and volunteer at events. But I have had race organizers tell me how much the runners rely on me (without even knowing it). When a race organizer personally tells me how important the job is, I feel a sense of

responsibility, not boredom, towards both the runners and the organization. Sure, the job can be boring, but it really helps to remember that I am creating an experience for someone else that day. Picking up trash restores the venue to its attractive state, course marshaling allows runners to only have to think about putting one foot in front of the other, and setting up tables, tents, and signs allows runners to navigate the venue stress-free. I have to remember that some of the unglamorous jobs require more motivation and attention to detail (e.g., keeping runners on the right course, which is probably the second most important part of the event behind security).

Another avenue to pursue when filling “unglamorous” jobs is recruiting non-profits or corporate teams to volunteer. For non-profit organizations, giving a monetary award helps fill these “unglamorous” jobs. Not only does the race organization create a new relationship with a non-profit by supporting their mission, but the non-profit has the opportunity to give back to the running community. The symbiotic relationship is at work again through servant leadership. Serving each other is what makes strong volunteer-organizer relationships (not just a one-way contribution). There is a “transfer” of the experience for volunteers working *with* a non-profit group at a race. A volunteer derives satisfaction by serving the non-profit organization *and* the race participants, augmenting the power of the volunteer experience. Volunteering for Team In Training (who support The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society) or the Red Cross at a marathon event would bring an amazing sense of ‘giving back’ to more than just the running community. To represent a non-profit for one day empowers an individual to feel they are helping multiple parties today: runners, the event organizers, and those who need our help and support beyond the

running world (e.g., cancer patients and hurricane victims). There are beautiful relationships at work here—the organizer-non-profit, the volunteer-non-profit, and the volunteer-organizer. Each group is ‘giving back’ to the other.

“We have 144 nonprofit groups comprise our 5400 volunteers. Those nonprofit groups receive a donation based upon the number of volunteers and their assignments. Those groups use [our marathon] as a fundraiser...these groups can earn anywhere from \$350 to \$2000. One church [got] \$900 for their youth group,” describes Marcy. Here we see non-profit organizations relying on the marathon organization to provide them a positive experience while also raising funds. But what is especially important is creating a lasting relationship with non-profits, where they will want to return year after year: “We work with a number of school and community groups who like to work the fluid stations. This area provides a great opportunity for groups to come together and work together as a team while cheering on the participants as they make their way to the finish line. I often hear that organizations use our event as their annual volunteer opportunity and they love coming back year-after-year,” reflects Karen. If a race organizer serves the non-profit in a way that makes them feel valued and that they are making an impact on runners in a way that no other volunteer group can, this will help them feel *needed*.

Even the unglamorous jobs can be made into a fun experience: “If they want to bring music or have a sign to cheer runners on. Any runner appreciates this—and makes you have a fun experience. When a runner sees a volunteer happy to be there, happiness can be transferred from a volunteer to a runner, even a course marshal who stands at the corner of an intersection. The runner realizes that every single volunteer out there is

serving him/her that day—the volunteers are making the day about the *runners*. This selfless act of kindness can bring energy to runners.

However, not every course marshal will want to take that approach or have the time to bring outside props for entertainment. Sometimes just delivering the task needed to ensure runners stay on track is sufficient for race organizers—just that the event runs smoothly. The most important point to let the volunteer know ahead of time (and during, if possible) is how integral the job is to the success of the event. Showing examples of “poor” performances or telling stories of hiccups that have occurred in this position help make a reality of how important the job is. Marcy says, “The volunteer on the corner, showing everyone the turn—their job is easy. And they probably feel like ‘I don’t need to even be here’, but if they’re not there, people will go the wrong way. I try to instill in them, ‘Yeah, you’re going to feel like you’re not doing anything,’ but it *should* be really boring. If all goes well, you’re going to feel like you’ve done nothing, and that’s because you were there and nothing went wrong. If things go bad and you become really busy, that’s not a good sign.”

Finally, when considering the types of “unglamorous” jobs, try and think of a specific type of group that might be more inclined to handle the job than another group. For example, Randy hired the Boy Scouts and donated money to their troop. The boys know it is not fun, but they know they are getting money for working. The servant leader looks for followers who would be a great fit for a specific job and serves them by donating to their group. By seeking groups that would fit the job description better than others, the servant leader strategically chooses groups. This shows that servant leaders

understand how some groups work differently than others and tries to avoid putting groups in jobs that are ‘over their heads.’

Interpersonal acceptance: Treat like a staff member, remember he/she is a volunteer

Accountability is a difficult area for race organizers to handle since a volunteer is donating their time to the event. Organizers also cannot control last-minute dropouts: “Without constant [communication], you lose volunteers. Other commitments or fun activities come up, and they go that direction. Weather is also detrimental to volunteers. One rain drop or cold day and 75% of your volunteer force doesn’t come to support!” explains Sally. Sometimes, the best a race organizer can expect is that a volunteer just show up to work, and not focus on performance: “Our event goes off at 6:30 a.m. on a Sunday. Some volunteers have to be there at 5 a.m. That’s part of their accountability—just to show up,” explains Marcy. However, I have learned that race organizers can take steps to ensure volunteers understand the nature of their assignment, the responsibility that comes with the job, and how the organization is relying on their invaluable help—which in turn, results in the volunteers feeling a sense of accountability.

Several organizers discussed “key volunteers,” “year-round volunteers” and similar types of VIP volunteers. These are volunteers who have proved to be dedicated to the organization at multiple events and are given greater responsibilities over time. “Our key volunteers are dedicated enough where we hold them accountable. Accountability does exist and can play a part maybe in a more drastic situation like taking an aid station away from a captain who continually has let the event down. But it’s hard to fire a volunteer,” explains Art. Servant leaders must accept that volunteers, even “key”

volunteers, are first, human beings and second, not full-time staff. Servant leaders understand that mistakes can be made and ensure to never make a volunteer feel in the wrong for making a mistake. Instead, the servant leader takes steps to guarantee the problem does not happen again: “If a problem or conflict is compromising the safety of an event or the integrity of the organization, it is essential that it be addressed immediately. If there are issues that can be addressed after an event, it is important to do so in a timely manner. It is also important to provide examples of why things were a problem or caused conflict. Perhaps if someone has a weakness in a certain area, maybe they are just not a good fit for that job,” says Karen. During my first job in the race industry, I worked with a key volunteer who provided much of her free time to the organization, but was abrasive with runners and their families on race day. This was a difficult problem to solve because our staff wanted to let this key volunteer know how valuable she is to the organization in terms of getting tasks done, but how do you tell a volunteer you do not want them coming to the event anymore? We communicated with this volunteer that we would like her in a different role—we took her out of race day operations and included her more in the pre-planning stages of the event. We thanked her for her commitment to the organization but took it upon ourselves to reposition her role.

This previous example goes back to prior communication to volunteers. Tell volunteers ahead of time how important their job is and emphasize consequences of their good or bad actions. This is not to “scare” a volunteer into not making mistakes, but to take steps to make the volunteer aware of possible pitfalls or common questions and obstacles on race day. “It is always important to communicate the importance of

volunteerism and share the impact and value their service has on the organization and community. With that, should there be conflict or issues, people realize the how their interactions and contributions can affect an event,” Karen reflects. A servant leader does not point fingers at a volunteer: “If someone volunteers to help [and something goes wrong] they’re not lazy--it was your mistake for not giving them the right information,” says Fiona. “One year we had a volunteer not at their post, and some of the half marathoners missed their turn. The volunteer should have been there, but it’s a volunteer. We don’t blame that volunteer for not being there. We should have had signage, a police officer, a sandwich board with a turn signal, so in case a volunteer is not there, it’s a fallback,” says Marcy. This has been something I am currently learning in my new job—after action reports are crucial to preventing volunteer mistakes again. As a servant leader, you must record what went wrong so that you can better the volunteer-organizer relationship. If you do not do this, you fail to serve your volunteers with the best service that represents the organization and you also fail to communicate what is expected of them on race day.

Marcy makes the point, “You walk a fine line. You can’t be bossy but you can’t let the inmates run the asylum.” One way to control mistakes being made by volunteers is determining the most appropriate jobs for certain personalities or passions. “Sometimes we’ll get a group where they’ll want to work registration, or need sit-down jobs, or they’re not early morning folks, so the afternoon 2 o’clock shift works beautifully for them,” she explains. Servant leaders need to be able to trust their judgments and assign tasks as best they can according to personality or previous knowledge about a person’s

interests. This is not possible for every volunteer, though: “Volunteers are not like employees where you can give reviews, you can rate them, you can fire them. It’s a different management style. You have to coax them, and thank them, and make them feel important. Some people haven’t worked out and we’ve moved them to a different position, or sometimes we don’t invite them back. Or, if I have them come back I better position them, or say ‘No, thank you’ on their application, which I have done before,” explains Randy. It is okay for a race organizer to not bring back every volunteer from the year before. It is their responsibility to bring on reliable and responsible people, or in other words, make sure a volunteer who has consistently let the organization down not return.

Race organizers who use servant leadership can only predict so much about a person’s work style according to their personality. Most times, race organizers will not personally know the volunteers. Therefore, servant leaders place trust in the followers to make the best decision about where to place themselves. This goes back to the value of online module to sign up for volunteering; the race organizer is placing trust in the follower: “We have 9000 assignments. I’ll tell the group leader, ‘You know your group better than I do. I’ll need to know the makeup or characteristics of your people.’ Not to be derogatory, but if the volunteers are old or need to sit down, they don’t need to be working at a water stop. If they’re young kids and have a short attention span, they may not be real good working the registration area. They may be better at stuffing bags or poster-rolling where they can talk and not pay attention but still get the job done,” says Marcy.

Stewardship: Race organizers show loyalty, exhibit teamwork, and serve as role models

It is the responsibility of the race organizer to stay committed to his/her volunteers, just as the volunteers stay committed to showing up for the event. “Most of them have the best of intentions, they may not always know what to do, but they want to be there and help,” explains Shelly. Organizers can participate with the volunteers and show support for their job. “You have to sound like it’s going to be fun, challenging, neat. You have to make it fun for the helpers. They have to *want* to be there and then they have to *want* to come back - because you don’t pay them,” explains Don. Getting involved in the task with the volunteers demonstrates you are just as committed to the end goal and that you understand the type of work they are committed to for hours: “I’m also not above picking up trash myself, so if they see that I’m gonna get in there and do some of it too, they’re more willing to help too. Get them started, re-direct the behavior. Regroup and remind them what they’re there for,” explains Shelly. When a race organizer has even remembered my name, this will go a long way in feeling energized and motivated to do a good job. When I can clearly see a division between staff members and volunteers, I am ‘turned off’ to the organization. There should be not be a clear divide between staff and volunteers. Volunteers show up on race day just like the staff—without volunteers, an event is near impossible. As a race organizer, I am learning you must treat your volunteers just as you would staff in the way you greet them, respond to questions, allow for questions, and thank post-event.

Security is also an important issue for volunteers (not just the runners): “Runners are crazy, especially at the start line...I don’t think a volunteer deserves to have to feel

the wrath of some crazy runner. They're not getting paid to be there. It's not right for the runners to treat them that way. The runners don't always treat volunteers with respect...[For example, if there's a] disagreement about corral assignments, the race coordinator and security personnel will need to protect them," explains Shelly. In contrast to the previous paragraph, a servant leader must also make an effort to protect the volunteer from any backlash that a staff member should have to address. In fact, one could argue that servant leaders go beyond the way in which he/she treats staff members. Treat volunteers as 'special guests' rather than 'volunteers.' Staff members are not given this special treatment – volunteers can be held on a pedestal among staff members to show how appreciative the organization is. A servant leader race organizer makes a volunteer feel like a "guest", not in a stranger-like, unfamiliar way, but someone who deserves the utmost respect and attention.

Finally, it is of the utmost importance for a race organizer (or his/her counterpart) to be *available* for the volunteer so in case they doubt the reason why they are there, the race organizer can always make the volunteer feel needed. I have seen volunteers show up that range from the high school track athlete looking to gain some service hours to the Vietnam veteran who would like to help out because the course runs through his neighborhood. Though age and background greatly differ, both of these volunteers represent the wide range of people who come forward to help. One thing these two volunteers *do* have in common is being unfamiliar with what to help with, how to help, who to report to, how long to stay, and so on. Race organizers: 'be there' for volunteers if they have questions. "Have their back" so-to-speak and make volunteers feel comfortable

to ask questions. It is also important to teach a volunteer to feel comfortable saying, “I don’t know the answer to your question, but I’d be happy to find out.” You want them to feel comfortable turning to a paid staff member when in doubt. Jack explains, “I allow volunteers to answer questions [of runners and spectators]. If I see them struggling with a question, I always step in. I also make sure that anyone who is complaining comes to see me and does not take their frustration out on the volunteers.”

Authenticity: Race organizers upholding the mission and goals of marathon

“Lead by example and transfer your enthusiasm, [create a] sense [that this is] an exceptional experience,” says Marcy. While a race organizer manages several volunteers at once, it is imperative he/she uphold the mission of the marathon. Volunteers represent the organization, whether they know it or not. Organizers unanimously agree that volunteers need an enthusiasm for what they are doing. The easy part is getting them organized into their roles. The part that *counts* is how the volunteer delivers in terms of his/her attitude. “The most important thing is enthusiasm and a willingness to join in on a group effort,” explains Art. The difficult part is transferring that ‘charm,’ that sense of an exceptional experience, referred to at the beginning of this paragraph. An organizer would *hope* that volunteers are happy to be volunteering since they came on their own, but this is not always the case. The servant leader must breathe life into volunteers’ attitudes during the event when possible, or making an effort to better enhance their experience for next time: “You will have, especially with a new group...complacency. If it doesn’t go well, I ask myself, ‘What did I not give them?’ Or I go to committee members, and ask ‘What did you see go wrong?’ Or I go to the group [and ask], ‘I heard

there were some problems. How did it go?’ I’ll go to both sides. I like to give every group the benefit,” explains Bill. “I ask them, ‘Please tell me what areas of the event could we have done better’ and ‘What areas not related to your assignment that you observed could we have done better?’” This observation touches on what we discussed earlier—how just showing up is a part of being held accountable. Sometimes that’s the best a volunteer can do. Fiona even admitted, “To be honest with you, if somebody doesn’t want to do something, I would rather not give them that job and find someone else more willing to do it, than give someone a job that really doesn’t want it, because then you risk them not doing it properly.” For some organizers, this is what it takes to uphold the mission of the organization. Make volunteers feel like they can be honest about a job that is not the best fit for them so organizers can see to it that they are placed in a better position. You have to be ready to create a sense of an “exceptional experience.” You must sell the event to the volunteers and portray your transparency. You must reflect the ideas and mission of the organization.

It is important to receive feedback from volunteers if possible. A servant leader aims to better him/herself as a leader and in turn, better serve his followers for the future. “I always ask for volunteer feedback every year. They’ll tell me, ‘You hadn’t explained so and so’, so then next year I’ll remember that I have to let them know how it happens, because last year I wasn’t clear,” explains Fiona. This was referred to earlier when we discussed the importance of some kind of after action report—a document that relays information of the performance of a specific part of the event that had volunteers. A servant leader also recognizes that he/she cannot see all of the different pieces of the

event at one time. Therefore, to better serve the volunteers (and in turn, the runners), the organizer must ask for feedback. This makes for a better event and a stronger organization in terms of how to learn from those that become involved with the organization. A servant leader should represent the idea that an organization wants to *learn* from its followers to make their experience better.

Part of the spirit of the marathon is to ignite the spirit within volunteers (or ‘breathe life into’ as just mentioned), not just spectators. “We invite high school track teams to apply to work at the aid stations. There are four stations. We have a competition. They dress up with themes. This year, one was circus, one was disco. And then the runners vote and according to their votes is the amount of money that is donated to each school. They’re rated on a scale from 1-4. The 1st place vote gets about 60% of the money donated and so forth. So it gives the students more of an incentive to really make it fun than just show up, throw on a silly costume, and not do much. You have to really work for that money. It’s called the “High School Challenge.” People love it. \$4-500 for the track team is a lot of money. We’ve given up to a \$1000 to the teams before. So you’re giving back to the school, you make it fun for the students to participate, and you make it enjoyable and entertaining for the runners as well. It’s a great program,” explains Randy. This description truly speaks for itself. The symbiotic relationship is at work between volunteer-organization, volunteer-runner, and runner-organization. A program like this reflects the values of the organization: in this case, that an event should be entertaining and fun. The volunteers’ relationship with this organization is clearly strong

because the servant leader has sold the event as ‘fun’, ‘memorable’, and ‘impressionable.’

Finally, we will segue into showing appreciation to volunteers (described in the next section). This is more than just hosting parties with pizza and beer, handing out T-shirts, and sending letters of appreciation. This is an opportunity to reflect the mission of the organization and leave a lasting impression on the volunteers. This is in hopes to motivate them to return for the next event. The number one key to volunteer retention, according to my findings, is establishing a relationship with the volunteers—a personal relationship with face-to-face contact. “For the lead volunteers, I rent out a Mexican restaurant right next to the finish line. I buy pitchers of margaritas and beers and appetizers and we just come in and really enjoy our accomplishment. We work so hard, it’s not like ‘Oh thanks, we’re done, everyone go home.’ They want to share their experiences, share their stories, and let their hair down a little bit after three days of very hard work. That costs me a lot of money, but it’s well, well worth it. You want these people back,” reflects Randy.

Randy’s example of appreciation communicates to the volunteers that “you are more than just a one-time visitor” to me. Organizers must make an effort to personally touch the volunteers. Now, not every organization can personally thank every volunteer with a handshake. However, pre-race get-togethers, pre-race briefs with lunch, pre-race picnic for volunteers, or post-race get-togethers are crucial in solidifying that personal connection. If you are excited about the event and share that excitement with the volunteer, you at this point both have something in common *that is made aware of both*

parties, consciously. Because a volunteer is made aware of the passion a race organizer has toward an event, they are more inclined to provide feedback, as discussed earlier: “From the operations aspect, you’re always learning. [Volunteers will say], ‘How about this next year?’ or ‘The runners really liked this.’ I also learned what really excites them, what motivates them, what causes them to have fun. Pike’s Peak Marathon was voted, tied with the New York City Marathon as the most fun marathon. Runner’s World [magazine] called and told me that, and I said ‘You’re kidding me!’ We have probably the most difficult marathon in the U.S. [but] it’s fun...and the [runners will say] it’s because the volunteers are having fun—and so it’s contagious,” explains Randy.

Humility: Showing appreciation to volunteers

One of the best ways to solidify a volunteer force is to communicate and show appreciation. Many avenues can be used to thank volunteers for their time: emails, handwritten letters, T-shirts, pizza parties, awards, donations, social media, honorary runs, and more. Race organizers even offer to help at another race for another organizer if he/she will help out at theirs. It is also important to thank the volunteers before the event: “You have to reinforce to the volunteers that their job is very responsible. In my pre-race emails, I thank them for accepting the responsibility of being a volunteer -- their presence, experience, enthusiasm, knowledge is important,” says Marcy. Never underestimate the power of an outside organization hosting a volunteer appreciation party on their dime. Marcy explained how a local casino offered to host the volunteer appreciation party. “Luckily, the casino was willing to throw in the buffet, drinks, and

door prizes because they figure, ‘Hey we got 3000 people here who might spend \$100 in the slot machines,’” Marcy said.

The following three quotes illustrate the importance of personal interaction with volunteers and taking the time to learn about their experiences. Encouraging the sharing of experiences engages the volunteer further than race day and facilitate story-telling about the event to other people. Sharing an enthusiasm to listen as volunteers reminisce and tell stories is a way of thanking the volunteer. You are taking the time to *listen* to them and say, “Your time is important to me, your feedback is important to me, your experience is important to me. You make my event better. Thank you.”

- “Personal interaction...face-to-face, on-one-on, verbally. Not in an email or letter, but ‘Hey Joe, I really appreciate what you did, you did a great job today, I got a lot of great comments about how well that aid station went.’” – Don
- “The race director will get in touch with all volunteers and personally thank them. Every summer we hold a volunteers party and invite all the volunteers throughout the year to come, meet the runners, and the runners get to meet the volunteers. There’s a lot of overlap. There are also people who only volunteer and don’t run. This gives the runners a chance to personally thank the volunteers. – Art
- “After race pizza party, that type of thing. I have levels of doing that. The key positions, we call them our “Ops team volunteers.” These are people working eight days before the event, put in difficult situations on a mountain, taking supplies up, hiking supplies in...I treat them as best I can. At our meetings we don’t just get together. We go to a restaurant, have pizza and beer, and build a sense of family or

group feeling because these people you want back and you want them motivated. They could decide ‘I’m mad, Randy is treating me bad, I’m just not going to show up’ or ‘I’m just gonna walk away.’ There’s nothing preventing them from doing that. It’s not like a job, so you really want to foster the good volunteers, those that are critical so you don’t have to train a whole new staff. Just make sure they’re having fun, that they’re enjoying what they’re doing—and that they get a sense of accomplishment. I think a lot of people do it so they get a ‘thank you’ for the day. They may not get that at work, ‘Hey thank you! Great job, I really appreciate it.’ That does wonders for people, that sense of accomplishment...the idea that ‘I did something good, I contributed today.’” – Randy

Conclusion

Race organizers are at the mercy of their volunteers. This realization is not always considered when they piece together the ‘volunteer puzzle.’ Engaging with and attending to volunteer needs must be a priority. A race organizer must leave a lasting impression with the volunteer or he/she will find another race to serve that provides a better learning experience, an opportunity to showcase skills, receive intangible benefits, feed off of plenty of direction, and receive praise:

It’s sort of like preparing for a tornado or a hurricane. You know it’s coming and when it’s going to hit, and it’s still unreal on the day of the race—unreal. So much is happening so quick, so fast. If you’re nailing down your house and you leave one door open, what can happen to your house? It can just leave unreal damage, as a race director and you leave one thing undone, what can happen to

your race? Catastrophe. Directing races is really, really stressful in a way, but really, really rewarding and enjoyable as well. – Don

The goal of this thesis is to help race organizers become conscious of the marvelous opportunity to impact the greater running community first with volunteers through servant leadership. By seeing volunteers as an extension of the role as the race organizer, this may help in redirecting priorities to that of volunteerism in special sport events. These volunteers have more direct interaction with the runners than do the race organizers. Servant leadership can brightly shine through volunteers' actions. When runners provide feedback after an event, they almost always associate the volunteers as a direct association of the race organizers. Race organizers and volunteers are seen as the same team from the runners' perspectives—this is why servant leadership is an amazing way of enriching a volunteer force.

Race organizers can strengthen turnover rates by facilitating a fluid organization of volunteers. Allow them to choose their roles, with plenty of time to spare and in a convenient medium, like an online module. Create a space for volunteers to speak freely about their experiences, both positive and negative. Maintain constant communication with volunteers, even after all details have been disseminated to volunteers. Create a communication campaign solely for volunteering that exemplifies an appreciative, excited, and adventurous attitude.

By interviewing race organizers with a wide array of backgrounds, some with 10 plus years of experience in the industry significantly strengthened the weight of the responses. These individuals have been working with volunteers for years – their

feedback could be stronger than that of a one-time volunteer. If special sport organizers want to learn, they need to learn from the experts.

When assigning tasks, race organizers create online modules, assign team captains/leaders, and trust the team captains to make good decisions for the organization. Race organizers who practice servant leadership provide plenty of direction to volunteers, whether it is cheat sheets, info-sessions, one-on-one meetings, emails, and more; the more information, the better. These race organizers assume the volunteers don't know what is expected so that volunteers can become the experts and teach others. Race organizers also own their responsibility of managing volunteers in different ways; they will 'let go' of a volunteer if they are compromising the integrity of the event or reposition them in the field if they are convinced the position is not a good fit. The race organizers are not afraid to have high expectations of volunteers, but if they do they communicate this to the volunteers. They recognize that they must also listen to the feedback of volunteers because they are the ones immersed in the race course and interacting with runners. Finally, a servant leader race organizer will show appreciation – especially in a personable way. They will work *with* the volunteers to make the event run smoothly and include the volunteers in both the planning and post-event reflection. To the servant leader who is a race organizer, he/she sees the volunteer as some of the most integral, if not the most integral, people of the entire event.

Recommendations for future research

Future research could include interviews from *both* race organizers and volunteers (not just one or the other). A way to conduct this scenario would be to interview race

organizers first and then relay the responses to volunteers and allow them to react to these responses—and vice versa. This could provide an opportunity for each party to confirm or disconfirm experiences of working at an event. To receive a more well-rounded description, future research could combine interviews (or conduct a focus group) from race organizers and volunteers and compare the findings.

Future research should consider using follow-up phone calls as a method of recruiting participants—not to just solely rely on email. Examining the way volunteers use servant leadership with race organizers is another suggestion. In this study, I found that the servant leadership style of race organizers was actually partially inspired by the volunteers. Future research could examine why those experiences cause volunteers to become inspired to serve runners and the marathon organization. Also, future research should consider examining the application of volunteers' current skills/interests/passions or professional skills to the volunteer job. It would be interesting to examine what they receive in a volunteer setting that they do not receive at their full-time/part-time/at-home jobs. A study like this may help race organizers better understand how to communicate with, ensure the job to fit the personality of the volunteer, better express appreciation, and in turn retain volunteers.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Participant recruitment email

Dear _____,

My name is Amy Sullivan – I’m a Masters student in the Sport and Recreation Studies Program at George Mason University. I’m currently writing my Thesis called *Servant Leadership: Race Organizers, Volunteers, and the Marathon Industry*. I have been lucky enough to experience the spirit of the marathon both as participant and volunteer. I’d like to describe how volunteers make such a positive impact on runners’ experiences as a result of the specific leadership style of the race organizers.

My study examines the leadership style of race organizers as they interact and manage race volunteers. It would be an honor to have you participate in my study. I would only need about thirty minutes of your time, whether by phone or in-person, to ask you some questions. You could greatly contribute to the small amount of research out there on the marathon industry and volunteers!

I’ve attached a consent form for your viewing, explaining some additional information about my study. I would be so grateful to learn about your leadership style when working with volunteers at your races.

All of your identifying information would be confidential. Please let me know if I may set up a time to chat briefly. Also, if you have any questions at all I would be happy to answer them.

Thank you so much for your time!

Amy Sullivan


Appendix B: Institutional Review Board Approval



Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

Research Hall, 4400 University Drive, MS 6D5, Fairfax, Virginia 22030
Phone: 703-993-5445; Fax: 703-993-9590

TO: Brenda Wiggins, School of Recreation, Health & Tourism

FROM: Aurali Dade
Assistant Vice President, Research Compliance 

PROTOCOL NO.: 8721

PROPOSAL NO: N/A

TITLE: Servant Leadership: Race Organizers, Volunteers, and the Marathon Industry

DATE: May 2, 2013

Cc: Amy Sullivan

Under George Mason University (GMU) procedures, this project was determined to be exempt by the Office of Research Integrity & Assurance (ORIA) since it falls under DHHS Exempt Category 2, research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior.

A copy of the final approved consent document is attached. Please use this stamped copy for your research.

You may proceed with data collection. **Please note that all modifications in your protocol must be submitted to the Office of Research Subject Protections for review and approval prior to implementation.** Any unanticipated problems involving risks to participants or others, including problems regarding data confidentiality must be reported to the GMU Office of Research Subject Protections.

GMU is bound by the ethical principles and guidelines for the protection of human subjects in research contained in The Belmont Report. Even though your data collection procedures are exempt from review by the GMU HSRB, GMU expects you to conduct your research according to the professional standards in your discipline and the ethical guidelines mandated by federal regulations.

Thank you for cooperating with the University by submitting this protocol for review. Please call me at 703-993-5381 if you have any questions.

APPROVED

8721
George Mason University

Servant Leadership: Race Organizers, Volunteers, and the Marathon Industry

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

This research is being conducted to describe messages and examples of servant leadership skills used by race organizers to build and foster their volunteer groups. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to answer approximately five to ten interview questions, lasting about thirty minutes. The interview will be audio-taped.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this research.

BENEFITS

There are no direct benefits to participants other than furthering research in the running industry, including helping aspiring or current race organizers develop and grow a volunteer base, create servant-led events, and improve over organizational performance.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The data in this study will be confidential. The results of this research will be presented to a committee of faculty and staff of George Mason University. The results of this project will be coded in such a way that the respondent's identity will not be attached to the final form of this study. The researcher retains the right to use and publish non-identifiable data. While individual responses are confidential, examples from interviews may be used in the final report. All identifying information will be removed from the examples used in the report. All data will be stored in a secure location accessible only to the researcher. Upon completion of the study, all information that matches up individual respondents with their answers, including audiotapes, will be destroyed.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you or any other party.

CONTACT

This research is being conducted by Amy Sullivan for the School of Recreation, Health and Tourism in fulfillment of the M.S. degree in Sport and Recreation Studies at George Mason University. She may be reached at 703-343-0891 for questions or to report a research-related problem. Ms. Sullivan's faculty advisor, Dr. Brenda Wiggins, may also be contacted at (703) 993-2068. You may contact the George Mason University Office of Research Integrity & Assurance at 703-993-4121 if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research.

This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.

CONSENT

I have read this form and agree to participate in this study.

Name

Date of Signature

Version date:

Revised 07/2005

1 of 1

Email to recruit participants

Dear _____,

My name is Amy Sullivan – I'm a Masters student in the Sport and Recreation Studies Program at George Mason University. I'm currently writing my Thesis called *Servant Leadership: Race Organizers, Volunteers, and the Marathon Industry*. I have been lucky enough to experience the spirit of the marathon both as participant and volunteer. I'd like to describe how volunteers make such a positive impact on runners' experiences as a result of the specific leadership style of the race organizers.

My study looks at the leadership style of race organizers as they interact and manage race volunteers. It would be an honor to have you participate in my study. I would only need about thirty minutes of your time, whether by phone or in-person, to ask you some questions. You could greatly contribute to the small amount of research out there on the marathon industry and volunteers!

I've attached a consent form for your viewing, explaining some additional information about my study. I would be so grateful to learn about your leadership style when working with volunteers at your races.

All of your identifying information would be confidential. Please let me know if I may set up a time to chat briefly. Also, if you have any questions at all I would be happy to answer them.

Thank you so much for your time!

Amy Sullivan

APPROVED

8721
George Mason University

Appendix C: Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me about your experience with race/volunteer management?
2. What aspects of your event do volunteers enjoy being associated with?
3. What tools (figuratively) do volunteers need to have a smooth experience?
4. How are tasks assigned? (Or, what is the training process like, if there is one?)
5. How do you own the responsibilities of organizing volunteers?
6. How are you responsible in countering volunteers' faults or weaknesses?
7. How do you hold volunteers accountable?
8. How do you motivate volunteers to perform a "tough"/not-so-glamorous job?
9. When is it "right" to step in to solve volunteer problems or address weaknesses?
10. How do you show or communicate appreciation and gratitude to volunteers?
11. What do you learn from volunteers?

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BIOGRAPHY

Amy J. Sullivan received her Bachelor of Science from James Madison University in 2011. She served as the race operations and marketing intern at the Women's Half Marathon race series for the 2010 and 2011 summers. While completing her Masters degree at George Mason University, she was employed as promotions and events coordinator for Potomac River Running, Inc. In May of 2013 she accepted a position to join the operations team as events coordinator for the Marine Corps Marathon, the 4th largest marathon in the United States and 9th largest in the world.