

*Volunteering Magazine, March 2010*

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Volunteering England

## **Book review**

### **This month we review 'A Conversation with a Purpose: A Practical Guide to Interviewing Prospective Volunteers'**

We liked the layout of this book, which is written by Kathleen McCleskey and Cheryle N Yallen. It is divided up into eight clear and concise chapters. It is packed with practical advice and tools and techniques.

The worksheets, forms to use and mock dialogue for an interview are likely to be particularly useful.

In *Getting Started*, the authors outline some of the key elements they believe must be in place before the interview gets under way. This might seem like stating the obvious but it really does give structure to this process. The authors also examine the importance of motivation and communication.

In the chapter *'The Participants'*, McCleskey and Yallen look at expectations and how the potential volunteer can actually make a difference to the organisation and who in the organisation is involved in the interview process.

"The key to interviewing is ensuring the interviewer, whether paid or volunteer, is properly trained in effective interviewing skills."

*'Interviewer Traps'* turns the spotlight on to possible barriers, including the 'halo effect' which happens when the potential volunteer has something in common with the interviewer, or stereotyping when the interviewer allows their own prejudices to impact on the interview, with first impressions generally formed in the first 30 seconds of the interview.

Another common trap is language, when someone may be 'verbally affluent' and using too much 'agency jargon'. Time is also picked out by the authors as a crucial factor. They believe the downfalls here are because interviews are sometimes squeezed into whatever slots are available in the day or hastily put together.

The authors go on to examine the potential volunteer and aspects such as their concerns about the interviewer or organisation if they have not done their research ahead of the interview.

In the discussion about face-to-face interviews the authors outline what they believe are the objectives: - to inform the prospective volunteer about the organisation and its volunteer roles; to learn about the prospective volunteer's strengths, skills, weaknesses and concerns; to gauge the prospective volunteer's effectiveness with client, staff and other volunteers and to understand and encourage that person commitment and motivation.

There is a good chapter about preparation and the crucial role this plays for both the interviewer and potential volunteer and some useful worksheets listing some effective questions and considerations to bear in mind ahead of the interview itself. There are also some excellent resources relating to evaluation.

Chapter 5 examines other types of volunteer interviews and covers topics including virtual volunteers, group interviews, exit interviews with a good example given here, before the authors move on to the legality of what you can and cannot say in the interview process.

In the concluding chapters the authors highlight the key point of being prepared, knowing your organisation in and out, knowing what the volunteer role entails, being confident about the format for the interview and choosing your questions well.

I would recommend this book to everyone involved in the voluntary sector and in particular to volunteer managers or anyone thinking about getting involved in this area of the sector.

**The electronic version of this book is available on the Energize website:**

**<http://www.energizeinc.com/store/5-231-E-1>**

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