



Marketing Matters

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Some may find it an unexpected, yet happy occasion to run into a Marketing column about hospice volunteers. You might think that the subject of volunteers makes an excellent topic. So much so that you're willing to overlook the fact that it's not terribly relevant to Marketing. Oh, but it's very relevant!

One of my favorite moments at the Fall Conference is the volunteer recognition part of the luncheon. I can't get enough of it, and although I know too well just how terrific hospice volunteers are, I can't help but be astonished all over again, and genuinely moved, when I hear about the accomplishments of the award recipients. The fact that they are so invariably modest, and seem perplexed at the fact the rest of us feel humble as well as appreciative for their great contributions. I hope every hospice has an event like that.

Actually, I hope every hospice has an event like that complete with glitter and bright lights, table centerpieces, large photos of the Volunteers of the Year and their bios, and all the pomp and circumstance that generally accompanies "big deal" events –because this really is a big deal. So don't just think of it as a grand occasion; *make* it a grand occasion!

This is the kind of event that can serve multiple purposes. The most important, no doubt, involves recognizing those who have earned everyone's admiration by giving so much of themselves to help others. They don't get paid, they don't get promoted, but they work hard and they do expect a pat on the back now and again. Going above and beyond a simple pat on the back is the icing on the cake, and something they rightly deserve.

Still, a volunteer recognition ceremony can become the kind of event that can attract new volunteers, as well as other supporters. Invite your donors, your advocates, your staff and their loved ones. Make it the kind of event that brings everyone together, where people can share stories that make them laugh and cry, where they can join hands, pledge their support – financial and otherwise – for your organization and everything it stands for.

This is the perfect event to invite the media to, and show the entire community what you're about; educate, celebrate, and motivate all at once! Great publicity may not be the purpose of the event, but it sure can be one of its most valuable consequences!

Remember to take a lot of pictures – a lot of great, professionally-taken pictures, in fact – because they'll end up on your website, your newsletter, your brochure, your annual report, and perhaps even a local paper or magazine. Remember, experts know best; I may know plenty about Marketing, but I urge you not to hire me to take photographs at your event unless you're planning to use them as examples of what *not* to do! You may not know, however, that Shawn Lauretic, the photographer in charge of the thousand-strong staff at Disney World's Photography Department, originally from Stoughton, WI is moving back to Wisconsin in March to be closer to his family. He also happens to have a genuine appreciation for the wonderful work that hospices do – which means you'll actually be able to afford him. Contact me, and I'll gladly introduce you. These photographs will reflect your brand image and your brand promise; they should be images that show how hard you work, how much you care, and what you

really stand for. They will help you brag about your volunteers who, after all, are well worth bragging about!

Public relations, however, go far beyond what's on your print materials and your website – and few people and be more effective advocates for your hospice than your volunteers. I imagine that these volunteers already say wonderful things about you to their friends and family, but there's more to be done. You need to really emphasize to your volunteers that they can and should be Hospice Ambassadors to their communities, and that just as spending time with a patient or creating a database or giving a tour of your facility to visitors may be part of their "official" volunteer duties, so is advocacy. Encourage them to be proactive and remind them that every missed opportunity to tell someone about what they do as volunteers and what your hospice does for patients and their families is a missed opportunity to create a new hospice supporter. Tell them it's a great idea to encourage others to volunteer or donate or even just read more about hospice care. After all, volunteers can make a difference not just for individual patients, but for the hospice they so fervently believe in as a whole!

Since I've already received inquiries about this from across the country, I might as well close with a note on the *Strategic Marketing Toolkit: Success Strategies for Hospice*, made possible by a Bremer Foundation grant to the HOPE of Wisconsin and Hospice Minnesota: The Toolkit, which does include more of my thoughts on volunteers among many other topics, is on its way! It's already being edited, and if your hospice belongs to the HOPE of Wisconsin you'll receive on at no charge by April. Membership as a well-known Marketing tagline once aptly pointed out, has its privileges.