



10 Tips on How to Build a Great Volunteer Board for Your Rotary Club

**by Mary C. Kelly, PhD,
CDR, USN (ret)**

Note: These are also helpful to consider when bringing new people into your organization in any capacity.

Many enthusiastic volunteers accept positions as part of a non-profit board, committee, or community effort such as a Rotary Club because they want to help and they want to make a difference.

The learning curve tends to be very high during the first year. As president, you are thrilled that they stepped up and are excited to get them involved.

Now what? How do you keep the momentum, clarify roles, and hold everyone accountable? Here are 10 ways to help you develop your non-profit team:

1. Define your job and everyone else's job. Keep your role clear. If roles overlap too much, people assume that the other person is doing the job, and often that means that no one is doing the task.
2. Know where to go to get information on how to do your job well and make sure everyone else has resources as well. Read and know your association's constitution and/or bylaws. They are often just a few pages in length, concisely state your association's mission, and many times define the duties of your office or committee chairman.
3. Ask everyone to get a good verbal and written turnover from the person they are replacing. Ask them if it is okay to get advice from them during your term. They will appreciate that you want to do a good job and that you respect them enough to ask for their advice.
4. The day your team takes over, give everyone a binder and ask them to keep it current. Prepare a turnover binder /package for the person coming after you. Make notes on:
 - a. What worked well
 - b. What can be improved
 - c. What resources you used

- d. Your “go-to” people
- e. Specific lists of people, emails, and phone numbers
- f. What you would do if you had the job another year

The easiest way to do this? Give everyone a color-coded binder at the beginning of the term with the names of the other board members in the clear plastic on the front so they always have points of contacts handy. Give every person a notebook in a matching color and encourage them to keep it handy for board meetings, notes, etc. (I keep mine in my car so I always have it with me.)

5. Encourage people to create a folder on their computer for your association’s information, emails, reports, etc. This makes it easier to create a turnover binder at the end of your term.

6. Create a shared drive, such as Dropbox, Google Docs, or Basecamp as a knowledge management system.

7. Specifics actions that the board can take to ensure success:

- a. Respond quickly to the rest of the board. You don’t want to be the person holding up other people.
- b. Recognize that time is the most precious gift anyone can give, and respect other people’s time.
- c. Have meetings for a reason, and conclude the meetings by assigning tasks and reiterating responsibilities.
- d. Start meetings on time.
- e. Conduct meetings by Skype or by phone conversation if you can, particularly when board members are separated by distance.
- f. Give other people deadlines for when you need actions or information.
- g. Don’t be late on deadlines to other people.
- h. Remember that just because other people do something a different way than the way you would do it doesn’t mean it is wrong. If you are tempted to criticize, ask yourself first if you are willing to take over that job.
- i. When someone criticizes the efforts of your volunteer board or committee, help to get them involved. Assign them a task. Respond “We’d love more help on that. What part of membership would you like to take on? Can we count on you to design our next marketing postcard?” (I interpret all complaints as a sign of volunteering.)

8. Actively look for opportunities to promote the group and the other members. Remember that you are there for the group, not to promote your own self-interests.

9. Use social media to communicate with the board and members. Most organizations do not fully utilize their Facebook pages or their websites,

which is often the first place people look to find information on the organization, its events, or its members.

10. Over-communicate, and use more words rather than less. Remember that this is usually not what these board members do as a paid job, and that they may not understand what they are expected to do. As a board member, keep the rest of the board informed – of where you are in projects, when you are unavailable, and when you need coverage of your job. If you know you cannot do something, letting other people know sooner is better than later.

One last note: Realize that people generally get involved as a board member or as a committee member for emotional reasons. When people are part of a board, it is tempting to treat them as employees. Volunteers tend to need more guidance early on, more positive reassurance from the president as well as each other, and more communication to make sure they are fulfilling the mission and guidance of the president.

Good luck!

Mary C. Kelly, PhD is author of ***15 Ways to Grow Your Business in Every Economy*** and ***Master Your World***. Her books are on Amazon, and Mary can be found at Mary@ProductiveLeaders.com. Her free monthly newsletter helps leaders be more efficient and the sign-up is at [www.Productive Leaders.com](http://www.ProductiveLeaders.com).