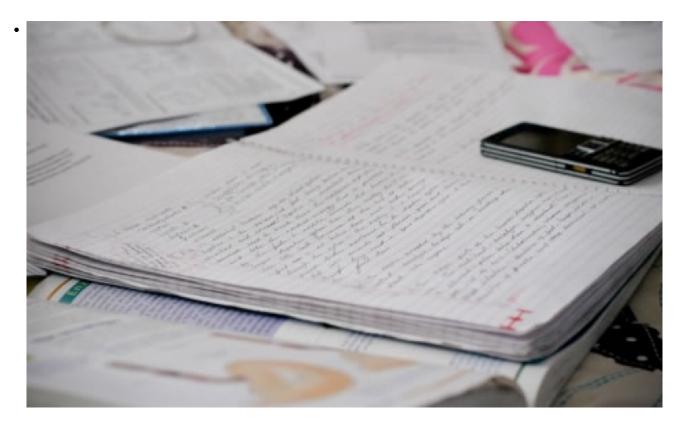# Processes don't work, people do

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In this article from the Third Sector blog, Rob Jackson looks into volunteers onboarding process.

Rob Jackson

Submitted by F Pere Tarrés on Tue, 04/12/2016 - 08:53
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A new piece of jargon is slowly creeping into the language of volunteer management – **onboarding**. Thankfully it has nothing to do with water sports like wakeboarding or boogie boarding or water related torture method, waterboarding.

No, as Jac Van Beek wrote in a recent blog post for the Canadian Association of Management Consultants, "onboarding refers to the conscious process of bringing someone 'on board' through orientation, introductions, a bit of training, a few simple inaugural tasks to get started to **help figure out how things work** around here and **assess how people work together**."

Onboarding isn't a new term, it's been around for a while. There is (inevitably) a wikipedia page about it. However, I am seeing it creeping into the language of the volunteering world more and more. Whilst I personally dislike the term, I don't have a problem with it's use. My concern lies with **what it emphasises**.

As Mr Van Beek's blog post states (and it's worth a read in full) a worrying number of potential volunteers **never get started because they never hear back from the organisation**(s) they want to donate their time to. Consider: 20% of people who try to volunteer through Do-It never hear back from the organisation; Volunteer Scotland estimate that half of all enquiries about volunteering receive no response within three weeks. Three weeks!

Onboarding emphasises **processes as a solution to this**. These processes make it clear how enquiries should be handled, how **recruitment, screening, selection and induction** should integrate to give a seamless and constructive introduction to volunteering. But as John Seeley Brown noted, "Processes don't work, people do". In other words, we can have all the onboarding processes we like but if people at the organisation aren't fully committed to engaging volunteers then they will only have limited impact.

We can tell an employee that any volunteer enquiries they receive must get a response within x hours but if that person has lots of other responsibilities and doesn't see volunteering as that important then the response time will lag and onboarding fail at the first hurdle.

In training I often ask people to consider how their organisation would handle a donation of £20,000 and a donation of £20,000 worth of someone's time. Over and over I hear that **the cash would be welcomed and the volunteering largely ignored**. All the onboarding processes in the world won't solve that issue, it's a **cultural challenge** that sees the **donated hour as less valuable than the donated pound**.

So what is the solution? The answer is varied and complex, much longer than I have time to cover in this blog post.

One point to note is that those who lead and manage volunteers need to get better at **influencing and effecting change** within their organisations. Later this year NCVO will be running training for Volunteer Managers on that very issue and I am getting more requests to speak on the topic at events I attend. So, next month, I'll focus my blog post on giving you some pointers on how to influence more effectively.

This article was originally published on Third Sector Rob Jackson's Blog. *Read more from the author on* Rob Jackson Consulting Ltd Blog.

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