

Volunteering Culture Check - Assessing and Making Change

An extract from the [Sport Wellington website](#) – Developing Culture

Why is culture important?

An organisation's culture is made up of the values and beliefs of its members. A positive culture – where volunteers feel appreciated and supported - can help attract volunteers while a negative culture will do just the opposite.

One of the challenges teams, clubs, and organisations face is creating a 'contributing' culture. This is where members take part in running the organisation rather than treating it as a service.

Assessing the health of your Culture

There are some key indicators that you can test to see if your club/ organisation's culture is healthy or not.

Some key indicators that your club culture is healthy:

- Most players stay for a few years
- Membership has increased or stayed the same during the past five years
- It is easy to get people to volunteer
- It is easy to get people to join a committee
- Committee members enjoy their role and remain involved for a number of years
- Committee meetings are efficient and effective
- Volunteers help for more than one season
- People support social functions
- People support fundraisers
- There are few (or no) harassment/abuse/conflict issues within the club/organisation
- Any issues are dealt with well
- Club/organisation policies are supported (e.g. participation)
- Officials are respected and appreciated by most members
- The workload is spread between many people
- New people are made to feel welcome
- The committee knows why people leave the club/organisation or their volunteer role
- Our club/organisation is well respected in the wider community

Making Change

If you decide that your club/organisation culture is not healthy and change is needed, be prepared for a gradual process. Below we talk about how change happens and how new ways get embedded.

But start with these actions:

1. Be aware of why change is needed
2. Have the desire to make change
3. Share knowledge
4. Create an ability to change
5. Reinforce the value of successful change

If the responses from your Club Culture Assessment suggest that change is needed, a Culture Change Plan (see tips below) can help. While change – of any degree – can take a considerable amount of time, the key is to maintain broad and ongoing communication between your committee and members. Communication is pivotal in addressing and solving any issues.

Changing a culture does not happen overnight. In fact change is a gradual process as the story below illustrates.

The story of the Five Monkeys

There once was a cage that contained five monkeys. Also, inside the cage hung a banana on a string with a set of stairs beneath it. Before long, a monkey went up the stairs towards the banana. As soon as he touched the stairs, the other four monkeys were sprayed with cold water.

After a while, another monkey approached the banana. When he reached the stairs, the other four monkeys were again sprayed with cold water. Pretty soon, when any of the monkeys climbed the stairs, the other monkeys tried to prevent it.

Then the cold water was turned off and one monkey was removed from the cage and replaced with a new one. The new monkey saw the banana and attempted to climb the stairs. To his surprise, all of the other monkeys attacked him. After another attempt and attack, he knew that if he tried to climb the stairs he would be assaulted.

Another of the original five monkeys was replaced with a new one. The newcomer went to the stairs and was attacked. The previous newcomer took part in the punishment with enthusiasm. Again, a third monkey was replaced with a newcomer. The new monkey made it to the stairs but was attacked.

Two of the four monkeys that beat him had no idea why they were not permitted to climb the stairs or why they were participating in the beating of the newest monkey. After the fourth and fifth original monkeys were replaced, all the monkeys that had been sprayed with cold water had been replaced.

Nevertheless, none of the monkeys approached the stairs ever again. Why not? Because as far as they knew, that's the way it had always been around there.

Tips for building a good volunteer culture

They say many hands make light work. But far too often in sports clubs/organisations, you see one or two individuals shouldering the bulk of the work. As administrators, it is important you create a strong and positive volunteering culture.

The below tips apply to teams, clubs, and regional sports organisations, club is used as the general term when referring to these. Anyone who relies on volunteers (which is most of us) can adapt the following tips to environment:

Set expectations at sign up or at induction

- As a club, you need to decide the club culture and volunteering expectations. Be clear and spell it out every time a new member joins the club. Most people don't mind helping out, they just need to know when and how. Is it once a week? Twice a season? Is it just selling a book of raffle tickets twice a year? Helping out at three events a year?

Remind people

- You need as many people to help out with the day to day running of your club as possible. Promote the need for volunteers on your club's website and in newsletters. Comments like "your contribution makes a difference" or "help us at our next event" continually reminds members that there is a culture of helping out and volunteering at your club.

Role descriptions

- People are more likely to volunteer when they are asked to fill a specific role with an outline of the time commitment required.

Focus on positive contributions and achievements

- When you feel burdened by responsibility, it's all too easy to feel negative. But it is your responsibility as committee members or administrators to set the tone and the culture and that includes how you conduct yourself. Keep a positive attitude and thank those who were

involved. It's more likely to change behaviour than pointing out those who don't help, as people will often become defensive.

Don't tell, order or shame but don't be afraid to ask

- Don't be too shy to ask people for help with a call to action. People nowadays don't often think to proactively volunteer but when asked are more than happy to give their time.
- It is also a good idea not to ask big groups but rather ask individuals who will then make a team. This approach helps to create ownership and pride for these people in relation to the project.

Keep a skills register

- This is very rarely done but is very useful. The register is simply a list of members with any specific skills. This helps you to be more specific about who to ask to fill which roles. For example, if you have a carpenter at your club and a door is starting to come loose they are more likely to be able to help quickly and efficiently, with little stress.
- People are more likely to volunteer if they have the time, knowledge, skills and inclination to do the job. Understanding the skillsets of the people at your club will help you get a much better result.

Subdivide large tasks into smaller tasks and delegate to subcommittees/project teams

- This makes it easier for people to get involved. Creating project teams means that members can take ownership of the task and if necessary, recruit their friends to be on their team to help.

Be flexible

- With long working hours and commitments at home, some people may not wish to take on a formal role at the club that requires too much time and effort. However, you might find they are happy to take on one of the following roles:
 - Statistician (to count shots on goals etc)
 - Videographer (using an iPad)
 - Or other match official role
- Allocating these types of roles to people that may be particularly vocal or potentially disruptive can be useful.

Build a rota

- Those that find it difficult to commit weekly might be more comfortable adding their name to a rota. That way, several people can help out on a monthly basis.

Allow people to succeed

- Don't try to take on too much. Don't try to do everything by yourself, other people will be capable too so give them the opportunity to succeed.

Train the people

- The opportunity to learn new skills, such as First Aid, can often motivate people to get involved in the running of a club. And while people may be extremely capable in their day jobs, they may not have the know how to do certain tasks around the club but might feel uncomfortable asking for training. So be upfront about the training opportunities you offer.