Volunteer Conversation Scripts

Below is a framework and examples for handling problem behaviors. Tailor them to best suit your situation.

G-R-E-A-T Communication Model

GOALS
• How their role relates to org goals
• New goals
• Unmet goals
• Timelines

ROLES
• Define yours and theirs, how they work ideally
• Be honest about your discomfort
• Behavior specific

EXPECTATIONS
• Describe needed observable actions
• For satisfactory performance
• For outstanding performance

ABILITIES
• Don’t know
• Can’t Do
• Won’t Do
• Set improvement plan together

TIME
• What’s the deadline?
• When will you check in?
REQUESTING MORE ACCOUNTABILITY

**OPENER**
Mrs. Vampire, have you got a minute for a quick chat? You know I enjoy working with you, but lately your work has had some major holes in it that others need to fill in. It really seems like the work is unbalanced between you and the other volunteers. It’s negatively affecting the morale of the team.

**VOLUNTEER REACTION**

- **Denies Problem:** What are you talking about? My work is fine, and I’ve heard nothing from other on the team.
- **Gets Angry:** You’ve got a lot of nerve to criticize a volunteer who works for free!
- **Accepts Criticism:** I’m sorry, but I’ve got a lot on my mind right now. I’m really doing the best I can.

**DEEPEN THE DISCUSSION**

- **Offer Evidence:** I’m talking about (give examples). If our team didn’t depend on you, it wouldn’t bother me. But, we really need you to take this seriously.
- **Diffuse Anger:** I'm not trying to put you on the spot, but it really makes it harder for the entire team. Think how you'd feel in your teammate's shoes.
- **Offer Support Options:** I hear you. Life can be complicated. But, I'd really like you to try your best. Is there anything we can do to better support you in terms of training or reduced hours?

**VOLUNTEER REACTION**

- **Still Denies Problem:** Are you threatening me?
- **Gets Over Anger:** I know. You're absolutely right. What do you need me to do?
- **Agrees to Try:** Maybe there's something we can work out that will work for both of us.

**REINFORCE**

- **Issue a Warning:** No, but if we can't come to agreement, I'm going to have to re-assign you (or let you go). Why don't you think about it, and we'll talk again tomorrow.
- **Reinforce Needs:** I need you to really own your assignment like (describe tasks). Check in with me if you think it's too much, and we can go to Plan B.
- **Schedule a Check-in:** Certainly! You know I'll help in any way I can. Let's set up an action plan for support. Also, let's check in in two weeks.
REQUESTING BETTER RELIABILITY

Mr. Ghost, Do you know what these time logs mean (holding up or gesturing to his volunteer hours or schedule)? [volunteer answers]. Those are all of the times you committed to a shift, and were either not here, arrived late, or left early. If you add them up, that's a lot of wasted time.

**Opener & Problem**

**Volunteer Reaction**

- **No Big Deal Excuse**: I know I come late and leave early once in a while, but I didn't think it was that big of a deal, since we're volunteers.
- **Rationalization**: I'm not the only one. It seems like a lot of volunteers, and even some staff, come and go as they please.
- **Personal Excuse**: I'm sorry I've had a lot on my mind that I didn't want to worry anyone with. My head just isn't here lately.

**Restate Problem**

- **Confirm Accusation**: We would not be having this discussion if this weren't an issue. When you're not here it affects productivity and the morale of the other volunteers.
- **Reaffirm Problem**: Yes, that may be true. In your case, it's more than once awhile, which is why I started looking at the time sheets. You need to understand that if this continues, we'll have to talk about ending your assignment.
- **Continued Focus**: That's understandable. But, for your role, it's critical that volunteers show up and leave on time. Do we need to discuss a re-assignment?

**Recommit**

- **Acknowledges Responsibility**: I'm really sorry. It won't happen again.
- **Acceptance**: I hear what you're saying. I'll take care of it.

**Reinforce**

- **Clarify Monitoring**: I hope not. I'm going to check on you over the next few months. If there are no further problems, we won't chat again. If there are, I'll need to let you go.
- **Rebuild Rapport**: I'm glad to hear that. If you're having personal problems, we can arrange a leave of absence, if that would help. Just let me know.
ENCOURAGING A MORE POSITIVE ATTITUDE

Mr. Zombie, I need to ask you a question and I want you to answer honestly. Are you planning to resign as a volunteer? [volunteer answers]

Describe the Problem: You've been displaying a very negative attitude around here to almost everything. It's really having an affect on the morale of your fellow volunteers. I'm assuming that because you are so unhappy you're planning to leave.

Voices Complaint: It's just that we volunteers work so hard, and it doesn't feel like staff really understand or respect what we do. To top it off, the materials we have to work with are sub-par and our office furniture is old and run down. Also, I don't think were doing enough for the community and we should expand our mission.

Point it Out: This is exactly the negativity I'm referring to. Certainly, our nonprofit isn't perfect. But, if there are so many things wrong, then perhaps its not a good fit. I'm happy to work with you, if you have some proactive suggestions for change (that you are also willing to take an active role in supporting). There are also things that probably won't change because we simply don't have the budget or the authority to tackle.

Accept & Reinforce: I'm glad to hear that. I don't expect you to be a cheerleader all the time, but you don't need to find the cloud behind every silver lining. Let's try to have some fun volunteering, OK?

Volunteer Apologizes: I'm sorry. It's just my grumpy personality. I didn't realize it was affecting the other volunteers.
GIVING A NEGATIVE PERFORMANCE REVIEW

Mr. Frankenstein, I've generally been happy with your work, especially with (insert example). But, lately I've been concerned. I seem to have to explain things a number of times. You either don't follow though or make mistakes. I'm wondering if you're struggling with your volunteer assignment.

**Volunteer Reaction**

- **Accepts Criticism:** I'm really sorry. I didn't realize I'd messed up so badly.
- **Denies Problem:** I'm not sure what you're talking about. I check and recheck my work, and I don't make mistakes.
- **Gets Angry:** I can't realize your complaining about the quality of my work. After all, I'm a volunteer not paid staff!

**Deepen the Discussion**

- **Offer Support Options:** There are a few ways we might better support you - you could get more training, work with a coach, or try a different job. What do you think?
- **Offer Evidence:** Let me show you what I mean. Here are some examples of mistakes you've made and things you've been assigned.
- **Diffuse Anger:** I'm surprised you're angry. I thought you'd want to do your best work here. Is something else bothering you?

**Volunteer Reaction**

- **Gets Past Denial:** I guess you're right. I didn't realize I needed some help.
- **Still Denies Problem:** I really don't see what you mean. Maybe someone else is making these errors.
- **Remains Angry:** I really think this is unfair. My work has been good. I think you expect too much!
- **Gets Over Anger:** I'm sorry I got so defensive. I work hard, but sometimes I get confused.

**Reinforce**

- **Issue a Warning:** If we can't see eye to eye on this, I'm going to have to re-assign you (or let you go). Why don't you take a few days to think about it, and we'll get back together (on date/time).
- **Schedule a Check-in:** You know I'm here to help in any way I can. Let's set up an action plan for support. Also, let set a date for a month from now to check in about how it's going.
Ms. Witch, we have a serious problem on our team. It's becoming hurtful and personal.

**Some Evidence:** I overheard you speaking with others about a volunteer on our team. I'm not saying you're at fault for the hurtful rumors, but I was troubled by what I heard.

**No Evidence:** I've received reports from a number of people that someone is spreading hurtful rumors about the personal life of one of our volunteers. Have you heard anything?

**Denies Responsibility:** I'm sorry. I really didn't mean anything by it. I don't think I'm the gossip you're looking for. For the most part, I keep to myself.

**Stonewalls:** It's not surprising that there's a little gossip here and there. It's only natural. But, I haven't heard anything out of order lately.

I'm glad to hear that. I know that you're very well connected with the rest of the volunteers. Because of that, I'd really like your help solving this problem. Could you help spread the word that I consider gossip to be unacceptable? Regardless of the intent, it hurts our team and our mission. Can I count on your help?

Great! Together we can put a stop to this problem. I'd hate to have to start digging deeper and have to make some serious changes. Let me know how it goes.