



Ensuring Success: Preventing Burnout

Volume Two, Number Seven
July 2009

www.alaskafood.org

Ending Hunger is Neverending	1
Recognizing the Problem.....	1
Taking Another Look	2
More Resources	2

“Hunger is a symptom of poverty and until poverty is eradicated, hunger will always be an uphill battle.”

Ending Hunger is Never Ending

All of us involved in the anti-hunger network are working toward the same mission: a day when no one is hungry. It is a lofty goal but a worthy cause and each of us, whether we are paid or not, put in many hours and resources to meet that goal.

We probably won't ever reach it.

Hunger is a symptom of poverty and until poverty is eradicated, ending hunger will always be an uphill battle. Knowing this truth, it can be easy to get wrapped up in the details of feeding hungry people and get lost and disillusioned with the effort. Everyone experiences days when it just doesn't seem worth it to continue with the pantry, soup kitchen, shelter, etc. and those times won't ever come to an end.

But, to prevent burnout and the complete loss of effort, we have to learn to effectively manage the lows so we can enjoy the highs.

Recognizing the Problem

Are you finding yourself, your staff and/or your volunteers struggling in service to feed the hungry? Do you see any of the following signs:

- Fewer volunteers offering their time
- Volunteers that used to be very dependable suddenly not showing up for their assigned shifts
- Volunteers/staff being less productive than normal
- Volunteers and staff having a difficult time communicating effectively with clients and getting easily frustrated
- Higher than normal number of complaints regarding process and procedure from both clients and staff/volunteers.

If you see more than one symptom listed above from your staff and/or volunteers, it may be a warning sign of burnout. It is time to sit down with staff/volunteers and let them vent about frustrations, map out a plan and realign each other with your vision of ending hunger. Burnout does not have to be the end of the relationship between the organization and staff member/volunteer. There are several different things that can be done to prevent the situation and remedy it when it occurs.

Strengthening Alaska's Anti-Hunger Network

Taking Another Look

When you notice staff/volunteers burning out on the mission, it's time to energize. Some strategies for getting people back on track:

- **Set Aside Time to Vent:** Allow staff and volunteers the time to come together without the burden of work. Give them the time to vent their frustration about their work to their peers; these may be the only people that truly understand the perspective.
- **Evaluate Your Systems:** Are you running your pantry, shelter or kitchen efficiently? Can a small monetary investment result in easier procedures? Is there a step or process you can eliminate or simplify?

For example, do you have a lengthy registration process? There are no requirements for distributing donated food outside of making sure the food goes to the ill, infant or needy. If someone is asking for food, they likely fall into that category. Reduce the work and get a name and phone number as your registration!

Do you pre-select food for clients? Reduce the time it takes to prepare for distribution and give clients a choice! Not only will you cut out valuable time spent creating pre-made boxes, but you'll also be giving autonomy back to your clients. You wouldn't want someone picking out your groceries for you at the grocery store---your clients probably do not want that either!

Contact fellow AFC members who manage the same type of organization as yours. Ask them about their programs and see if you can borrow ideas for your organization.

- **Change Duties:** Sometimes a job gets boring and all a person needs to get motivated about their work is a change of pace.
- **Don't Forget the Fun:** Feeding hungry people can be physically and emotionally taxing. Make sure you take the time to have a personal investment in each staff member/ volunteer and tell them often how important they are to the success of the organization and how grateful you are for their contribution.

More Resources

If you have questions about burnout or for more resources, contact Kerri Burrows, Alaska Food Coalition Manager, at afc@foodbankofalaska.org or 907.222.3103.

**Next Month:
Strategic
Planning**

