Preamble

1. Australia has a huge reputation for the effects of volunteering across the Nation in all walks of life and across the so called multicultural divide and in this 'service to nation' volunteer process within the Ex-Service community there is an amazing volunteer ‘organism’ that has adopted the traits born of the Australian Defence Force and the ‘mateship’ earned, not only on the battlefield, but from the training endured in peacetime.

   ➢ The first ‘lore’ is that volunteering in the ex-service arena has a difference

   FOR THOSE WHO HAVE FOUGHT FOR IT, FREEDOM, HAS A TASTE THE PROTECTED WILL NEVER KNOW

Aim

2. The aim of this document is to explore the workings of Ex-Service Organisation volunteering and how to ‘communicate’ within that environment

Levels of ‘listening’

3. Most organisations with a military and civil background understand that a basic structure [in common terms] consists of:-

   • The Office Bearers
   • The Managers
   • The grass-roots practitioner
   • The member / Clients

4. The Office Bearers: have usually [but not always depending on who and how election is processed] attained the skills, from military and civilian employment, that provides expertise in policy, business and personal acumen and financial management. History has shown that committees led by their office bearers don’t always succeed, usually because they listen to themselves and miss the communitive expressions of the managers, grass-roots practitioners and their members.

   ➢ The second ‘Lore’ is that the committee must have the ability to listen to ALL their constituents and provide feed-back up and down the lines of communications that makes sense to all those the information is aimed at
5. **The Managers:** Have usually attained the ‘lynch-pin’ status and it is noticeable that sometimes the listening skills disappear from their ‘kit bags’ and their reputation and expected standards and credibility earned as a practitioner suffers. Good managers assume the mantle of manager but maintain the communication with the volunteer force within their area of operations.

> The third ‘lore’ is that any manager who has benefit of lines of communication both up and down the organisations structure has the basis to succeed and make effective management decisions and ‘take the volunteers with them...’

6. **The grass-roots practitioners:** within the ESO can have a number of ‘faces’ including:-

- **Like to work alone**—This can be most effective but requires a special kind of communication [listening and assisting in translation to the ESO Standard Operating Procedures discussions] that keeps them in the ESO structure and Standard Operating Procedures. That special kind of communication requires the manager to include and ensure they are part of the SOP developers activities [Has a degree of ownership]
- **Like to work in a team**—Depending on ‘team configuration’ and ‘team maintenance’ and a listening and communication process management that requires constant maintenance and has ownership for the team.
- **Can become ‘territorial’**—Communication and information flow must be translated by a fellow practitioner or manager where mutual respect and ‘man to man’ [sic] credibility exists
- **Most Ex-Military volunteers** are not open to bullshit or bluffing and are apt to just depart the scene, most times, without comment
- **Grass-roots practitioners become local ‘experts,’** in various parts of the compensation and welfare arena due to experience or self-exposure. That expertise needs to be documented and useable within the team
- **Volunteers, especially in the early years need management** [constant reminder about ‘burn-out’] and a working within a volunteer environment policy should be clearly demonstrated to all volunteer practitioners
- **There is of course other ‘faces’** that need addressing

> The fourth ‘lore’ requires the office-bearers to provide policy, the managers to ensure a ‘happy’ house and the volunteer practitioners to have ownership and self-protection all can be achieved as long as the issues are communicated using a number of avenues

7. **The members/clients:** tend to follow ‘word of mouth’ advice who to seek advice from:-

- Usually have an understanding of the basics but sometimes appear ignorant
- Demonstrate poor understanding of government beaurocratic processes and communication
- Usually demonstrate a good knowledge of the $
- Can sniff out bullshit* and lack of knowledge quite well

“Failure to communicate” [sic]

8. Having looked at the ‘levels of listening’, and experienced the failure of ‘getting the message out’ to the number of recipients there needs to be a discussion about positive improvements rather than defending ones ‘acre of land’ so I have noted some dot points that discussion may want to explore:-

- **Why did the circulation of Q & A papers have a less than expected response?** Most effective Q & A documents need a level of understanding about the subject to attract interest in reading the information. The missing link seems to be the absence of the Regional Structure where robust interaction and discussion at the grass-roots is restricted by indications that information should come from the SGB or DVA
• Why did the circulation of the standard Employment job offer for the Regional Manager and regional Management Group have a less than expected response? The job offer was couched in employment terms rather than about volunteering in a ‘niche’ [ESO] environment. Those who read the document stopped reading when they realised it was not a paid position or did not read, past the heading, because it looked like a job offer not a volunteer seeking paper.

• Retirees reaction- They don’t read bureaucratic designed documents since they left the work-force

• Advertising for volunteers, in the paper or other communication outlets has never been highly successful within the ESO Community [and has some history of attracting the unsuited to the table] and the process is time and expenditure poor. With the confusing and bureaucratic process and lack of regional input the response was untenable The most successful recruiting process since the aging of the Vietnam Veteran has been ‘identify and head hunt’ the possible volunteer practitioner. Younger volunteers who are now MRCA or SRCA recipients are concerned about the ‘capability’ issue and their military compensation if they become a volunteer.

- The fifth ‘lore’ demonstrates that restructuring from the top down is not necessarily the better option and if the Regional Management Group had at least a minority presence the information flow to the Ex-Service community would have been more appropriate even if the TIP management [extended to 30 Jun 2016] had a transitional role.

Coverage across the board

9. The lack of response to the advertised Regional Manager, Committee of Management and ASO position circulated to Ex-Service Organisations could be attached to the fact that at the regional level [Victoria at least, noted by queries but limited applications] there was a ‘hit and miss’ knowledge level in ESO land, about the local regional structure to establish the ‘interest and encouragement’ factor, a communication requirement and would have set up a negative to the advertisement.

10. Even if the understanding of the advertisement and the allied information about the restructure was sufficient to draw the interest the word out there was that ATDP had to demonstrate that it was not going to be a TIP clone, immediately put off the Ex-TIP personal [excluding those already part of ATDP] with suitable experience from applying even though the blueprint talks about using the best of TIP. [Double negative communication].

11. To re-advertise, using the same process would properly have the same poor response.

A matrix

12. In ESO land to attain understanding at the Office Bearer, Manager, Volunteer practitioners and member/clients, good ESOs issues items of communication written to reach the listening level of the information target so that the same message written to be comprehended by the different levels may be worded or framed differently.

13. Maybe ATDP should develop a matrix to assist communication to the levels of all information targets which if used regionally would assist better communication process.

- The sixth ‘lore’ recommends ATDP communication needs to develop a matrix that defines the level of listening to the target audience with demonstration of ‘Level of listening speech’ across the board.

Consistency

14. The ATDP –[SGB, CFMG and Regions] need to be consistent in the use of ‘listening levels’ and after decisions to provide information are made, it should be noted which item of the matrix is the target or targets of the communication and the author of the communication be responsible for editing.
The seventh ‘lore’ is continuity, consistency and attention to detail with ‘listening skills’ that must be included when communicating with the Ex-Service Community

Conclusions

15. This paper is targeted to Ex-Service Organisations internal operations which demonstrate a wide range of expertise but also a wide arena where communication is poor. This includes what the ESORT and the DVA are responsible for and what the ESOs at grass-roots level expects of ESORT and DVA

16. The most damming indicator of poor communication is the number of times that a claimant comes to an ESO volunteer practitioner to have the beaurocratic correspondence interpreted

17. **This paper is designed to provide the agenda item on communication with input on volunteer issues**

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