

LEADERSHIP TRAINING BULLETIN 95-06

RELEASING OFFICERS -- A CARING AND CONCERNED APPROACH

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INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the most difficult task a GWRRA Officer will ever have to undertake is releasing another officer or staff person from their volunteer position. This Training Bulletin defines the process and procedures for releasing an officer from their position in such a way that negative consequences for the officer, the Members, and GWRRA are minimized or eliminated. Better yet, information is also provided that may well be of use in avoiding the removal process altogether by helping Officers become adept at recognizing and addressing performance-related issues before they even become problems through regular and effective communications.

If it appears that making an Officer change is really necessary, it is important that the process be well understood and carried out. Three main points of consideration should always be involved in with respect to officer removals. They are: (1) Caring for the individual; (2) Concern for GWRRA and its Members; and, (3) GWRRA policies and procedures. Each of these processes will be described in this bulletin.

CARING FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

Caring for the individual must be the energy that drives the removal process from start to finish. While concern for the best interests of individual Members is paramount, concern for the feelings and dignity of the Officer being released is only slightly less important. Officers involved in decisions about changing other Officers must be sure to show and feel empathy, concern, and caring during the entire process. They must be receptive to "ALL" problems, real or perceived, including possible unfairness on the part of either party, honest misunderstandings, lack of education or training, lack of resources, length of service, and the particular situation of the officer in question.

Several issues must be considered when releasing an Officer. These are described below.

EMOTIONS VS LOGIC

Our thought processes, and thus our decisions, are affected by both our emotions and our sense of logic. Emotions, our feelings, are usually the stronger of the two in a conflict situation and tend to overshadow our more rational, logical side. Great care must be taken to be sure that we have taken the time necessary to think matters through completely and that our decisions are based on logic, the interests of the Members, and not on our emotions. The only emotions that should be involved in the removal process are those associated with a caring and concerned attitude toward all those involved, particularly the Officer being released.

TIMING AND APPROACH

The timing of a removal action should be carefully considered. Such actions should not be initiated in the "heat of the moment" or in other situations when events have the potential to force premature decisions. For example, late December is not the time to advise an officer that their appointment is not going to be renewed. This decision should be made much earlier when time for careful consideration and the possibility of corrective actions exists.

The approach should be one of caring and concern for the Officer in question and those associated with him/her. These are the only emotions that should be involved in initiating a change of Officers. Remember that Officers are people who have volunteered to help the Association progress by serving its Members in leadership positions. They deserve credit and recognition for their successes, and understanding and concern for their feelings and future in GWRRA, regardless of the nature of the action being considered.

COACHING

When consideration must be given to removing an Officer, or not renewing appointments, it often means that both the Officer in question and the Appointing Officer have fallen short. Appointing Officers have a responsibility to nurture, coach, train, and develop their subordinates. Not doing so can set the reporting officers up for failure. Only after BOTH parties have done all that they can do to salvage the situation should removal be a consideration.

Clearly, one person can do all that is possible to make things right while the other does not. There is always accountability for both the Appointing and Appointed Officers. Appointing Officers must be absolutely sure that they have done all that is reasonable, and maybe even a little more, to help each of their direct reports succeed. However, Appointing Officers are not responsible for another person's decision to not make a good faith effort.

GIVING CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM

In many cases, it is possible to work with the Officer in question and "turn them around." Patience, one-on-one training, and honest constructive feedback, coupled with "catching them doing something right", often have the effect of improving performance to the point that removal is no longer necessary.

If the Appointing Officer has been conducting regular effectiveness interviews each March and October, most problems can be identified and addressed early-on or avoided altogether. These interviews are conducted for that very purpose, as well as to provide the kind of help and assistance that will move everyone toward the success that they desire.

The objective of giving constructive criticism through discussions and the evaluation process is to get the individual to change unproductive behavior. It IS NOT to demoralize or humiliate them. With a little practice, using the steps outlined below, you can give the kind of advice and council to your officers and staff that will effectively help them improve!

1. The first and most important rule is to treat them the way you want to be treated.
2. Plan your basic conversation ahead of time, outlining the specific points you want to make.
3. Start the discussion with a positive statement about them as a person. Remember, you want to build bridges not walls.
4. Direct your criticism at the negative action, not the person.
5. Make the criticism constructive but specific. For example, you might say "You are not providing newsletters to the Members on a monthly basis", rather than "You are not communicating with the Members."
6. Don't make threats. Use "we" to stress that you want to work out the problem together.
7. Make sure the other person understands the reason for the criticism, but don't belabor the point. Keep the discussion short and sweet, don't lecture.
8. Ask the person what you can do to help. Perhaps you can't do anything, but it does show that you are willing to work things out and opens the door for further conversation. The least we can do is listen to the individual's point of view and their suggestions for solving the problem.
9. Do not set a tone of anger or become sarcastic. Neither is productive behavior.
10. At the end of your discussion, reaffirm your relationship with the person by expressing confidence and support. Write down all the options both of you have discussed for solving the problem. Together, choose one or more options and agree on a course of action. Set specific steps and time parameters for accomplishing these actions. Agree on what is to be accomplished and continue working together to achieve your agree goals.

CONCERN FOR GWRRA

GWRRRA Officers have responsibilities to both the Members and the Association. However, Officers are the official representatives of the Association to its Members and the public and as such have a significant responsibility to protect the interests of GWRRRA as an organization. Concern for GWRRRA is a legitimate and viable consideration in initiating Officer changes. However, Officers should keep in mind that in most cases helpful, creative, solutional thinking can result in a situation in which the Officers are able to protect the interests of GWRRRA and its Members, creating a win/win situation.

The considerations described below will be useful in finding your way through a sometimes difficult and challenging process.

TAKE YOUR TIME - GIVE IT EVERY CHANCE TO SUCCEED

It should be extremely rare to release an officer "on the spot." Even in the most extreme circumstances decisions on the critical issues should be made only after careful deliberations. Everyone deserves a chance to correct and learn from their mistakes. Hasty removal of Officers denies everyone this opportunity and closes the door to teaching and the resulting personal growth.

Using a "probationary period" is a common method of problem solving performance-related problems. A probationary period is a set length of time in which special conditions of behavior can be established and observed, and in which training can be provided or corrections made as needed. This "probationary" period must be long enough to allow all parties time to effect a behavioral change and think the matter through thoroughly. However, it should not be open-ended or extend beyond a time when unreasonable damage may be done to the person, the Members, or GWRRRA.

NON-RENEWAL OF APPOINTMENTS

Decisions regarding renewal of officer appointments should be made well in advance of December 31. This allows time for the Officer to be advised properly, given the opportunity to improve, select a replacement if necessary, and provide for a "seamless" transition between officers. Beginning this process early also allows time for the Members to adjust to the upcoming changes and work out any concerns they may have with the Appointing Officer.

CAUSES FOR REMOVAL

The primary causes for releasing an officer are failure to abide by the agreements described in the GWRRA Memorandum of Understanding. Additional reasons include but are not limited to:

1. Abuse of Member rights or GWRRA policies;
2. Failure to submit the required financial report at year-end or upon request;
3. Failure to submit the annual Chapter Chartering Fee;
4. Documented misuse of GWRRA funds; and,
5. Actions unbecoming an Officer or GWRRA.

Other reasons may also be applicable when making decisions regarding officer appointment renewals.

TALKING WITH THE MEMBERS

As a rule, only those people directly affected by the release or non-renewal of an Officer's appointment should be involved in the process. However, if the matter becomes public knowledge, it may be advisable to speak with all the Members impacted by the action. Here again, care and concern for the individuals involved must be the prime concern. Public criticism of any individual involved, and speculation about the situation is never justified and must NOT occur. Regardless of the nature of the removal, the personal dignity and reputation of the people involved must be protected. Only those aspects of the situation that are both public and documented should be discussed. Confidences must be maintained.

The main reason for talking with the Members either individually or in a public forum is to address their concerns and answer any questions they may have. This "discussion" can have a positive effect by quieting the rumor mill, and allows Members to get on with positive activities.

**GWRRA POLICIES AND PROCEDURES --
OFFICER REMOVALS, TRANSFER OF OFFICE, AND GRIEVANCES**

1. REMOVAL OF OFFICERS (Reference Officer's Guidebook, Section G-4, G-5, G-6)

No GWRRA Officer is to be removed from their position without an in-depth discussion of the matter with the Approving Officer for that appointment prior to any action being taken; i.e., A District Director would not remove a Chapter Director without first discussing the matter with the Region Operations Director. The decision to remove an officer is ultimately that of the Appointing Officer, but Approving Officers must be advised and consulted before any final action is taken.

The Officer with direct authority and responsibility over the situation, usually the Appointing Officer, will document and provide the reason(s) for dismissal to include, but not be limited to, the steps taken to correct the situation and written documentation as to the justification of the act. In addition to full documentation as described above, the affected Officer will also receive a copy of the grievance procedure outlining his/her rights in the matter. Copies of all correspondence and documentation must be forwarded to the appropriate Regional Director, and the Executive Director.

2. TRANSFER OF OFFICE (Reference Officer's Guidebook, Section C-8)

Officers removed from office must:

- a. Turn over all materials (files, records, paperwork, etc.) of that office to the appointing Officer or his/her designee;
- b. Turn over all property (equipment, etc.) of that office paid for with funds generated for that office to the appointing Officer or his/her designee; and,
- c. Turn over all funds generated for the operation of the office along with a full accounting and financial report to the Appointing Officer or his/her designee.

The transfer of office should take place within a mutually agreeable period of time but MUST NOT exceed 30 working days from the date of removal.

3. GRIEVANCES (Reference GWRRA Officer's Guidebook, Section G-3,G-4,G-5,G-6,I-13 as amended 1999)

Policy

It is understood that honest differences of opinion will occasionally occur. These differences will usually be over operating procedures, sometimes compounded by personality conflicts. The purpose of GWRRA Grievance Procedures is to minimize and resolve disputes, and to protect GWRRA and its officers and Members. The GWRRA Grievance Procedures allow any officer or Member with a legitimate concern to formally involve the Chapter, District, or Region Director and carry that grievance through the officer system to and including the Chairman of the Board.

The purpose of involving GWRRA Officers in the grievance procedures is to provide the opportunity to clarify the information and settle grievances at the lowest possible layer of the Association. A copy of the grievance procedure will be provided to any Officer removed from office, and to any Officer or Member upon request. Officers should make every attempt to determine the legitimacy of a grievance by considering it from the point of view of the person lodging the complaint.

Definitions

Grievance - A claim based upon the interpretation, application, or violation of GWRRA policies that have a negative impact on the terms and conditions of membership enjoyments, officer selection, officer terminations, or decisions or perceptions resulting in unfair or inequitable treatment.

Aggrieved Person - The person or persons making the claim.

Party In Interest - Person(s) making the claim (or) any person who might be required to take action (or) against whom action might be taken in order to resolve the claim.

Procedures

- a. Procedures used in case of alleged violation of policy:

LETTER OF COMPLAINT – Before entering into Level 1 of the Grievance Policy, a letter of complaint shall be submitted to an appropriate arbitrator (approved by parties concerned) listing the complaint of the aggrieved. This letter shall be available to all parties (accused). This allows the complaints to be resolved before becoming formal at Level 1. If the concerns of the aggrieved cannot be resolved, they then can be reviewed by the District Director at Level 1 by filing a grievance form (Officer's Guidebook, Page I-13). All efforts should be focused on resolving the complaint at this point.

LEVEL 1 - Within ten (10) working days of the discovery of a grievance, the aggrieved person shall first discuss it with the appropriate Chapter and District Director and other concerned persons with the objective of resolving the matter as close to the problem as possible.

LEVEL 2 - If the aggrieved person is not satisfied with the disposition of the grievance at Level 1 or if no decision has been rendered within five (5) working days after the meeting on the grievance, the aggrieved party may file a written grievance, within seven (7) working days with the appropriate Regional Director. Within ten (10) working days after the receipt of the written grievance the Director and the aggrieved person will meet or communicate in an attempt to resolve the grievance.

LEVEL 3 - If the aggrieved person is not satisfied with the disposition of the grievance at Level 2 the aggrieved person may within five (5) working days after the receipt of the decision file a written grievance with the Executive Director. The Executive Director, or designee, will, within fifteen (15) working days after the receipt of the written grievance review the evidence and render a written decision.

LEVEL 4 - If the aggrieved person is still not satisfied with the disposition of the grievance at Level 3, the aggrieved person may within five (5) working days request that the grievance be reviewed by the Chairman of the Board. The Chairman of the Board may at his option within thirty (30) days after receipt of the written grievance, review the evidence and reach a written decision. Should no review take place within thirty (30) days the decision made at Level 3 is final.

b. Miscellaneous

Written Decisions - Decisions rendered at Level 1, which are unsatisfactory to the aggrieved person and all decisions rendered at Levels 2 and 3, or 4, of the grievance procedures shall be in writing, setting forth the decision and the reasons therefore, and shall be transmitted promptly and entirely to all interested parties.

Separate Grievance File - All documents, communications, and records dealing with the processing of a grievance shall be filed in a separate grievance file and shall not be kept in the file of any participants. A Member shall have access to all documents pertaining to his/her grievance and may acquire copies of same.

Meetings and Hearings - All meetings and hearings under this procedure shall be conducted in private and shall include only such parties in interest and their designated or selected representatives, heretofore referred to in this policy. All meetings or hearings shall be at a time convenient to the aggrieved and shall not interfere with his/her work schedule. At no time is the aggrieved to present any issues to the Executive Director, Level 3, or Director of GWRRA, Level 4, unless said grievance has gone through due process of the District Director and Region Director (i.e. Level 1 and Level 2). It should be noted that the Executive Director **will not** act on any grievance unless the aggrieved has gone through the appropriate officers at Level 1 and Level 2 and the Executive Director has conferred with the appropriate officer.

External Organizations - If the aggrieved party is another organization the grievance will be initiated at the appropriate level, but in no case lower than Level 2.

Presentations - The aggrieved person may not present any issues at Level 3 or 4 not presented in Levels 1 or 2.

Time Limits - Time limits provided in this grievance procedure may be extended by mutual agreement, in writing.

Jurisdiction - The grievance procedure established herein shall be the sole and exclusive remedy available to a grievant for resolving disputes arising under this document. If any subject matter which is or might be alleged as a grievance is instituted in any administrative action before a governmental board or agency, then that administrative procedure shall be the sole remedy and a grievance under this policy shall no longer exist. Should the governmental board or agency decline jurisdiction the aggrieved may reinstitute in writing the grievance at the appropriate level.

OFFICER RELEASE CHECKLIST

This checklist exists to assist officers considering the removal of officers of staff members under their jurisdiction. Officers involved in such actions should carefully review and consider each of the following questions. Careful and thoughtful consideration may result in new ideas for developing a win/win solution other than removal of the person from their position. Also, careful and thoughtful consideration of this checklist and the recommended removal procedures will ensure fairness to all.

1. As a Coach and Mentor, have you done all you can to encourage, train, educate, support, and contribute to the success of this person in their position? (If not, begin to do so now, before releasing the Officer from their position.)
2. Is the problem or concern yours or someone else's? If it is someone else's, have you defined your proper role in the action?
3. Is the issue based on emotions or emotional concerns? Is the issue more one of personalities than of operational concerns?
4. Have you identified and documented the specific, "root" cause(s) of this issue?
5. Are members aware of the situation in question? If so, how will you handle that?
6. Are other Officers or staff persons affected by or aware of the situation? If so, how will you handle that?
7. Is, or will, GWRRA Inc. be affected by this situation or its possible outcome? If yes, what do you anticipate the repercussions from this action will be? What are your recommendations for offsetting any adverse reactions?
8. Have you reviewed all relevant GWRRA policies and procedures regarding removal of officers?
9. Have you communicated with other "interested parties" for advice? (Your mentor, buddy, appointing officer?)
10. Have you considered other possibilities besides removing the Officer? Identify at least three other possibilities -- not including the possibility of finding another position to which the person is better suited.

11. Have you defined and considered all aspects of the "problem", yours and theirs?
12. Have you had focused, one-on-one discussions, either in person or via telephone with the person in question? If so:
 - a. When?
 - b. What was discussed?
 - c. Were all the problematic areas identified and addressed?
 - d. What were the actions taken, decisions made, or follow-up dates set?
 - e. What expectations were agreed to? Were they written down and all parties provided with copies?
 - f. Were follow-up discussions scheduled and held?
13. Was a formal, written evaluation done? If yes:
 - a. When?
 - b. What follow-up action is/was planned?
 - c. Did the officer in question receive a copy? Did they sign it?
 - d. Did you discuss the results of the evaluation with the person in question? When and How?
 - e. Was a time agreed upon for a follow-up progress review? If so, when?
 - f. Was an agreement reached regarding continuing or resigning the appointment? If not, what were your actions?
14. Has your Appointing Officer been consulted in this matter? Do you have their agreement? Support? Other options?
15. Has your Appointing Officer been provided with copies of all relevant information?
16. Have you prepared a formal Letter of Appreciation for the affected party sincerely thanking them for their service to GWRRA and its Membership?
17. Is a replacement in place or planned for?
18. What is the plan for Transition of Officers?

REMEMBER:

Treat others as YOU would want to be treated. Treat others with respect, courtesy, and sincere concern. Don't allow mole hills to become mountains. Find the Win-Win solution! A volunteer Officer was first of all a Member and ALL Members are important!