SAP Litmos

Bringing out the best in volunteers:
How nonprofits can solve their seven toughest training challenges

THE BEST RUN **SAP**

The seven toughest challenges of training volunteers

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A few years ago, when Girl Scouts San Diego (GSSD) was looking for a way to train its troop leaders, they realized they had a problem; their troop leaders are a large, widespread, diverse set of volunteers. Not everyone had experience using a Learning Management System (LMS). GSSD's leadership needed to find a way to train everyone, regardless of their amount of experience with LMS technology and online training.

The San Francisco SPCA had a different volunteer training problem. As the fourth-oldest humane society in the US and founders of the No-Kill Movement, the SPCA was very focused on animal welfare, but not so much on training. Its training was as-needed or event-based. But as the organization started to grow, the SPCA realized they needed a consistent way to train their new volunteers.

Training volunteers can be a challenge for nonprofit organizations. Nonprofits often rely on volunteers to provide labor they might not be able to otherwise afford, and that work is extremely valuable; according to a study by Independent Sector, volunteer work is worth an average of $25.43 an hour.

While free labor is a gift, training volunteers can provide a set of unique problems. One of the biggest challenges of training volunteers is built right into their role — they're volunteers. Anything they do for your organization is just that: voluntary.

The 2018 Volunteering in America report found that 77.34 million adults (30.3 percent) volunteered through an organization last year. Altogether, Americans volunteered nearly 6.9 billion hours, worth an estimated $167 billion in economic value...

If a volunteer doesn't want to take training, they don't have to. While this is just the most obvious training issue you might face when it comes to free labor, nonprofits face others: volunteers come from a range of different educational backgrounds and may not be familiar with workforce training, or they may not have the time for in-person sessions.

The good news for the heads of nonprofits is that the right training program can make volunteers more likely to learn, more productive, and get your entire volunteer organization operating at the same level.

Challenge #1
You can't make your volunteers take training

Let's start with the biggest challenge: although some organizations can require their volunteers to take training (GSSD requires training before a leader can take over a troop), your organization might not be set up that way. Fortunately, there are a few tricks that will make your volunteers more likely to take training. For example, are you giving your volunteers the training they want?

Often, organizations think about the training we want or need our volunteers to have — like compliance issues or soft skill training, but we don't remember that volunteers may have their own training wants and needs. Your volunteers, for example, might want practical modules about how to do a dog intake at an animal shelter, or — if your organization works with children — how to handle an overbearing parent. By mixing the content they're asking for with the courses you need them to take, you can serve your organization's training needs and the needs of your volunteers.

Sometimes people need a little bit of a push to take training. By using the gamification features built into your training platform, you can use psychological tactics to make training more fun for them and encourage them to log in regularly. By adding points and a leaderboard to your training, for example, you can start a friendly competition among your volunteers to see who can take the most training. You might even consider offering prizes to the person who is most engaged with your training.

Challenge #2
You have a LOT of volunteers

There are 23,000 scouts in the troops administered by Girl Scouts San Diego, and to support them, GSSD relies on 14,000 volunteers.

With that many volunteers (and with volunteers' busy schedules), it's more-or-less impossible to get everyone in one place for in-person training.
It's also difficult to get people to come into the GSSD offices for in-person training, which was the organization's training method before they partnered with SAP Litmos.

Rather than attempting to pull volunteers into a live session, an LMS can push training out to your volunteers instead, something that makes it easier for volunteers — who may want training but just not be able to make it to you — to learn.

It worked for GSSD. When the organization started building content with SAP Litmos Training, they noticed a spike in training, especially from volunteers who would never have come in for an in-person class.

"We have more people learning, period. **We have about double the amount** of people engaged in learning in some way than we have in the past."

Sandy Sultz,
Adult Learning Manager, GSSD
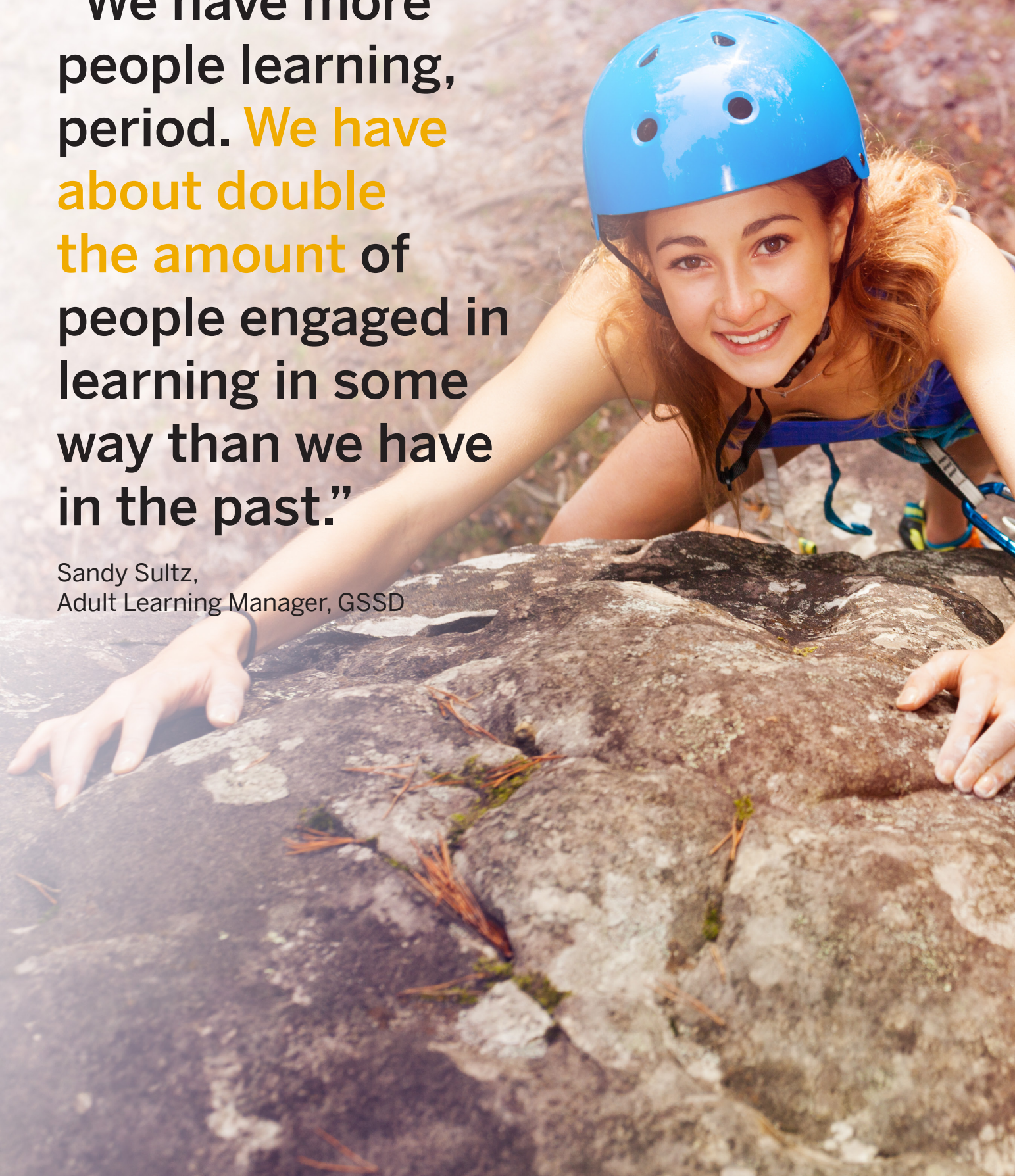
Challenge #3
# Not all your volunteers know what an LMS is

While online learning makes training a large group of volunteers possible, it's still a challenge to design an inclusive training program that works for everyone. Volunteers tend to come from a wide range of backgrounds. Take GSSD, for example. Some troop leaders might work part time. Some are stay-at-home parents. Others may work in a corporate setting.

Troop leader diversity is typically a strength for GSSD, but when it comes to training, diversity can create an eLearning divide. For example, the volunteers who work for large companies are likely familiar with learning management systems (LMS) but many of those who have not worked in an office setting may not be familiar with LMS tools at all.

This can be a big pitfall — new technology often means learning how to log in to a new system, creating a password, and figuring out a new platform before you can use it. If your volunteers find your learning platform too difficult or time-consuming, they just might opt out of training altogether.

To make sure your volunteers are learning, you have to make sure your training modules are easily available and don't require too much additional effort on their part. That means ensuring that logging in isn't a hassle, or possibly integrating training into an app they're already using.

That also applies to devices. Volunteers come from a wide range of income levels and educational backgrounds. Some may be able to access learning on their phones, others may share a desktop with family members. You need to be able to reach them all with learning that can be accessed from every device your volunteers might use.
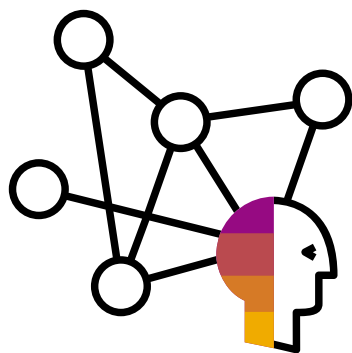
Challenge #4
Your volunteers are busy

The old saying "If you need something done, ask a busy person" definitely holds true when it comes to volunteers.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), most volunteers have jobs. They also have families; married people and parents with children under 18 volunteer at a higher rate than their peers. They may also volunteer for another group; 30% of volunteers give time to more than one organization.

Persons employed part-time are more likely than full-time workers to participate in volunteer activities — 31.1% versus 26.3%.

- Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)

That means that when your volunteers aren't working for you, they're on the move: at work, meeting family obligations, driving kids to activities, and volunteering in their communities. All that activity means they probably don't have much time to sit down at a computer and take training.

To get these super-volunteers trained, you need to be able to reach them where they are and when they have a free minute — and that might be when they're sitting in waiting rooms, the school pick-up line, on lunch break, or just on their couches at home after a long day.

In brief, it's important to provide quick, easily accessible training on their phones or any other devices so they can train wherever they are.

Challenge #5
You need to onboard new volunteers fast

When a new volunteer comes to your organization and asks how they can help, chances are you need to onboard them quickly. After all, you want to start taking advantage of their skillset as soon as possible.

Take the example of the San Francisco SPCA. Their training was ad hoc; the organization designed training materials when they were needed. While an organic program like that might be tailored to the needs of a new volunteer, it also might mean that new volunteers are waiting around for training to be designed for them, get shoddily trained, or they may not get trained at all. It's also the sort of program that might work well for a small organization, but not for a large one.

When the SF SPCA began to grow, they found they'd need to implement a training system so that new volunteers could be consistently and quickly onboarded. They used SAP Litmos Training to help formalize their learning experience.

28% of non-profit leaders say developing a learning and development strategy or program is a top priority for their organizations.

- Nonprofit HR

An LMS allows you to create more than training materials — you can also design a learning strategy. Once that's done you can offer training to new volunteers as soon as they sign up with you, starting them off with a preselected onboarding training sequence that will get them up to speed quickly and easily. That way, new volunteers get a running start and everyone gets the same training — no matter how many volunteers your organization has.
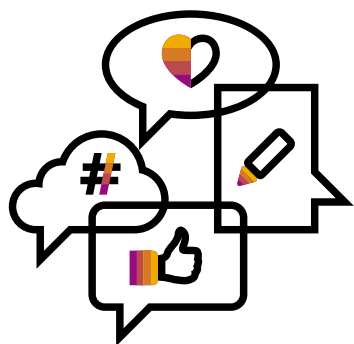
Challenge #6
Your volunteers need better people skills

Imagine you run an animal shelter and you have a volunteer who's amazing with animals. She understands how to make a nervous dog comfortable; she knows which cats will do well in a room together; and she's even got some basic veterinary skills.

She's a delight if you have fur or feathers, but she doesn't seem to like people much. She's abrupt on the phone, abrasive to people who want to adopt, and openly hostile to anyone who comes into the shelter to surrender an animal. In a perfect world, you'd just have her work in the back room with the animals, but unfortunately, you don't have a lot of volunteers and sometimes you need her at the front desk.

This volunteer is in serious need of soft skills, or people skills.

When you think of professional behavior — communication, phone etiquette, or time management, for example — you're probably thinking of soft skills. Unlike hard skills (skills that can be directly applied to a specific job, like knowing how to handle a frightened dog), soft skills are needed in just about every workplace.

They can also be a major stumbling block for nonprofit organizations that depend on volunteer workers. You might tolerate bad manners because you need that volunteer's veterinary experience, but unfortunately, no one is going to want to foster a dog at your shelter if they think your volunteer is going to give them a hard time.

Fortunately, soft skills can be trained and they're in demand right now. According to LinkedIn, 91% of HR professionals are looking for soft skills in job candidates, particularly creativity, persuasion, collaboration, adaptability, and time management.

The demand for soft skills is good news for you because it means there's plenty of relevant eLearning content available. Instead of developing soft skills training from scratch, you may opt to choose a learning platform that offers off-the-shelf soft skill eLearning.
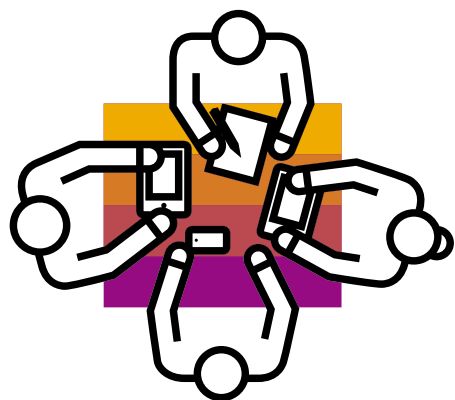
Challenge #7
You don't have an L&D department

Did you know that U.S. nonprofits employ the U.S.'s third largest workforce? Non-profit organizations employed 12.3 million paid workers in 2019. Despite the size of their workforce, however, nonprofits are often hurting for administrative help.

Nonprofit organizations often need employees who can run their organizations: grantwriters, projects and program managers, IT and HR workers.

- The Economist

Even if you work for a large organization, your nonprofit may not have a training director or director of L&D. Volunteer training may fall into HR's domain, or be a responsibility that has shifted from one department to another as leadership has changed.

If that's the case, an LMS can help your organization in several ways. For one thing, it can maintain a consistent training strategy by housing all your course materials and learning pathways in one platform. For another, a third-party LMS doesn't need to be maintained by an IT department — which is helpful because your nonprofit might not have an IT department to begin with.

Perhaps more importantly, an LMS can help you by delivering training modules you're unable to develop yourself. By choosing an LMS with a content library offering nonprofit-specific content and other modules relating to other more transferable skills, like good communication and social skills, you can offer top-notch training to your volunteers while saving the money and time it would take to create those courses in-house.

Training turns the volunteers you have into the volunteers you need

You can pick your employees, but you can't necessarily pick your volunteers. They come to you because they're passionate about your mission and they want to help.

Over the past 15 years, Americans volunteered 120 billion hours, estimated to be worth $2.8 trillion.

- Americorps

However, just as volunteers bring valuable skills with them when they donate their time to your organization, they also bring their skill deficits and that can be a liability for your organization. Volunteers may be the first contact members of the public have with your nonprofit, and you want them to represent you and your mission well.

A good training program is an excellent way to help your volunteers brush up on their skills and give the most they can to your organization and to those your mission benefits.

The Trusted Learning Solution for Socially Focused Organizations

It's clear that nonprofits need a training platform as much or more than for-profit companies. Beyond volunteers, you've got diverse groups of people to train — employees, donors, board members, and even non-donating supporters. There's no reasonable way to do this all in person. You need an online solution to systematically share the story, rally the energy for the cause, and convey important information and processes.

With SAP Litmos Training, you have a powerful, yet cost-effective solution to deliver training to every constituent group without exhausting your in-house team or busting the budget. You can create and assign courses by role, track progress, automate communications, and even create camaraderie with social learning and gamification. Your learners will feel even more committed to the important work you do as their knowledge, skills, and connections deepen through learning.
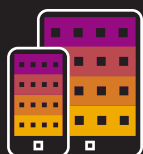
Anywhere, anytime, any device, anyone
SAP Litmos Training makes it easy for your learners to access training at a time and place that suits them, and on their preferred device – mobile, laptop, PC, or tablet. You'll see greater engagement and completion rates by delivering the training where they are and when they need it.

Easy for non-technical learners
Ease-of-use is the number one reason not-for-profit organizations choose SAP Litmos Training. It cleverly combines leading-edge functionality with an intuitive interface to make it easy for learners and administrators alike to access and manage your training content.

Off-the-shelf nonprofit-focused courses
SAP Litmos Training Content is a library of more than 1000 courses with topics such as leadership, customer service, and personal development to help you upskill learners. Instant access to courses such as GDPR and Diversity and Inclusion make it easier to uphold compliance requirements.

More revenue with minimal effort
SAP Litmos Training enables you to generate revenue for your organization through the sale of your training courses. The platform comes with an eCommerce capability included, giving you the ability to quickly create external-facing courses that can be sold online.

A centralized place to learn and commit
People have come to you to make the world a better place. Give them what they came for and share content that unites your enthusiasts. With SAP Litmos Training, you make it simple for people to dig into courses, learn the details of your cause, and discover ways to contribute further.

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www.litmos.com

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