

# The Worst Volunteer Position in America

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I have volunteered with many organizations. I've been a soccer and baseball coach, scout leader, a Lions Club president and even an EMT with my town's first aid squad. I've helped many different kinds of people, in many different kinds of situations. In these positions, the vast majority of people I helped appreciated it. I assume thousands, actually hundreds of thousands of other volunteers have had similar experiences.

But there is one group of unpaid volunteers, numbering in the millions who are not only unappreciated, but many times hated by those they help. They routinely read complicated legal documents, spend hours meeting among themselves and with their groups' members and have the pressure of knowing their decisions will have great impact. They are volunteer homeowner association (HOA) board members.

It could be argued that they are the most despised volunteers in America.

Even the most calm, polite and unassuming people can turn into mommy grizzly bears when exchanging peasantries with you at the clubhouse. She is a lovely woman. But you see her the next night at the your community's HOA board meeting, and she is ready to burn an effigy of you because you informed her that she cannot paint her house red with white polka dots.

I've never been an HOA volunteer but I'm a publisher in the HOA industry. I've heard it all. Most HOA board members are not power hungry dictators. Many took the job because no one else did. Board members have to deal with everything from landscaping to "slip and fall" lawsuits. On top of that they have the responsibility to tell their neighbors things like how high their grass or fence can be.

When I coached sports, people said, "Thanks for teaching my kid how to throw" ...People understood they were receiving help. But HOAs are different because the average resident doesn't really understand how the association board members protect their property values. They don't see that efforts are being made to collect dues from delinquent homeowners. This is money that everyone else would need to make up the difference on if uncollected. They don't understand that there are timetables that need to be organized for building money in reserves to maintain their common elements such as pools, parking lots, signage, trees and more. The beneficiaries of these volunteer efforts either take them for granted or they assume since they pay dues, they are entitled to live unaware of what goes onto maintain their properties. After all, the community was sold to them as "maintenance-free living." They don't understand that it's maintenance free because volunteers are overseeing the management of the community. The aspect of management and oversight are completely overlooked.

...Here's the main reason why being an HOA board member could be the worst volunteer job in America. When I was a soccer coach,... I had to deal with a player's dad who was insane. He never volunteered. He just showed up every now and then and would berate the team and myself from the sidelines like a crazy person. I got through it for two reasons. First, everyone knew he was nuts. And second, and perhaps most importantly, I could go home and be done with him after the game. Unfortunately for HOA board members, they need to live side-by-side with their antagonists....I didn't have to see the soccer dad every time I pulled into my driveway or walked my dog.

There's more going on at your HOA than people letting their dogs poop all over, or residents who can't park their cars within the lines. For most people the investment in their home is the most critical investment in their lives. Yet, many people spend more time investigating which model of car to purchase, compared to what they are getting into with a HOA.

This is a big mistake, because whether you are a HOA board fan, or antagonist, or something in between, that lack of knowledge can hurt. HOAs do run into major financial issues, some even go bankrupt. What is your home value going to be if your pool has algae in it? Or the clubhouse is falling apart?

My suggestion is get to know your board members outside of the "public meeting" sessions. These meetings are important to attend but many times attract the more vocal residents, whose hobby in life are to attend these meetings and "yell from the sidelines." like my soccer friend. This way you can simply ask, "how is the HOA doing" in a cordial environment, and hopefully get answers to your questions, and stay up to date on how your largest investment is doing.

Now from the other side of things, did you hear about the HOA president who put a siren and red lights on his car and appointed himself sheriff?

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