

## Don't Let The Dogs Bite You



### By Melanie Lockwood Herman

Executive Director

**Resource Type:** Risk eNews

**Topic:** General

Online training is an affordable and increasingly popular approach to training nonprofit volunteers. Providing 24-hours a day education across four U.S. time zones and around the globe is one way to accommodate volunteers who have busy lives and myriad other responsibilities. Yet even the best-conceived plans...can get waylaid.

This week I took a call from a volunteer leader who was taking an online safety course sponsored by a large nonprofit. She called back later in the day and let me know she had completed the course, and was now trying to help her husband do so. Although I didn't ask, when I hung up the second time I was reminded of the expression: "On the Internet, no one knows you're a dog." I couldn't help but wonder whether the caller had completed the course while logged in as her husband.

While it's true that safeguards, policies and protective equipment can be skirted, misinterpreted, and undermined, a few simple planning guidelines may help you increase the odds of success. Consider the following tips to prevent your risk management strategies from being compromised:

- **Explain "why."** When unveiling any new training requirement, make certain you offer a clear statement of purpose. Tell volunteers and employees who must complete the training WHY their participation is key to protecting your mission and clients.
- **Request honest participation.** Ask personnel taking online courses to verify that they are who they say they are. My daughter recently wrote an essay as part of a school application process, and before submitting her essay she was required to check a box verifying that "this is my original work."
- **Provide accessible help.** The caller with whom I spoke this week was experiencing "technical difficulty." Her frustration came over the telephone line loud and clear. After our second conversation I wondered whether her frustration with the technology might have led to her decision to complete the required course on her husband's behalf. Make "help" easy to find and remember that many people become easily frustrated with online applications.

There is no foolproof way to ensure that your strategies will come to life as you envisioned them. However, by taking time to explain "why," by requesting honest participation and by making your help desk truly accessible, you may be able to avert the risk of an important online safety or risk management requirement going to the dogs.

*Melanie Lockwood Herman is Executive Director of the Nonprofit Risk Management Center. She welcomes your ideas about any risk management topic, feedback on this article and questions about the Center's resources*

at [Melanie@nonprofitrisk.org](mailto:Melanie@nonprofitrisk.org) or 703.777.3504. The Center provides risk management tools and resources at [www.https://nonprofitrisk.org/](https://nonprofitrisk.org/) and offers [consulting assistance](#) to organizations unwilling to leave their missions to chance.