Why Consistency Matters

At Center of Hope, we want to serve people with compassion, understanding, and grace. We also recognize that every person's circumstances are different, and there are times when flexibility is both appropriate and necessary.

But flexibility works best within a healthy structure. **Our policies and procedures aren't meant to get in the way of helping people — they're part of how we help people well.**

They allow us to serve guests fairly, make good use of limited resources, protect volunteers and staff, and provide consistency from one day to the next. Some policies have also developed through years of experience serving individuals and families in our community.

> **“Let all things be done decently and in order.” — 1 Corinthians 14:40**

There Is Often More to the Story

One of the challenges of serving people is that we rarely know their entire story.

A volunteer may meet someone for the first time even though Center of Hope staff have worked with that person or family for months or years. There may have been previous conversations, accommodations, repeated exceptions, commitments, or concerns that aren't known to everyone. Because we respect confidentiality, there may also be information that shouldn't be widely shared.

This is why it's important to trust established procedures even when we don't completely understand the reason behind them.

If a rule or decision doesn't make sense, ask rather than simply changing it.

There may be a very good reason for doing something a particular way.

Even Small Exceptions Matter

Sometimes an exception can seem harmless.

For example, a guest might arrive without an appointment when there happens to be an opening. Letting that person shop may seem like the easiest and most compassionate solution.

But we may not know the history.

Perhaps that guest has repeatedly been reminded that appointments are required. Maybe several exceptions have already been made. Perhaps other guests have been told they must schedule an appointment before returning.

Making another exception might solve the immediate situation, but it can also unintentionally communicate that **the rules only apply until someone pushes hard enough to get around them.**

That isn't fair to the guests who follow the process, and ultimately it isn't helpful to the person receiving the exception.

Consistency Creates Trust

When policies change depending on who happens to be working, confusion follows quickly.

One guest is allowed to do something another guest was told they couldn't do. A volunteer explains a policy only to hear, *"But they let me do it last time."* Different teams begin operating differently, and eventually no one is quite sure what the actual procedure is.

It also creates a particularly difficult situation for staff. **Staff are put in the position of enforcing policies that another person has already undermined.** What should have been a simple explanation of a procedure can become a confrontation because we've previously communicated — intentionally or unintentionally — that the rule is negotiable.

This can also put volunteers in an uncomfortable position. Someone who is correctly following the policy can appear unreasonable simply because another person made an exception earlier.

Consistency prevents much of that confusion.

Our goal is for guests to receive essentially the same answer regardless of which day they come or who happens to be serving them. Guests should know what to expect from us, and volunteers should be confident that the procedures they've been asked to follow will be supported.

That requires all of us to work from the same policies rather than individually deciding which rules should apply in a particular situation.

Flexibility Still Has a Place

Following procedures doesn't mean we stop thinking, stop listening, or stop showing compassion.

There will absolutely be circumstances when an exception makes sense. Someone may be experiencing an unusual crisis or have a legitimate situation that doesn't fit neatly within our normal procedures.

When that happens, **bring the situation to the appropriate staff member or Director rather than making the exception independently.**

That allows someone with the necessary authority — and often more information about the situation — to make a thoughtful decision.

A simple response to a guest is perfectly appropriate:

“I understand the situation. Let me check with someone and see what we're able to do.”

That allows us to remain compassionate without creating inconsistent policies.

Structure Can Be Part of Helping

It's easy to think that helping someone always means making things easier for them. Sometimes it does.

But sometimes genuine help includes healthy expectations.

Keeping appointments, arriving when expected, communicating when plans change, respecting boundaries, following procedures, and accepting reasonable limits are important parts of life for all of us.

If we continually remove those expectations whenever someone doesn't follow them, we may unintentionally reinforce the very patterns that make stability more difficult.

Our goal isn't to punish anyone or create unnecessary barriers. **It's to provide assistance within a healthy structure that treats people with dignity while also encouraging responsibility.**

Grace and accountability aren't opposites. Often, people need both.

When You're Unsure, Ask

No volunteer is expected to know every policy, understand every situation, or have every answer.

When something unusual happens, asking for guidance is always appropriate.

Don't feel pressured to make an immediate decision simply because someone is standing in front of you waiting for an answer. Take a moment and check with the appropriate person.

There may be information you don't have. There may be an option you aren't aware of. Or the situation may genuinely warrant an exception.

> **“Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.” — Proverbs 15:22**

Compassion and Consistency Work Together

We never want rules to become more important than people.

At the same time, we don't want good intentions to create confusion, unfairness, or unhealthy patterns.

That's why we ask everyone serving at Center of Hope to **follow established policies and procedures, avoid making exceptions without appropriate approval, and ask when something doesn't seem to fit.**

Sometimes the right answer will be to make an exception.

Sometimes the right answer will be a kind but firm **no**.

And sometimes there will be another solution we hadn't considered.

The important thing is that we make those decisions thoughtfully, with the right information and the right people involved.

Consistency provides structure. Flexibility allows compassion. Used together, they help us serve people well.