

Keys to a successful Volunteer-based Ministry

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Developing and maintaining a successful volunteer-based organization takes a great deal of hard work. Keeping volunteers motivated and dedicated to serve is like pushing water uphill. As a Ministry Leader, great attention must be given to building and sustaining a volunteer-based ministry and should be treated as a high priority. This outline will give you some insights that will assist you in this endeavor:¹

I. Why Should I Serve?

As leaders we can't assume that every person has a biblically-based motivation for serving in the church. Our first step in building a healthy volunteer-based ministry is to impart the importance of possessing the heart of a servant.

A. What is a Servant?

1. A servant is one who is willingly gives up their own rights and interests, dedicates their time, resources and energy for the benefit of meeting the needs of another.
2. A servant follows Christ's example.
Matthew 28:20, "Jesus didn't come to be served, but to serve."
3. A servant aims to please God and not man.
Galatians 1:10, "Obviously, I am not trying to be a people pleaser! No, I am trying to please God. If I were still trying to please people, I would n to be Christ's servant."
4. A servant serves with pure motives.
Philippians 2:7, "He made himself nothing; He took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form..."
5. Servant Quotes.
 - a. "Servant hood is not difficult to define; it is only difficult to achieve."²
 - b. "The best way to find out whether or not you really have a servant's heart is to see what you reaction is when somebody treats you like one."³

¹ These materials taken from, *Connections Ministry Leader's Guide*, Marc Estes, (City Bible Church, Portland Oregon) ©2002

² John Maxwell quote

³ Elizabeth Elliot quote

B. Reasons Why we Should Serve

1. To Honor God.⁴
*Ephesians 6:7, "And work with a smile on your face, always keeping in mind that no matter who happens to be giving the orders, you're really serving God."*⁵
2. To Build His Church.
Romans 12:7, "If your gift is serving others, serve them well."
3. To maintain a proper perspective on life.
Luke 12:35-36, "Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him."
4. To grow spiritually.
Luke 1:74-75, "We have been rescued from our enemies, so we can serve God without fear, in holiness and righteousness forever."
5. To help people in need.
Galatians 5:13, "For you have been called to live in freedom – not freedom to satisfy your sinful nature, but freedom to serve one another in love."
6. To fulfill our destiny and purpose.
Romans 12:4, "We are all parts of His one body, and each of us have a different work to do."
7. To be obedient to God.
1 Timothy 4:14-15, "Do not neglect the spiritual gift you received...give your complete attention to these matters. Throw yourself into your tasks so that everyone will see you progress."
8. To show great expression of Christ to others in the church and outside the church.
1 John 3:18, "Dear children, let us stop just saying we love each other; let us really show it by our actions."

⁴ All scriptures are in New Living Translation unless otherwise noted.

⁵ Eugene Peterson, *The Message/Remix The Bible in Contemporary Language*, (Navpress) ©2003

II. Reasons People Volunteer

There are a variety of reasons why people volunteer. Although every reason may not be the proper reason to serve, it is beneficial to review this list and be aware of all serving motivations. This might help you as a leader to better understand the motives behind those desiring to serve in your area of ministry and assist you in directing them toward proper serving motivations. Here are a few:

- A. To learn new skills.**
- B. To feel good about themselves.**
- C. To make a contribution to their church or community.**
- D. To gain ministry experience and develop their gifts, talents and abilities.**
- E. To feel needed.**
- F. To meet people and make new friends.**
- G. To help others.**
- H. To support a cause they believe in.**
- I. They want a sense of belonging and acceptance.**
- J. To be a part of something that is significant.**
- K. They want recognition.**
- L. To please someone who has asked them to get involved.**
- M. To have fun.**
- N. To please God.**

III. Reasons People don't Volunteer

There are many reasons why people will not volunteer. In many cases their reasons are provoked by the leadership of the church, and not necessarily themselves. Here are a few to consider.

- A. No one asked them to serve.**
- B. They don't feel qualified to serve.**
- C. There isn't an area of service that interests them.**

- D. They are selfish
- E. They are apathetic.
- F. They do not have the time to serve.

IV. Reasons People Quit Volunteering

Although it is sometimes impossible to define the real reason why people choose to stop serving, there are some general factors that will definitely contribute to their choice.

- A. **Lack of Purpose** – Volunteers are not sure of the purpose of the church and whether their contributions are needed or their involvement valued.
- B. **Lack of Support** – Volunteers are left on their own, once assigned, to manage the responsibilities without adequate training, support or resources required to accomplish the tasks.
- C. **Lack of Focus** – volunteers find the job unchallenging and unfulfilling. There is no sense of achievement.
- D. **Lack of Information or Communication** – Volunteers are not kept updated on changes or new developments and therefore lose heart.
- E. **Lack of Realistic Expectations** – Volunteers are assigned too many tasks, resulting in 'burn out.' This can happen to those who demonstrate a willingness to undertake additional responsibilities.
- F. **Incompetence** – Volunteers feel ineffective, inadequate, or inefficient in handling or coping with the given tasks.
- G. **Lack of Unity** – Volunteers sense tension in their area of ministry due to relational conflicts, division, discord or ministry 'politics.'
- H. **Wrong Ministry Placement** – Although the foundation of ministry placement is to serve, there should be some effort to placing people to best match the gifts talents and abilities. Volunteers that are assigned tasks that conflict with their gifting and talents may feel frustrated and unfulfilled.

V. Ten Key Principles to Sustaining Long-term Volunteer Motivation

There are some general principles that you can apply to ensure that your ministry area is filled with people excited to serve on an ongoing basis. Here are ten areas to consider and questions to ask yourself regarding your ability to motivate volunteers in your area of ministry:

A. Build Relationships:

“Do those serving in my ministry area experience genuine community?”

In most cases, serving together should allow people to bond together. Those who have genuine relationships desire to spend time together, especially when they share common vision.

B. Have Fun:

“Do those serving in my ministry area seem to be happy? Is the environment filled with fun and laughter regularly?”

Having fun is a sure recipe for great volunteer satisfaction. Laughter and fun can be a great measuring rod to the health of your ministry area. People must realize that “Jesus is our joy and not our job.” If people seemed stressed out it might be time to re-evaluate what is taking place in your ministry area.

C. Have Defined Roles:

“Does each volunteer have a clear understanding as to what is expected of them?”

People are down on what they are not up on! One of the greatest ways to discourage a volunteer is to not have clear duties and responsibilities defined for them when they show up to serve. Volunteers want to know exactly what you expect from them. Have a defined description of every position and spend the time to discuss each point in detail.

D. Proper Tools and Equipment:

“Does each volunteer have the proper tools and training necessary to be the best at what they do?”

It is discouraging to a volunteer to be asked to accomplish a task or work on a project but not have the proper training or adequate tools necessary to complete the job. Each volunteer should be adequately trained in every area they are asked to serve BEFORE releasing them to serve. In addition, make sure to have the right tools (computer, teaching materials, finances, people, etc) to complete the job.

E. Encouragement and Appreciation

“Do I regularly encourage my volunteers publicly? Do I show them appreciation through practical and meaningful acts?”

The most important two words you can ever say to a volunteer is, “thank you.” Encouragement and appreciation are the two components needed to keep volunteers to serve long term. People want to be appreciated for their sacrifice. You may also look for ways to honor them regularly. Take them out for a meal, invite them over to your home, bring them a latte, or even present them with an award or certificate.

F. Give Ownership

“Do I allow my volunteers to be a part of shaping their area of service? Do I give them the opportunity to share creative ideas and ways to improve their ministry area?”

A common trait found in most every person is the desire to make a difference. Although many will serve simply out of the goodness of their heart, long-term there is the quest for significance. People, who feel like they own a part of a ministry, will give their life for it. Provide plenty of opportunity for your volunteers to assist you in shaping and molding their ministry areas. You never know, they just might do it better than you!

G. Emphasize The Big Picture

“Do my volunteers understand how significant their area of ministry plays in the church’s ability to fulfill its purpose and vision?”

When volunteers in the church—regardless of where they are serving—really understand how their service makes a significant contribution to the accomplishment of the church's overall mission and vision—then they tend to be motivated to serve! To say it another way, volunteers who understand the big picture and their role in seeing that picture realized - those are the motivated volunteers!

H. Communicate

“Do I regularly communicate with my volunteers regarding ministry details, directions and decisions?”

Lack of communication will always result in a lack of motivation. Be sure to communicate clearly and regularly with volunteers regarding all aspects of your ministry area.

I. Care

“Do I know enough about my volunteers to effectively care for any needs that may arise in their life?”

It has been said, “people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” One of the primary responsibilities of a Ministry Leader is to shepherd those entrusted into your care. We can never be too busy to get involved in the lives of those who have dedicated themselves to serve our ministry areas and us. Be sure and take the pulse of each of your volunteers in every area of their life.

J. Pray

“Do I pray regularly for each volunteer by name?” “Do I pray regularly for each volunteer needed?”

The most powerful tool you have to build and motivate your ministry team is prayer. Prayer moves the heart of God to move the hearts of men. More prayer for your volunteer team will always result in happier, healthier people.

VI. Leadership Conflicts that Destroy a Volunteer-Based Ministry

There are certain principles, that when violated will cause a lack of motivation in your volunteers. If not corrected quickly, it will result in a lack of respect for your leadership. Please read through these leadership conflicts and avoid them at all costs.⁶

- A. When there is inconsistency in practicing clearly established biblical principles.
- B. When the leadership violates moral and ethical standards taught to the people.
- C. When the leadership presumptuously declares a vision or direction from the Lord and then abruptly abandons or changes from that direction.
- D. When the leadership avoids, procrastinates, or ignores the necessity of confronting and handling the problem of those who are sowing seeds on contention.
- E. When the leadership causes great confusion by choosing unqualified leaders to serve the people, thereby violating clearly enunciated standards and wisdom.
- F. When the leadership carelessly handles an explosive situation without considering the ramifications or makes a hasty decision without prayer.
- G. When the leadership does not consistently practice principles of forgiveness taught in Matthew 18 and this allows offenses to grow in the church and in the leaders.
- H. When the leadership acts independently violates the spirit of team ministry.

⁶ Frank Damazio, Lay Pastors Manual, City Bible Publishing, pp. 69