

10 Keys to Recruiting and Keeping Volunteers!

All communities (churches, schools and organizations) need a growing volunteer base for a variety of reasons. Research shows that once a community reaches about 200 volunteers, it has all it needs to function, no matter the size of the larger community. After it reaches this number of volunteers it finds it difficult to seek out new volunteers. This, of course, can spell trouble for medium-sized and larger communities. There is little real need to increase the volunteer base, though leaders in fact say that is what they want!

In addition to this, today's volunteers are not like the volunteers of the past. They are not usually as loyal or connected to your organization. They have many volunteer opportunities. They are looking for more meaningful volunteer opportunities and ministries.

So what are the secrets to recruiting and keeping today's volunteers?

1. Have a mission and vision – Organizations today must be clear about what they do (mission) and what their goals are for the future (vision). The more significant and important your mission and the bolder your goals for the future, the more attractive volunteering in your organization will be.

2. Have a job description for each position – Decide on the most important gifts necessary for that position and make sure your volunteers have those qualities! Do not get tied up in knots about a formal job description, but be clear about your list of criteria.

3. Limit time requirements – Your volunteers' time is precious. They don't want to be drawn into open-ended time commitments. Be specific about the tasks involved and the time needed. A church board or council may involve preparatory reading, eight two-hour meetings during the year, a retreat/planning weekend... Create volunteer positions for limited time periods: three months, six months, one year, or two years.

4. Invite them in person – This is very important. Jesus called people in person. To be effective in recruiting volunteers you want to: 1) brainstorm for names with staff, leaders, or connected people in the community, 2) weed out problematic personalities, 3) make a list of your best prospects, 4) set aside time to call them to explain the mission, position, tasks required, time required, and who else will be invited, and 5) invite them to participate! Give them a week to think about it, and then - call them back. The personal invitation lets them know they are important. Always have a second request. If they can't teach weekly Sunday school, can they substitute once a month?

5. Train them well – Schedule an orientation and training as they begin their service. Some positions require more orientation than others.

6. Give them support – Organizations and volunteers need encouragement/affirmation, a budget, resources, places to meet... Be generous in providing your new group the things they need to get off to a good start. As they progress in their service, offer them opportunities for updating and growth.

7. Monitor their performance – Informally or formally you should be monitoring volunteers to make sure they are happy, fitting in, working together harmoniously, providing a high level of service, and representing your organization well. It is better to screen out problematic personalities at the beginning than to have to disinvite them later on.

8. Foster community – Foster a sense of fellowship and community in the organization and amongst your volunteers. This could include such things as coffee and rolls before, during or after meetings; yearly appreciations or dinners; or occasional outings.

9. Show appreciation – Signs of appreciation can take many forms: stopping in to thank them when they are working, thank you notes, acknowledgements in newsletters or announcements, recognition awards, Christmas gifts, birthday cards, birthday certificates for organizational leaders, Christmas or Easter parties, or summer BBQs. Create an appreciation calendar for all your volunteers and groups, and then implement it! These tokens of appreciation need not be expensive but they should be heartfelt.

10. Always be replenishing your volunteer list – Always be seeking names of new volunteers from staff, connected leaders and current volunteers. Seek to add 10-25% of your group's members in new members each year. In this way your organization will be continually revitalized.

If you have found the 10 Keys to Recruiting and Keeping Volunteers! helpful, then contact us today at VisionWorks - 888.948.1113 or info@visionworksc.com.