

NEED H VOLUNTEERS

Often during the busiest times, we wish that there were a few more hands around to help with some of the tasks or chores that need done. Volunteers might be the answer to your needs. However, efficient and effective volunteers do not just fall from the sky. It takes planning and management to have volunteers that do not consume all of your time, and who stay consistent with your goals and mission.

First you must understand why people volunteer. Some want to help build a better community; others want to give something back to their community. Recognition is what drives some; others want to have the feeling that they have personally achieved a task, or have perhaps brought about social change. Yet others volunteer just because someone asked them to, or to help out a friend, or show support for a given cause. In the end it doesn't matter if they meet the goals that they have for themselves and the organization.

On the other side, volunteer complaints include: not being called back, not being available at the needed time, not being given anything to do when they show up, feeling "in the way," being forced to fund-raise only, never being thanked, and not receiving enough guidance.

You need to manage your volunteers so that they don't have these thoughts.

Designing a work plan for volunteers' needs to be done carefully and with some forethought. Simply allowing people to do as they please will not only frustrate you to the "doing it yourself would be easier" mentality, but also people will begin to shy away from helping productively.

There are countless places and organizations for people to volunteer their time. You want to make each volunteer experience as positive as possible, so people will return time after time to lend a hand. To help make your volunteers' experiences a success, give them clear, concise and meaningful work. Explain your expectations and provide them with the proper training and tools to do the job. Have a training day to show volunteers what you want and how you want it done. Do not give them work that you would not do yourself. Be organized and prepared. Nothing will kill the passion of a volunteer faster than if they arrive and find staff ill prepared for the event. This is a bit like having a friend ask you to help them move, and when you show up to help, you end up packing boxes before you can load them in the truck.

Have job descriptions and always have a to-do list for volunteers. Job descriptions help you and the volunteer better understand what you want them to do. Having a to-do list will help you answer quickly that unexpected call asking "Is there something I can do to help?" You always want to have a task for this volunteer, saying "no" will only delay the question in the future.

Give volunteers meaningful work that can be accomplished in the time that they have. Do not give them more than they can handle. Know your volunteers and their abilities. If they have one hour a week to volunteer, do not give them 10 hours of work and expect them to complete it. Allow them to complete a job and then express your appreciation for the work they completed.

Communicate with your volunteers. Do not limit communications to only what needs to be done and always say "thanks." Always be timely and return calls or e-mails.

Another great way to recognize volunteers is by feeding them. During a workday serve lunch, or have a recognition dinner for them at the end of the year or season. Communication needs to be a two-way street. Volunteers should feel free to talk to

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BY JEFF FOWLER

MIGHT BE THE KEY

you about what they think needs done as well. Consider forming a volunteer council and giving them an avenue to not only communicate with you, but with each other.

Do not let it be said that a volunteer is forever and can not be "fired." If you have outlined a job description and the mission of your organization and tried to work with a person who continues to work independently of you and others, it is your responsibility to ask them to find another organization to volunteer for. Remember you should make it a privilege to volunteer for your organization not a right.

Volunteers can be used not only to do many of the tasks that you cannot get done, but also to assist with many of the everyday tasks that need completed. For example, teach your coaches and managers to drag the infield the proper way and

tarp homeplate and the pitcher's mound every night after practice or a game. Show volunteers the correct method to repair clay in batters boxes and mounds so that they can help maintain those areas regularly.

If you follow these basic steps when working with volunteers, you will not only accomplish more work but, you will have people taking personal pride in your facility and helping in ways that you never thought possible. If people see that they will be a valuable addition and feel like their time and talents are appreciated, volunteers will become a priceless commodity around your facility.

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