

## Motivation and Recognition

Your best efforts to identify, recruit, interview and train volunteers can quickly go to waste if you cannot retain those volunteers. Volunteer retention relies on keeping your volunteers motivated, inspired and feeling appreciated.

To effectively motivate and express recognition, it is important to understand why people are volunteering for your ministry or organization. Sometimes a simple ‘thank you’ is sufficient, but effective volunteer management also involves letting the volunteer know how their contribution is serving the broader goals of the organization, and that their contribution is appreciated and of value.

In very simple terms, most people volunteer because they want to make a difference. As a coordinator or supervisor of volunteers, your role goes beyond simply finding, training and managing volunteers. You must also keep them inspired by reminding them that they ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE and that their volunteer service is genuinely APPRECIATED.

### MOTIVATION

Motivation is achieved when volunteers understand the purpose of the work they are doing; how that work fits into the mission of the organization, and how it benefits those whom your ministry or organization exists to serve. Sustained motivation also requires providing volunteers with work that is challenging, rewarding, dignified and respected.

Keep in mind that as volunteers gain experience and a better understanding of the way your organization operates, they may be looking for greater challenges or responsibilities in order to stay motivated and continue to feel that their contribution has value. Remember, volunteers are constantly DONATING to your organization – they are donating their TIME.

Many organizations never ask a person why they are volunteering, and what they hope to gain from the experience. That is a huge missed opportunity, since your organization is overlooking a tremendous chance to learn and grow in the way it fulfills its mission through the effective use of volunteers. In addition, volunteers may feel less appreciated, turn over more quickly, with the potential for your organization to either be short of volunteers or needing to start the whole volunteer engagement cycle (recruit, screen, train, supervise) all over again.

It is not difficult to motivate people to do something they feel passionate about. The challenge facing your organization, and particularly you as a manager of volunteers, is to identify what that passion is and to assist, equip and inspire your volunteers to fulfill their desire. That challenge may seem daunting, but through regular interaction and building deeper relationships with your team of volunteers, it will create an experience that is not only more rewarding and enjoyable for them, but also for you as their supervisor, and for meeting the needs and goals of your organization or ministry.

## **RECOGNITION**

Recognition needs to be given regularly and frequently, but it also needs to be warranted and genuine. Constant recognition for trivial achievements will come across as insincere and patronizing, and will undermine the impact of true recognition. Recognition that is too infrequent or overly formalized, such as waiting for an annual banquet but offering nothing in between, is insufficient and could make volunteers feel unappreciated and result in a higher rate of turnover.

Recognition is important to your organization and its volunteers because it contributes to positive morale in the workplace, productivity and volunteer retention. While recognition is important for demonstrating to volunteers that they and the work they perform is appreciated, it is vital to remember that principles covered in previous articles in this Volunteer Engagement Series also contribute to the motivation and recognition of your volunteers.

Motivation and recognition can only be built upon a foundation of effective recruitment, ongoing training, good lines of communication between the volunteer and their immediate supervisor, and periodic evaluation of their performance. Volunteers also know their contribution is appreciated and needed when you ensure that there are tasks waiting for them upon their arrival, as well as tools and resources to accomplish their task. This not only shows you have thoughtfully prepared for them, but also that the work they do is important, and that you respect and honour your volunteers for contributing their time.

Many organizations have an annual 'volunteer appreciation banquet' or special function, and while these formal events are appreciated by volunteers and can be an effective way to enhance connections between volunteers and other staff members, beware of some common pitfalls and take steps to avoid them. For example, if volunteers and paid staff do not interact (i.e., by design or choice they sit separate from one another) it can create an impression of volunteers being 'outsiders'. On the other hand, volunteers may perceive lavish banquets as an extravagant use of the organization's financial resources and staff may think it negates or replaces the need for expressing regular appreciation for the tasks done by volunteers.

Through regular interaction with your volunteers and by understanding what motivates them, your organization or ministry will be able to recognize and respond in an effective and thoughtful way. Your volunteers will have a more positive and rewarding experience, and the objectives of your organization or ministry will be more effectively served.

## QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES:

- Based upon your experience, what are some reasons why volunteers choose to serve your organization or ministry? Try to define what it is that motivates them.
- Aside from verbally expressing thanks, or an occasional card or small gift, what are some other ways your organization or ministry can show gratitude for the service provided by volunteers?
- Consider creative ways that your organization or ministry can maintain volunteer involvement, and make those volunteers feel motivated and appreciated.
- How would you recognize and then deal with situations where the needs of the volunteer are being met but not the needs of the organization, or situations where the organizations needs are being met but not those of the volunteer?
- Think about a time when you were recognized, either as a volunteer or in some other role. How was that recognition given, and how did it make you feel? Based on that experience, are there specific ways your organization can enhance the way it recognizes the contribution made by volunteers?

ServiceLink is proud to offer the following *Volunteer Engagement* workshops:

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3. Screening and Interviewing Volunteer Applicants
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5. Supervision and Evaluation
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7. Motivation and Recognition

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