

6 Ways to Become a Volunteer Magnet - and get your volunteers to stick around!

1. Watch your language

A healthy environment for volunteers is saturated with verbal honor--regular, specific praise for what they're doing. In his book *The Top Ten Mistakes Leaders Make*, Hans Finzel says, "Organizational researchers have been telling us for years that affirmation motivates people much more than financial incentives, but we still don't get it."

2. Listen more intensely

Author Stephen Covey borrowed this from St. Francis of Assisi: "Seek first to understand, then to be understood." Next to physical survival, says Covey, "the greatest need of a human being is psychological survival--to be understood, to be affirmed, to be validated, to be appreciated." He adds that when you listen carefully to another person, you give that person "psychological air." Once you've met that need, the door is open for you to influence and problem-solve.

3. Lead from the big picture

Your job isn't to serve your volunteers--it's to serve God! In the soon-to-be-classic book *On Being a Servant of God*, author Warren Wiersbe says, "Ministry isn't easy, but you make it more difficult for yourself if you serve people instead of the Lord Jesus Christ. You can't please everybody, so don't even try". What great advice! And when you practice it, you'll draw your volunteers away from trivial concerns and into a much bigger mission.

4. Love by your actions

Communicate love to your volunteers by respecting their time. How often have we asked people to show up early only to have them sit around? Been wishing for 10 new hands-on volunteers? 20? If you answered yes, what would these leaders do? Unless you can assign specific responsibilities with meaning and purpose, they'll quickly lose interest, be ineffective, and drop out.

5. Laugh a lot...with your team

Create a tradition of getting together with volunteers for fun nights. Put names of restaurants into a hat, then pick one for appetizers, one for dinner, and one for dessert--or just pick one course if you're on a budget. These nights are sure to be highlights for your team, as long as you follow one rule: no shop talk! It may be challenging at first, but keep each other accountable. Focus on having fun and getting to know each other personally. And don't forget to laugh. It sends a strong, personal message like nothing else.

6. Let go of some of your real responsibilities

Nothing frustrates volunteers more than shoddy delegation or excessive supervision. When you delegate, give specific guidelines and expectations. But don't equate "specific" with claustrophobic oversight. Show confidence in their ability and character; step back, and let them do it.