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## How to Serve the Volunteer Teams You Lead

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How to Serve the Volunteer Teams You Lead Jacob Fleming Thu, 03/28/2024 - 00:05 Nothing compares to the privilege of serving in the house of the Lord! My heart echoes David's: "For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness" (Psalm 84:10). Along with that privilege comes responsibility; and when that responsibility includes leading others, it is imperative that we have a plan. My pastor, mentor, and friend, Dr. Paul Chappell, says, "Churches struggle when they establish goals without a strategy and ministry without structure." Unfortunately, many times our volunteer teams never reach their full potential because of a lack of structure. Following are five simple principles that can help you serve the volunteer team you lead and establish a culture that promotes the forward momentum of God's work.

**Strategically Recruit?** To lead a volunteer team, we must first have willing and able volunteers. Some volunteers will do just that—volunteer. Others, we need to recruit. And then, we must have the wisdom to place each volunteer where they will have the most impact on a weekly basis. As leaders, we should have a personal goal to set each volunteer up for success. One of the most helpful ways to know where specific volunteers will be successful is to learn what their spiritual and natural gifts are and then involve them in areas where their gifts will be put to the best use. In addition to gifting, different areas of ministry require different levels of oversight and discernment. For instance, stocking guest tables or preparing refreshments for an event wouldn't involve the extensive background checks verifying childcare workers would require. The fact is, God has created every person precious and unique, fitted to serve Him. As ministry leaders, we want to help our volunteer teams reach their potential by serving in their naturally gifted areas. Generally speaking, it is much easier to take a little time and effort to discern the right position for a volunteer than it is to make an adjustment when someone is already actively serving in the position that you have (mistakenly) placed them in. Think, for example, of a church member volunteering for "whatever you need me to do." At the moment, you happen to need door greeters for the first impressions team. This volunteer, however, has an introverted personality. Should you place this volunteer in the door greeter position? Most likely, that wouldn't be the best fit. But this volunteer could shine in many other areas. Perhaps they could still be on the first impressions team, but doing the work of stocking supplies, treats, etc. On the other hand, there may be more extroverted people who would be happier to greet, knowing that the more tedious work of stocking supplies is cared for.

**Equip with Resources?** As ministry leaders, we are to equip "the saints for the work of the ministry" (Ephesians 4:12). One of the greatest ways you can encourage your volunteer team to reach their potential is to equip them with the training and resources they need to excel in that specific ministry. Here are four areas in which you can equip your volunteers:

- Job descriptions:** Write out a purpose statement for each ministry with key responsibilities for each volunteer position. (The book *Order in the Church* by Paul Chappell has some helpful sample descriptions.) If you have not provided clear communication to a volunteer, don't get frustrated when they don't serve exactly how you desire.
- Clear expectations:** Volunteers want to be told what is expected. A great way to frustrate your volunteer team is to leave your expectations open-ended or fuzzy.
- Contact information:** If a volunteer has questions or an emergency on the day that they are serving, who do they call? Give them your phone number and the phone numbers of any other people they should turn to for help.
- Periodic training:** Strategically schedule ministry meetings throughout the year during which you can provide further training. For instance, you may train your first impressions team three weeks before Easter so everyone has a fresh reminder of the ways to serve first-time guests.

**Reward Regularly?** It is impossible to encourage the wrong person. Volunteers sacrifice time and often finances to actively participate in serving our Lord. It's a good thing to recognize their sacrifice and encourage them to keep up the great work. Regular recognition can put wind in the sails of your team members. Here are some suggestions:

- Yearly:** Recognize a ministry team in a Sunday night service.
- Quarterly:** Write a thank you note with a candy bar.
- Monthly:** Have a bite-size treat, waiting at their serving station.

**Weekly:** Verbalize your gratitude with a heart-felt "thank you."

**Value the Team's Response?** Your volunteer has strategically been placed, equipped with resources and training, and is feeling encouraged by serving. By now, there's a great chance that they have gleaned knowledge in their ministry and have ideas that can make their specific ministry even better. To be effective leaders, we must take the time to listen to their input. It's easy to receive compliments. But leaders are willing to receive complaints too. Make sure the compliments don't go to your head, and make sure to handle the complaints prayerfully and responsively.

**Empower Responsibly?** The purpose of delegation is not for you to do less, but for you to get more done effectively. The leader should always be watching for a volunteer team member that potentially could step up and help co-lead a part of the ministry. Be willing to share the ministry and allow well-trained volunteers to be empowered to help make decisions. The person who builds by himself won't accomplish nearly as much as if he had a team of leaders helping him build. Can you imagine Nehemiah building the walls by himself? He would have ended up in the place many of us have found, or nearly found, ourselves: blown up, burned out, or quitting in discouragement. Build your volunteer team, and build with your volunteer team. It is my prayer that these five principles will encourage you as you serve your volunteer teams.

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