

1. Keys to Effectively Leading Volunteers

“To lead people, walk beside them... As for the best leaders, the people do not notice their existence. The next best, the people honor and praise. The next, the people fear; and the next, the people hate ...When the best leader’s work is done the people say, ‘We did it ourselves!’” Lao-Tsu

So what are the keys to leading volunteers successfully? Take a look at these:

Key #1 – Lead by serving. The Bible reminds us in Matthew 23 that effective leadership is found in serving others. Great leadership is not measured by how many people are serving you, but instead by how many people you are serving.

Key #2 – Lead by relationship. People do not follow a title. They follow someone they love and respect. This does not happen overnight, but as you take time to build relationships with people.

Key #3 – Lead by following. To be an effective leader, you must first be an effectively follower. This means following the vision and direction of the Pastor and church you serve. This means not becoming a ministry silo, but instead coordinating with the other ministries in your church.

Key #4 – Lead by encouraging. 65% of workers say they have received no recognition or appreciation in the past 12 months. Be an intentional encourager. Walk around and personally thank your volunteers each week for serving. Keep a stack of note cards by your desk and discipline yourself to write thank you notes regularly.

Key #5 – Lead by learning. Effective leaders are always in school. They listen to their volunteers. They ask their volunteers for input and feedback.

Key #6 – Lead by equipping. An effective leader is an equipper. They realize their priority is to equip volunteers for the work of the ministry and they are constantly helping others reach their potential. They pour into others instead of trying to do everything themselves. They can step back into the shadows and everything will run smoothly without them.

Key #7 – Lead by praying. Nothing of eternal value is ever accomplished without prayer. Let your public leadership be a reflection of the private time you spend in prayer.

Key #8 – Lead by growing spiritually. You cannot take people where you have not been. An effective leader has a growing relationship with Jesus. This includes spending time in God’s Word on a daily basis. Each week you should have a fresh truth from God’s Word to share with your volunteers.

Key #9 – Lead by having character. Character means keeping your word and delivering on what you promise. It means having integrity and honesty. It means being trustworthy and reliable.

Key #10 – Lead by putting others in the spotlight. They would rather see their volunteers shine than themselves. They are quick to give others the credit for the victory and quick to take the blame for failure.

Key #11 – Lead by humility. The Bible reminds us again in Matthew 23 that an effective leader is someone who is humble. If you think you’re a great leader...then you’re not. Pride will drive away volunteers, while humility will attract them. I don’t know about you, but I have a lot of work to do in all of these areas. Let’s strive to become more effective leaders for Christ.

Key#12 - Lead from vision. The biggest thing you can do to build leaders on your team is to give them the vision. Scripture says that where there is no vision the people perish . . . that means where there IS vision the people will flourish.

2. Influencing Your Volunteers

You've heard the statement...leadership is influence. It's true and that means if you want to become a better leader for your volunteers, you've got to increase your influence with them. Here's 7 keys to raising your level of influence with your volunteers.

1. Talk less and listen more. That might sound counterproductive...after all... don't influencers have all the answers? Actually no. Great influencers are great listeners. They ask great questions and find great answers. If you really want to influence volunteers, then listen...really listen to them. When volunteers know you value their ideas and input, you will gain influence with them.

2. Praise often and criticise rarely. You won't gain influence with your volunteers if you are constantly criticizing them. People don't follow criticism. They follow encouragement and positive feedback.

3. Be a giver instead of a taker. The motive behind godly influence is not selfish gain. It's to help others. Generosity leads to influence.

4. Be positive instead of negative. Negative people can be influencers...but they influence volunteers in the wrong direction. If you want to influence volunteers in the right direction, then be a positive person.

5. Be quick to take blame and slow to take credit. This is another one that might sound counterproductive...but it's not. When you admit your mistakes instead of hiding them or shifting the blame, you will gain the respect of your volunteers...and respect leads to influence. And when you empower your volunteers and give them the credit for wins, you also gain influence. Empowerment leads to influence.

6. Keep your word. Integrity leads to influence. Follow through when you tell your volunteers you are going to do something. They notice.

7. Care...really care about your volunteers. When your volunteers know you really care about them, it opens their hearts to your influence.

8. Don't micromanage . . . ever . . . just don't. Micromanaging is never good. Leaders that micromanage lead from a place of weakness and insecurity. Let your volunteers soar. It is okay if your fingerprint isn't on it. When your volunteers are encouraged and equipped to lead you will have opportunities to grow your ministry way farther than ever before. Take the plunge! Develop those volunteers!

3. Six 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.

4. What About Debriefing?

So you just finished up with a big event or program. Maybe it was summer camp, volunteer training, family service, or fall festival. Just as you breathe a sigh of relief...bam...another event or calendar item is already staring you down. But hang on...before you jump into the next big thing...it's important to slow down and look in the rear view mirror. Taking time to debrief is one of the best things you can do after an event is over. Here's some keys to effective debriefing:

Debrief within one week after the event is over. You want to debrief while your thoughts and memory are fresh.

Get the right people in the room. The debrief team should be made up of people who are able to identify issues and come up with solutions, actions and outcomes.

Keep the debrief as "brief" as possible. Limit the meeting to one hour or less. If it goes longer than that, people will not want to do another one.

Don't let it get personal. If the event was not successful, it's not about finding out whose fault it was. Make it clear up front that the purpose of the meeting is not to attack or place blame on others.

Make it a level playing field. Everyone is on equal ground. Don't allow one person to dominate the conversation because of seniority or expertise.

Pass out post-it notes. Have everyone write down issues they saw and ways to improve. Gather the post-it notes and put them in categories such as volunteers, technical, advertising, communication, planning, etc. Work through the notes as a team.

Discuss questions such as... "How did the event feel?" "What was it like for them?" "What did they notice, experience, or hear?" "Did we achieve our goals?" "If we fell short, why?" "What could we have done better?" "What issues came up that we didn't expect?" "What did we learn about ourselves as a team through this event?"

Capture it. Make sure someone records or writes down all the feedback. Then have them put it in a document that can be distributed to everyone after the debrief is over.

Make a list of ways you can improve. If you do the event again, you can refer back to the list. The goal is continual improvement.

Create action steps. Issues that are identified should have actions steps associated with them. Assign the action steps to team members.

End the debrief on a positive note. Focus on wins not just fails. If you focus solely on mistakes, it can become de-motivational. Take time to encourage and praise.

5. How an Inspiring Vision Attracts Volunteers

I was speaking at a conference once about vision and volunteerism, when about 10 minutes into the workshop, one of the attendees got up and walked out. I've been a conference attendee. I know that sometimes workshops aren't what you think they are going to be, so you politely duck out and find another one. Not a big deal, and honestly, I didn't give it too much thought until about 20 minutes later, he walked back into the room.

At the end of the class, I spoke with him and he said, "Sorry if I was a distraction, coming and going. I just didn't see what having a vision statement had to do with volunteerism. But I decided to come back and see what else you had to say."

I asked them how volunteerism was at his church and he said something very telling. He said, "It's terrible. We can't get people to help and when we do convince them to step up, they don't stay very long. We just can't understand why people won't commit."

And THAT is the exact point about what vision has to do with volunteerism. People volunteer because they want to make a difference in the world.

It is that simple. If they don't know what you are doing, where you are going, and what the overall goal is, they aren't going to stay.

Proverbs 29:18 says, *"Where there is no vision, the people perish."*

The Message Version puts it this way, "If people can't see what God is doing, they stumble all over themselves; but when they attend to what He reveals, [the vision] they are most blessed."

As church leaders, it is your primary responsibility to cast the vision. And it is critically important that you help every member of your volunteer team stay connected to that vision. If your church has trouble gaining and retaining volunteers, you might not have a volunteer problem. You might have a vision problem.

So what is needed?

1. Cast the vision for your ministry and your church. Do this in multiple ways and often.
2. Clarify the vision. Does everyone understand what you are aiming for and why? Talk and review. Talk and review.
3. Capture the vision. Can you state it and repeat it? Do you know what a win looks like?
4. Drip the vision. There is an old saying that vision leaks, so make sure you are constantly talking it up and reminding the team. Drip the vision over as many people as possible. And make sure your team are doing the same. Passionate people with a strong vision will attract other people to the team.

6. Valuing Volunteers

When we show appreciation to volunteers, we show how much we value them. So, how can you show them just how much they mean to you? Shout them dinner at a restaurant? Give them a trip to Queenstown? Maybe a gold watch with their name engraved on it? They're certainly worth that and more, but I doubt your budget would stretch to any of these. So, if your budget is on the more modest side here are a few simple, but big impact ways you can show your volunteers how much you value them.

1. **Host a Volunteer Appreciation Evening/Lunch** – put on a free meal, coffee and dessert or lunch. Include some entertainment and speak about how they are valued.
2. **Hand out Goodie Bags at team meetings** – maybe on a random basis so that they never know when it will be their turn (might help with attendance!).
3. **Give vouchers** for movies, a coffee, free babysitting etc. To help pay for this look for people or organisations who might be prepared to donate to a worthy cause.
4. **Have a 'service spotlight'** time within the church service or your CM programme – develop a culture of recognising and rewarding a leader or two on regular occasions.
5. **Pop a small gift in their letterbox** with a hand written note.
6. **Know what your leaders like** or what their hobbies are and find ways to gift personal things that show you care about them.
7. **Shine a light** - In an email or newsletter, include a photo and description of a volunteer, what they do etc. and a quote from that person.
8. **Have a volunteer 'raffle'** – once every couple of months at a church event or service, pull a volunteer name out of the 'hat'. The winner receives a small gift or block of chocolate.
9. **Feature a story about a volunteer** on the church website or FB page.
10. **Write them a handwritten thank you note.** In the day of digital communication, a handwritten note can mean so much more. You could ask the Senior Pastor to write one as well!
11. **Wish them Happy Birthday on their Facebook page.** Write a note with it and share how much you appreciate them as a person.