

## How to recruit volunteers effectively

### Compiled by Bob Young (various sources)

If you've been around a while, you have heard of the 80-20 rule. The rule states that 80% of the outcome can be attributed to 20% of the causes. For churches, this is often communicated in the idea that 80% of the church's contribution comes from 20% of the givers, or that 80% of the work is done by 20% of the volunteers. Regardless of whether the 80-20 ratio is absolutely accurate, most churches need to increase the percentage of members who volunteer.

You say you have already tried? Then you to rethink volunteers and volunteering—you need something new and different.

Here's a quick guide to recruiting more volunteers to help your church grow. **Preparation is essential in recruiting volunteers.** There are so many facets to church ministry that it often seems easier to recruit volunteers by issuing a blanket challenge to the church. That seldom works, and may in fact work against future volunteer development in the church. One reason a church needs to pay close attention to the volunteer process is that **sloppy volunteer recruitment can be damaging.** Many churches overburden a handful of people they know they can rely on. Other times, they grab someone randomly and put them in a role they are not prepared for—something that effectively inoculates members against ever wanting to volunteer again. To recruit volunteers effectively, preparation is key.

Here are nine ideas to help recruit volunteers. The first six are general guidelines for putting a volunteer system in place. The final three are more specific regarding how to recruit the volunteers that are needed in the local church.

#### **1. Know what volunteers are needed, coordinate the work of the ministries, ask if the expectations are real and practical.**

Every ministry must have goals for growth. Those goals should include and define volunteer positions. In fact, one of the goals of every ministry leader should be finding ways to include more people. When someone wants to get involved in a particular area, the leader should already have an idea of possible tasks.

#### **2. Analyze the available volunteer positions.**

Look at all potential volunteer positions and analyze them according to the required:

- Skills
- Strengths
- Spiritual maturity

This will help determine who to talk to when a volunteer is needed, and will help to place the people who want to get involved. For example, a different level of spiritual maturity would be required for leading worship or teaching a class than for greeting. Some churches waste their spiritual talent by assigning spiritually capable people to mundane tasks—I am amazed when I see a deacon assigned to counting attendance or an elder assigned to accounting. A spiritually mature person with leadership skills could serve as a small-group leader. The same person with less developed leadership skills could be a great mentor.

#### **3. Develop a volunteer recruitment system.**

Your church needs a system that helps find the people needed and carefully assigns those who want to get involved. The members should be aware of the system. Awareness of the system should be a part of new member orientation. These questions provide examples:

- Where is there a list of all the volunteer positions available? [When the previous step is completed, there should be a list of the volunteer positions with notations about requirements.]
- If someone wants to volunteer, what should that person do? [What is the process for getting people involved? Who is the first contact? If two church members are having coffee and one mentions the desire to be more involved, the other should know exactly what to do.]

- How will you help people discover their strengths? [Why not use some of the spiritual-gift inventories and strength-finding assessments that are available? Perhaps you can work them into your membership classes. When an opportunity comes up, you have a better idea of who will be a perfect fit.]
- How are the members shepherded? [The church leadership should know, for each member of the church, what the member would like to do and what kind of training is needed. The Bible clearly teaches that an important role of evangelists, elders, and teachers is to train member for ministry and to facilitate the ministry and involvement of the members.]
- What steps are taken to identify members who are uninvolved? [If church leaders are responsible for the involvement of every member, how are members personally taught about God's plan for the ministry of members of the body of Christ?]

#### **4. Provide volunteer training.**

Many churches use some tool to determine what activities the members are willing to do. In that way, there are always lists of willing workers. Many of those sign-up mechanisms fail to ask if members would be willing to work if appropriate training were available. In my own ministry experience, I was always amazed by the number of members who checked the box that said: "I am willing to do this if training is available."

#### **5. Define the volunteer's commitment.**

This is an area where many churches struggle. When handled poorly, the church can quickly burn through the available volunteers and insure that members are hesitant to volunteer again. Whether members take the initiative by volunteering or they are recruited, knowing the expectations is essential. One area in which many churches struggle is in having a sufficient number of teachers in the education department. When my wife was helping with the children's education program, she handpicked the teachers for all of the classes and put them in a rotation that guaranteed they would teach one quarter per year (unless they wanted to teach more). From time to time, the rotation had to be adjusted due to new volunteers or those who moved away, but the program functioned for several years without encountering any volunteer problems.

It is essential to tell volunteers what is expected of them, how long they will serve, and what will be the measurements of success (that is, what is the goal). Lack of clarity in these areas sets the church and the volunteers up for failure.

#### **6. Make a big deal of volunteers**

Churches should take advantage of every opportunity to publicly celebrate volunteers. Teachers should be honored, volunteered should be applauded publicly. Volunteers that feel appreciated and loved will go above and beyond the call of duty. The message to the congregation should be, "We appreciate the sacrifices of our volunteers." Appreciation must be publicly demonstrated with announcements, dinners, and awards. Appreciation events should be scheduled regularly.

Once the volunteer system is in place, the work with getting volunteers involved begins. Many churches do not know **how to ask for volunteer involvement**. Here are three important guidelines.

#### **7. Start recruiting volunteers early**

Even before asking for specific involvement, make clear that church expects the involvement of every member. Focus on "every member ministry." Even in the membership class, the importance of volunteering should be communicated with examples of potential opportunities to get involved.

In recruiting for specific tasks, do not wait until the need has become a crisis. Too often one hears: "We need a teacher for the 3-4-year-old class next Sunday!" Schedule volunteers early, anticipate needs and seek to fill the roles timely. The church that constantly announces emergency needs for volunteers inadvertently communicates that the work of the Lord is not important enough to give it timely attention.

## **8. Recruit specific individuals—learn the art of shoulder-tapping**

In point #2 above, the importance of discovering members' strengths was mentioned. When church leaders know what people enjoy, what they are capable of doing and equipped to do, and what kind of tasks will contribute to their spiritual growth, it is easy to make the connection between a volunteer opportunity and a specific person. It is almost always easier to fill a position by asking someone personally than by announcing a need. When training is provided (see point #4 above), a list of those ready, willing, and able is often available. Do not quit asking someone to help simply because they have said "no" a couple of times. Trust God, communicate your trust and confidence in them, and keep giving them opportunities to be involved.

## **9. Use your social media effectively and sparingly for volunteer opportunities**

Social media may include a church bulletin, website, and other social media postings; even announcements are a kind of social media. Providing a list of positions available is a great way to help those who are looking for ways to get involved. "Volunteer job opportunities" can also be an outreach tool to touch people who are looking for a church and a place to serve.

Social media should be used, but sparingly. Few are enamored with hearing or reading the same announcements of an unfulfilled need day after day or week after week.

## **Effectively recruiting volunteers will help your church grow!**

Increasing the involvement level of the members is one of the most important things a church can do. Churches that genuinely growing (not just swelling) cultivate a spirit of volunteering. People are thrilled to donate time, talents, and resources to help others mature—if they are doing things within their desires, skill level and training level. Your church will grow if you will put more energy into developing a strong volunteer process that helps people become involved according to their gifts.