

The Changing Face of Volunteerism

By Molly Laychak Whalen



Why is the face of volunteering changing in today's world?

Take a snapshot of our society, specifically, the Washington metropolitan region today, and we find that most households either are dual-income households or single-parent households. The normal work week for many is far more than 40 hours, and the traffic and congested roadways in our area mean that many of us spend two hours or more a day commuting. Children are involved in multiple sports and after-school activities, which is well beyond the geographical location of the neighborhood park—meaning parents are driving them to activities. What does this mean to organizations that depend on volunteer involvement and hours? *It means people have much less time to volunteer.* Recent studies of volunteers increasingly report “not enough time” and “lack of time because of work and family” as reasons for not volunteering or not volunteering more. That’s the bad news....

The good news is that according to the Independent Sector’s *Giving and Volunteering in the United States 2001 Study* (www.independentsector.org), 44 percent of all adults in the

United States volunteer, which means 83.9 million adults in our country are volunteering whatever free time they might have.

However, with less time, people must decide “what’s really important.” Subsequently, they

are becoming very selective when deciding where to volunteer and spend their precious time. What does that mean to non-profits and member organizations? With limited time to invest, your members and volunteers are looking to your organization to fulfill a lot of needs, and your job is to make sure they are not disappointed.

How can you attract volunteers? Studies show that adults

are looking for well-organized, technically savvy, open, and meaningful organizations to volunteer with and they want their time well spent at a place that really utilizes their skills and talents.

As a member organization, you can make it worth their while by respecting two major issues with today’s volunteer: family/personal time and flexibility. By being creative with member events and including families and spouses,

Tips for rewarding and recognizing participation

Recognize all contributions

Emphasize success

Be open and public

Be personal and honest

Tailor your recognition to your volunteer’s personality

Timing is crucial

Make connection between accomplishments and the recognition received

Remember FUN

“Organizations that are technically savvy, well organized, open, and meaningful attract the most volunteers”

you allow volunteers to combine volunteer time with family time. Try a family picnic day for your membership meeting, or a family volunteer event for your philanthropy. Secondly, say goodbye to the "officer-for-life-term", and examine co-chair positions, "job-sharing", and flexibility. Take the job of a newsletter editor: Can the job be broken down into tasks that can be split among several volunteers? One person takes the electronic duties of layout and printing, another person takes the duties of reminder calls for articles, etc.

Having trouble getting people to volunteer? Want to know the number one reason why people volunteer? Because they were asked. The *Independent Sector Study* showed that the percentage of adults who volunteered when asked was 71 percent. What this means is that your number-one job as a volunteer leader, is to find your replacement – be a talent scout. Find out what your members' interests are and where their talents lie, and connect their motivation to the jobs and tasks that need to be accomplished in your organization.

Call your volunteer and personally ask him/her to volunteer with a specific project or job. If they say no (75 percent of those asked will not decline), then ask why. Ask what the hindrances are to volunteering, and then see if you can be flexible with your needs to

10 Great Ways to Motivate Staff and Volunteers...

Call in well days.

Thank spouses and children with a card, phone call, or gift.

Hold a staff/volunteer retreat – include all staff/volunteers.

Celebrate even the smallest success.

Glue a chocolate bar to boring memos/correspondence.

Place an ad in your newsletter/magazine thanking staff or volunteers.

Send a welcome card to new employee before they start or to a new member as soon as they have joined.


Create a New Volunteer or Staff Welcome Kit.

Have a King or Queen of the Day/meeting.

Tape thank-you coupons or certificates under chairs in a meeting.

make it work for them.

Once you have willing volunteers, how do you keep them motivated? Two keys words: FUN and THANKS. No one wants to volunteer his or her time if it isn't FUN. Volunteers should enjoy their time and find it fulfilling and rewarding by allowing them the opportunity to meet new friends, gain new skills, and general-

ly feel good about helping others. And don't forget to say, "Thank you!" 

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