
ARTICLES ON VOLUNTEERS

ENERGIZING AND RECOGNIZING VOLUNTEERS

“Quick tips for getting the best from your volunteers” by Annette E. Petrick, CAE.
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American Society of Association Executives, Washington, D.C.

No matter how hard you work in your top leadership role, you will need a high-energy team of volunteers to assist you in leading the association. Here are the techniques for developing such a team— and keeping the energy level high.

Five Tips To Encourage Participation

1. When creating your team, make recruits feel special. Don't give the impression you pulled their names out of a hat. Refer to the reasons you wanted them in the first place: their special skills or talents and their previous service and successes.
2. Make sure each volunteer assignment has a job description. Outline responsibilities, time frame, expected outcomes, and deadlines.
3. In discussing an assignment, ask what tools volunteers need, and be sure they have – or can get – those tools.
4. Create Email lists [like those available free at onelist.com] to keep in touch with committee heads and board members. This way you can send a generic reminder to all committee heads at once and remind board members of upcoming deadlines with a one-sentence note.
5. Attend local meetings and recruit leaders from there. Some of your best potential leaders may be going unnoticed at the local level; it's up to you to find them.

Five Special Ways To Say Thank You

1. Send handwritten notes – sure to be revered and kept by recipients. Request note cards with your name, title and association name – or create them on your computer. If there's no time to hand-address envelopes, ask for a computer generated label list from the record keeper in your region.
2. If you can't fit handwritten cards into your busy schedule, print out customized Post-it notes with your name and title and association name. (The notes come in sheets that can be run through any computer printer.) Slap a Post-it on anything that points up colleagues' contributions – flyers, a page torn from your region's newsletter, a part of the meeting minutes. Write one sentence of encouragement and mail it.
3. Send an e-greeting – a greeting card sent via Email. They're free from many sources, such as www.hallmark.com or www.bluemountain.com. Or search the Internet on the key words “free greeting cards.”

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4. Don't wait until a project ends to express appreciation. Recognize the group early on. Provide encouragement along the way, as well as thanks when the job is complete.
5. Use the Internet for recognition. Place photos of group leaders or award winners on your Web site.

Five Things To Do With Your Face

1. Smile.
2. Smile broader.
3. Smile longer.
4. Smile harder.
5. Keep smiling.

They say Alan Greenspan's expression can sway the stock market. The same is true of the look on your face at functions. Your scowl can start rumors of unrest. Your smile can reassure everyone in the room.

In leadership training sessions, I do an exercise in which some board members wear crowns to show how special they are. It is eye opening to see how people react to those wearing the crowns of the office.

You are no longer a private citizen when you accept elected or appointed office. What you say has significance, is repeated, and is inspiring or discouraging. The look on your face does likewise. A smile conveys positive messages and radiates self-confidence.

Five-Minute Mentoring

At a recent board retreat, I asked participants to tell who had made an early impression on them and what motivated them to get on the leadership track. Often they said their sea-change moment was an exchange of five minutes or less, or resulted from a series of brief exchanges. As the person in authority, you can make a big impact even in a short time. Here's how.

1. Use your crown of authority to inspire. Talk to members every chance you get. Sit with people you don't know at a lunch table. Stop with a group and chat. Ask people to introduce you to circles of members. Get out and mingle.
2. Listen with a third ear. When you hear a good idea or are impressed by something, write it down. If someone gives you a business card, immediately write on it the subject discussed or the request made. Have a system for flawless follow-up.

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3. Give people you encounter your undivided attention. Maintain steady eye contact. Let each person know, through your body language, that at that moment he or she is the most important one in your universe. Not good at this? Practice until you master it. It's that important.
4. Remember that potential new leaders may not fit your mental image. Don't discount people who are older, younger, or a different gender, or those for whom English is not the first language. Being open to diversity can be one of your greatest contributions to your association.
5. Enjoy your time in the limelight. It may be the most significant year of your life. Leadership brings privileges to be enjoyed. This in itself may motivate someone else to get involved – simply because they'd like to be just like you.

MAKING FIRST-TIMERS FEEL WELCOME

“Give new volunteers a nametag, a buddy and meaningful work” by Wilford A. Butler, CAE. Reprinted with permission from ASSOCIATION MANAGEMENT, copyright 2000, American Society of Association Executives, Washington, D.C.

No organization intends to turn eager new volunteers into disillusioned dropouts. But many associations do just that, year after year, because they don't engage newcomers correctly from the start. Here are my top 10 suggestions for chief elected officers who want to be sure that all new board and committee members feel welcome and effective.

1. Formally assign a veteran of the group to be the newcomer's buddy, both to answer questions and show him or her the ropes.
2. At meetings, provide easy-to-read nametags and get people to wear them. Put nameplates at each seat and supply a seating chart.
3. Do self-introductions until everyone knows each other.
4. Make a point of soliciting new members' opinions at the start of the discussion and again later on.
5. Plan a follow-up phone call after the meeting to see if there are any questions about the process or assignments.
6. When a committee must deal with restructuring or policy issues, provide enough written background so that even recent recruits can make intelligent recommendations. There is nothing more frustrating to new volunteers than being told that the board turned down their proposal because they hadn't taken the group's traditions into account.
7. Figure out a specific assignment for the new person and get a veteran to collaborate on it.

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8. When a new member completes his or her first assigned task, make sure that the volunteer who is chairing the committee reviews the task with the new member to find out if he or she was comfortable with it and is interested in more.
9. Listen for clues to hidden talents. If a newcomer shows real ability with budgets, don't ask that person to tackle people issues. Do some planning to develop potential paths for volunteers.
10. Distribute one-page evaluations at the end of all meetings. You need to know how committee members really feel about the meetings and the organization.
 - ▶ Photographer/videographer
 - ▶ Study group advisor/tutor
 - ▶ Fundraising organizer
 - ▶ Membership directory coordinator/editor
 - ▶ Community service event coordinator
 - ▶ Rally ring steward
 - ▶ Social Committee chair
 - ▶ Doggie Bag Coordinator – parents put together a Pony Club “survival kit” for new parents
 - ▶ Physical Fitness instructor
 - ▶ Cartographer (makes maps to events)
 - ▶ Web site designer
 - ▶ Seamstress (or the male equivalent!)
 - ▶ Booth construction (great for woodworkers)

FIND AND KEEP THE BEST VOLUNTEERS

Adapted from an article by Mark Mitchell and Donald Yates,
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Now more than ever your club is competing with other recreational interests for the time and energies of volunteers. Here are some ideas to help you attract the best possible volunteers for your organization.

The Four M's of Volunteer Recruitment

Volunteer recruitment consists of four components:

- ▶ Management
- ▶ Marketing
- ▶ Motivation
- ▶ Mission

Management

You must prepare others in your club to recruit and manage volunteers. Be sure everyone is committed to having new volunteers as part of the organization and that they know how to work with newcomers.

Do not skimp on communication and training! Training should not only explain how to supervise volunteers but should also explore attitudes. Be sure existing volunteers do not undervalue newcomers simply because they don't have the same level of knowledge. Stress the importance of teamwork and mentoring.

Marketing

Second, market your club to potential volunteers as a worthwhile outlet for their energies. You must be pro-active in discussing Pony Club, particularly your club, to those who may not be familiar with the organization. The most effective marketers are satisfied volunteers and children already involved in the club. Encourage them to reach out enthusiastically to other potential volunteers.

Motivation

Third, you must determine the motivations of potential volunteers. Don't assume that their motives are altruistic. Volunteers have multiple motivations, with altruism only one of many factors. Other motivating factors include: fellowship, discontent with primary vocation, personal recognition, desire for new experience and/or knowledge, social interaction, and the lessening of a sense of debt or obligation.

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Most people want positions that provide self-expression, personal challenge, visible achievements, and an opportunity to develop specific abilities and skills. In designing your effort, keep in mind these general motivations for volunteering as well as each individual's personal motives. Seek a "fit" between your club's needs and the volunteer's aspirations. Remember, every new volunteer has the potential to be a future leader.

Mission

Pony Club's mission is a strong, visible tool you can use to recruit volunteers. You cannot enlist volunteers until you know exactly what you wish to accomplish as an organization. Does your club also have a mission statement?

Do not take lightly the task of formulating and publicizing your club's mission. Continually reinforce your mission to existing volunteers, and share new goals and objectives with them to maintain their commitment.

Program Assessment

Remember that you are competing for time and resources, both valuable assets. To properly address assessment, it is useful to differentiate three closely related concepts:

- ▶ Effectiveness concerns the quality of impact of a program's output – that is, the relationship between outputs and outcomes. In other words, are you doing good things?
- ▶ Efficiency deals with the relationship between inputs and outputs. The focus is on the amount of resources necessary to produce one unit of output. In other words, are you making things easier for yourself and for others?
- ▶ Productivity occurs when both effectiveness and efficiency are present. In other words, are you doing good things inexpensively?

Satisfied volunteers become loyal and productive volunteers who can insure the future leadership of your club.