

How to Reduce Volunteer Turnover

By Hardy Smith

An annual nationwide study by the Corporation for National & Community Service on Volunteering in America, reports that each year millions of people volunteer their time to charitable and community causes they deem to be worthwhile.

However, the report also shows that organizations continuously face a revolving-door struggle to retain their volunteers once they have been recruited.

Long time experience in volunteer recruiting and retention has shown me that many organizations run into problems when it comes to keeping volunteers interested and active.

The reason is that even a good cause isn't always enough to keep someone involved.

Organizations struggling to keep their volunteers need to understand the volunteer's perspective. Volunteers are generous and giving people, but they have needs they want and expect to have met.

Here are five tips that can help any organization hold on to its valuable volunteers.

- **Realize that people do things for their own reasons.** Take time to understand why your volunteers came aboard in the first place. What was their true purpose in wanting to participate with your particular organization? Their needs may relate more to personal reasons or benefits rather than to your cause. Are you fulfilling those needs? If not, chances are high that you'll lose them.

- **Volunteers want to have a relationship with the causes they choose.** Are you working to build relationships with volunteers? Their connections with other people in your organization, will keep them involved much longer. Relationships must be developed -- they rarely happen accidentally.

- **Avoid the "sink or swim" technique for managing volunteers.** Sometimes organizations assign someone a duty or position without providing adequate guidance, background information, training, or help from

someone previously in that role. This common mistake usually leads to frustration and volunteers don't sign up to be frustrated!

● **Similarly, loading up an eager performer who won't say no is a sure way to create burnout.** It is easy to give tasks to a new volunteer who is willing to yes. But how many times do you see that shining star flame out in a short period of time? Keep that performer longer by spreading the responsibilities.

● **Take time to recognize your volunteers.** People want to be appreciated. Don't wait for the year-end ceremony. Be generous with recognition. Make sure your volunteers know they aren't being taken for granted. When you articulate these basic points, they seem almost self-evident. Simple thank yous that show volunteers that their efforts are indeed making a difference can have a huge impact on how they feel about your organization. The better they feel, the longer they'll stay!

By taking the time to pay attention to the various motivations that drive your volunteers, you will minimize the recurring need to find, recruit, and train new volunteers.

As a speaker and consultant, Hardy Smith helps nonprofit organizations achieve high performance success. Learn more about his ability to help with your nonprofit organization's volunteer recruitment and retention needs by visiting: www.hardysmith.com