

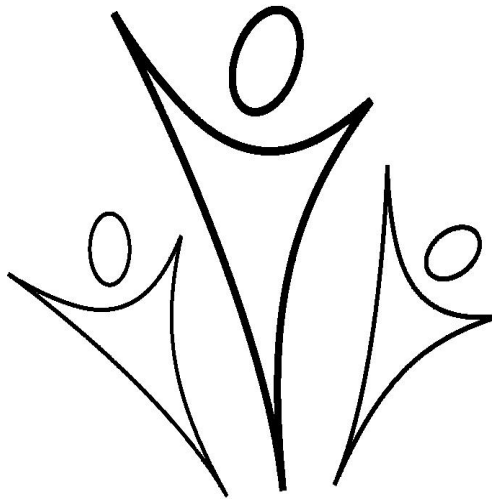
Count On Me!

**501 IDEAS ON RETAINING,
RECOGNIZING AND REWARDING
VOLUNTEERS**



Judy Esmond, Ph.D.

COUNT ON ME!
***501 Ideas on Retaining, Recognizing and
Rewarding Volunteers***



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501 Ideas On Retaining, Recognizing and Rewarding Volunteers

by Judy Esmond, Ph.D.

Welcome

Thank you for reading this E-Book. It contains 501 truly great ideas for you.

The design of this E-Book will allow you to:

- read it easily on your computer screen
- print out the whole E-Book to keep as a hardcopy
- print out specific pages as required

Enjoy the book and as Linus Pauling (US chemist and Nobel Prize winner) explains...

"If you want to get a good idea, get lots of ideas" and we have 501 for you!

Enjoy!

Judy

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P.S. Want even more ideas? Then get my great FREE E-Book with over 100 more ideas on how to recruit, retain and recognize volunteers at www.morevolunteers.com

P.P.S. If you require any further assistance or advice then just contact Judy directly

Email: mtdjudy@iinet.net.au or Phone: (+61 8) 9371 2677 (international)

Count On Me!
501 Ideas on Retaining, Recognizing and
Rewarding Volunteers

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Dedication

To Katherine Esmond, thank you for being my daughter.

To my mother Moya Esmond and my father Ken Esmond, I miss you both.

To volunteers around the world, thank you for your amazing contributions.

Acknowledgements

To my business partner and friend, Linda Worthington, who has worked tirelessly to make this book a reality. Thank you, Linda.

To my wonderful editor and brother, Ian Esmond, whose dedication to detail has been enormous. Thank you, Ian.

To Linda Browning, who designed the final layout and again made it all seem so easy. Thank you, Linda.

Whenever the sadness in this world seems too much, I only have to spend time with volunteers who are giving of their time and my faith in what the human race can actually achieve is once again restored.

Judy Esmond

A personal thank you

Thank you for buying this book. I am honoured that you have done so. I am sure you will find it an extremely valuable resource to enhance the success of your volunteer retention, recognition and reward program.

Thank you also to all those people who have attended my workshops and presentations and provided me with a wealth of information for this book. Thank you also to those in marketing, media, advertising, human resources and customer service who have provided further inspiration for the ideas in this book.

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Introduction

Since writing the best-selling book, *Count Me In! 501 Ideas on Recruiting Volunteers*, I have presented my ideas on recruiting to 1000s of people.

As people have become enthusiastic about these new and different ideas on recruiting volunteers their next question has often been, ‘So Judy, now that we have recruited our volunteers, how do we retain them?’

It was this question that inspired me to spend three years researching and collecting ideas on retaining, recognizing and rewarding volunteers. This search took me beyond some of the traditional ideas within the non-profit sector to explore ideas from the worlds of advertising, marketing, public relations and human resources.

The result is this book, full of 100s of ideas from a wide range of sources on retaining, recognizing and rewarding volunteers. It is aimed at assisting all those involved with volunteers.

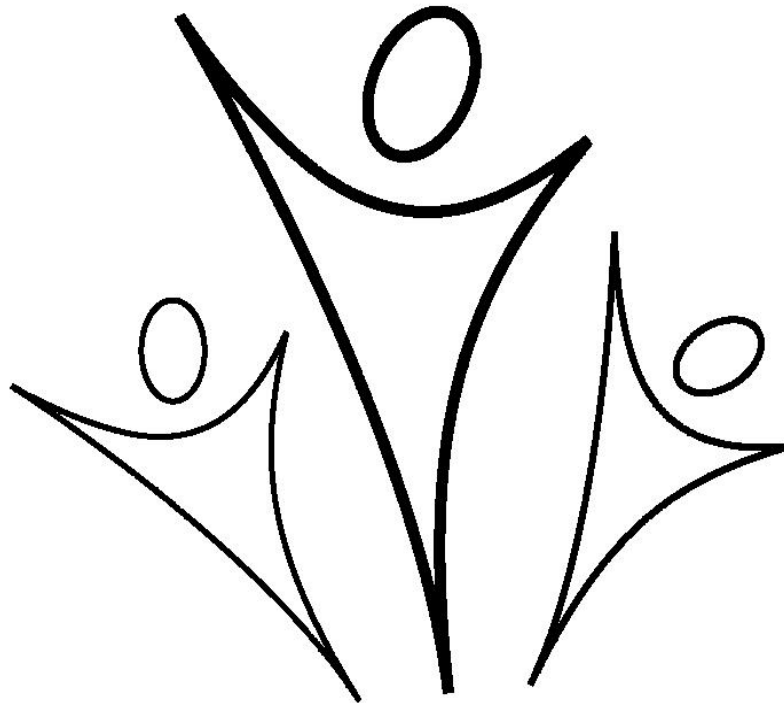
There is one thing stronger than all the armies in the world, and that is an idea whose time has come.

Victor Hugo

How to use this book

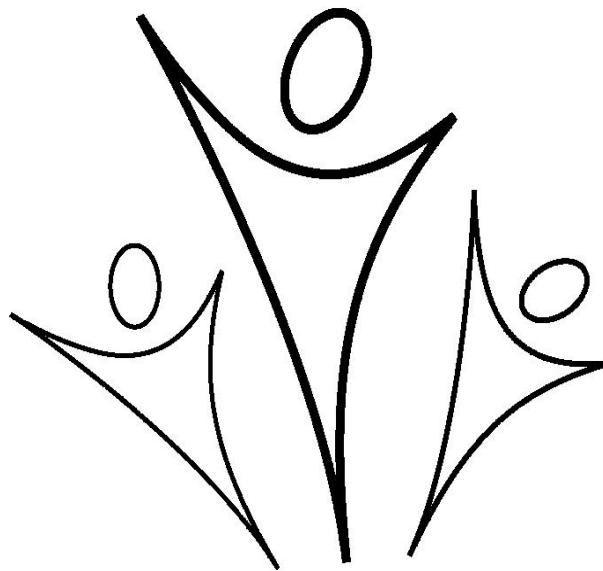
This book is the second in a series and is the sequel to the best selling book *Count Me In! 501 Ideas on Recruiting Volunteers*. It is also a working book – it is designed to be very practical and easy to read. This book contains 100s of ideas on retaining, recognizing and rewarding volunteers and you can turn to any page for inspiration. Not all of the ideas will apply to your situation, but many of them will.

The first half of this book looks at retention and the second half of the book examines recognition and reward ideas for your volunteers. To get the most out of *Count on Me!*, highlight the ideas that appeal to you and start trying them out in your own organization. Make use of the blank pages provided to write down your own thoughts and ideas. Come back to the book again and again to source more ideas and strategies to continually improve your volunteer retention, recognition and reward program.



Remember, there are countless ways to retain, recognize and reward your volunteers so they continue to say, “Yes, you can **Count On Me!**”

Understanding retention



Each and every day millions of people around the world give their time and energy to make a difference through volunteering. They deserve to be part of a truly satisfying volunteer experience. Make the commitment now to develop a really successful retention, recognition and reward program. Use the ideas in this book to help you design an on-going program that combines a series of actions, both large and small, to say thank you and keep your volunteers coming back again and again.



In business, it takes five times as much time, effort and money to attract a new customer as it does to keep an existing customer. It is the same with volunteers. Too many organizations concentrate solely on recruiting more and more volunteers through the front door, while giving token attention to their current volunteers who may be walking out the back door.



Don't misunderstand – of course it's great to have a well-developed recruitment program and to actively seek new volunteers. But you need to find a balance and also spend time ensuring a high level of satisfaction amongst your current volunteers. Make sure you pay as much attention to retaining your volunteers as you may do to gaining volunteers.

Furious activity is no substitute for understanding.

H.H. Williams



Think about it! What does it really cost to lose experienced volunteers? What about the time, effort and money involved in recruiting, selecting, training and supervising new volunteers? What of the disruption to services, clients and other volunteers? How about the valuable knowledge and experience lost with the departing volunteer? It's hard work being stuck in a revolving volunteer door!



But wait – how do you actually know if you have a volunteer retention problem? How does your organization measure success in volunteer retention? Of course the answers will vary with each organization and even with the type of projects involved. But very few organizations have goals and outcomes defining what they mean by retention success. Even fewer collect any data on their volunteer retention rates.



How long must a volunteer stay to be considered 'retained' rather than a 'dropout'? One month? Six months? One year? Ten years? Do you examine retention based on how long each individual person stays? Is retention about active membership or just being 'on the books'? Susan J. Ellis in her extensive work on volunteering suggests that retention is when the volunteer remains on the job for the amount of time they originally committed to during the placement process.



Whatever your definition of retention, develop some practical retention goals. Holding on to a volunteer forever is far from a realistic goal. One goal could be to achieve an average number of hours of service from each volunteer per year. Another might be a total number of hours per year per group of volunteers – a team approach. Still another goal might be a commitment of 2 years or 200 hours involvement from each volunteer. Or to increase by 20% the number of volunteers staying longer than 2 years. Get specific about those retention goals now!

§ § §

Develop a system to collect and record the data relevant to your goals. Set performance indicators for your retention program. Keep them updated, compare them at least annually and aim to improve on the preceding year. Remember, you can't improve what you don't measure.


§ § §

But do keep retention in perspective. Eventually all volunteers will leave and for a myriad of different reasons. Changes in lifestyle and personal circumstances are not reasons you can control. Save your energy. Focus on those factors that can be controlled within your organization to encourage rather than discourage your volunteers to say 'You can still Count On Me!'

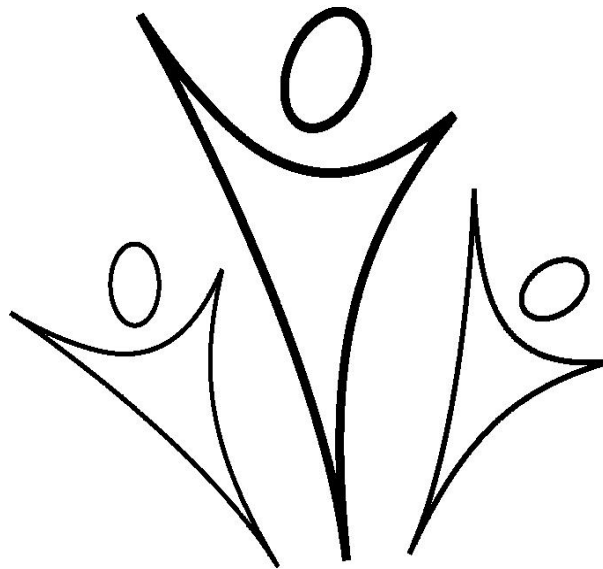
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In the absence of clearly defined goals, we become strangely loyal to performing daily acts of trivia.

Anonymous



Culture and climate



Blocks to a successful retention, recognition and reward program come in many forms and are often imbedded in the culture and climate of your organization. The culture includes the structures, policies and procedures that exist in your organization. The climate is about how people really feel being in that working environment. Along with the overt are the powerful covert unwritten rules and norms of behaviour that make your organization either a place for volunteers to thrive or to barely survive.



So how do your volunteers regard your organization? Is it seen as a bureaucracy full of rigid rules, procedures and hierarchical structures? Or does it feel like a friendly place, focused on personal relationships with people caring and supporting each other in their work and valuing the contribution of all? Is it the place to commit or a place to omit?




Time for a SWOT (**S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities and **T**hreats) analysis of your organization. Have the courage to undertake an honest and candid appraisal with management, paid staff and volunteers as to the health of your organization’s culture and climate. Objectively examine your strengths and weaknesses, note opportunities to improve, and identify threats to achieving a thriving organizational culture and climate.



Ensure that your organization is not just talking the talk, but is really walking the walk. Are openness and creativity espoused, but restrictive policies and procedures that confine and demoralize people enforced? Are honesty and integrity advocated, but a ‘watch your back’ culture and climate pervade?

Bureaucracy defends the status quo long past the time when the quo has lost its status.

Laurence J. Peter



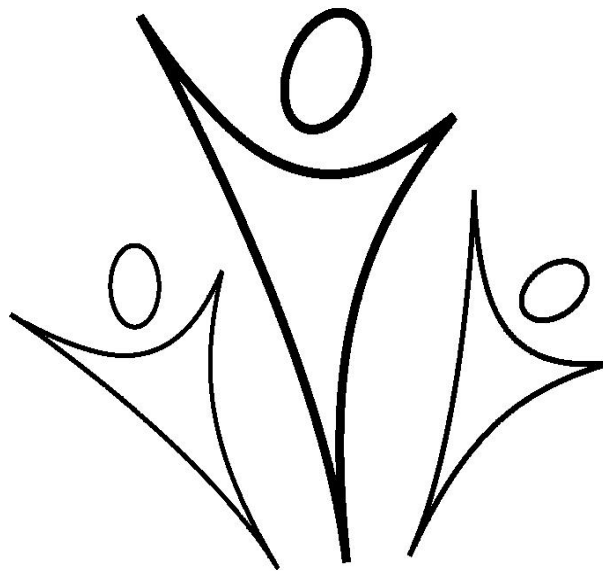
As Sue Vineyard (2001:13-14) in her book *Recognizing Volunteers and Paid Staff: the Art, the Science and a Gazillion Ideas* explains, “if your organizational climate is negative, wastes time and energy, is disrespectful, bigoted, refuses to change, rejects anything never done before, is run by an ‘elite’ group or dictatorial tyrant or has its head in the sand as to clients’ and volunteers’ changing needs, no amount of praise and reward will overcome its nasty character”.



Read through the following sections and do a mental check on how your organization would rate on those aspects that contribute to the culture and climate. What changes would need to be made to improve your organization’s rating?



Policies and procedures



Critically review your organization's policies and procedures. Identify the purpose each policy or procedure serves. Does it make sense? Is it realistic? Or is it a relic from another era? How well does it connect with the mission and goals of your organization? Does it make the work efforts of your volunteers harder or easier? Strive to get rid of any policy or procedure that is unnecessary and makes your volunteers' tasks more difficult, otherwise it will continue to undermine your best retention efforts.

§ § §

Examine all the paperwork in your organization. Paperwork is one of the top time drainers for people. Ask for whose benefit each piece of paper exists. Do the forms serve a real need for the volunteers or are the forms more about control or convenience for the organization? Even if you think you need all the information you collect and the paperwork you now have, still ask yourself if there is a better way to go about it.

§ § §

Eliminate aggravations. Find out if there is some aspect of your organization's procedures that volunteers find irritating and unnecessary. Maybe your volunteers are spending valuable time doing things that are not really needed, such as compiling reports nobody reads, just because of some outdated policy. Abolish such irritations and watch both productivity and morale soar.

§ § §

Don't buy into the loud protests of members of the 'old guard' who cling to outdated procedures because 'that's the way we've always done it'. Change is always difficult to accept, but if something isn't working, don't persist. After all, if you keep on doing what you've always done, you'll keep on getting what you've always got.

§ § §

Ask your volunteers to identify your least efficient procedure. Then, challenge the team to do an 'extreme makeover' on it. The volunteers will relish the opportunity to effect real change and their creativity will result in many worthwhile ideas for improvements.

§ § §

Sometimes it's not what you *are* doing that is turning people off, but something you are *not* doing. Every so often, ask your volunteers if there is something more the organization could be doing to make their lives easier.

§ § §

We can lick gravity, but sometimes the paperwork is overwhelming.

Wernher von Braun



You can work at something for twenty years and come away with twenty years' worth of valuable experience, or you can come away with one year's experience twenty times.

Gwen Jackson



If your organization relies on corporate structures, such as official titles, hierarchical divisions and set working hours, think outside the box. What would happen if some of these were abandoned, getting rid of status barriers to cooperation and giving everyone the initiative and freedom to perform their duties?

§ § §

It's no wonder volunteers lose interest when organizations hold a seemingly endless number of meetings. If you need merely to disseminate information, send it out in a more efficient way. We've all been to meetings where nothing is achieved. What a waste of everyone's time!

§ § §

Don't drag volunteers into meetings, incurring travel time and expenses and diverting time away from task-oriented activities, unless absolutely necessary. Consider the possibilities offered by new technologies, such as telephone or video conferencing or online discussions.

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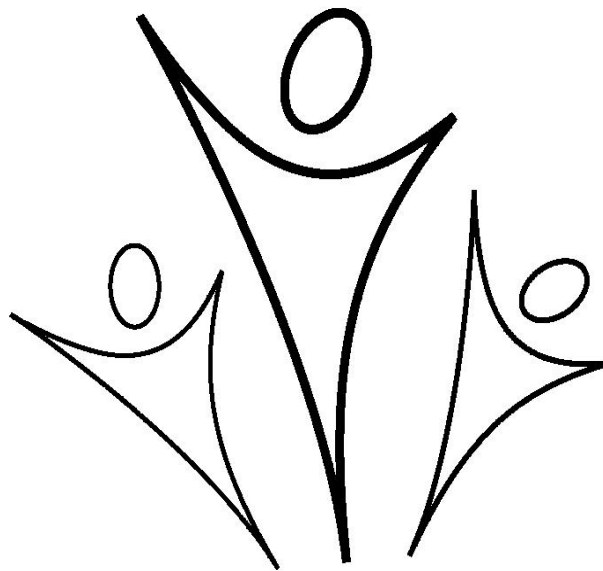
Firmly limit meetings to goal-oriented activities, such as making key decisions and resolutions or determining specific policies. Use them for task allocation for a specific project, or for brainstorming a particular problem. Make meetings work *for* you, not *against* you.

§ § §

Consider disbanding committees and replacing them with task forces. Committees often have a very broad and general role, and some seem to exist indefinitely. A task force has a specific assignment and timeline, and once the job is completed, the task force is 'demobbed'.

§ § §

Mission and goals



Refocus on and reaffirm the *mission* and *goals* that your organization is aiming to achieve. It is the mission that espouses the high ideals of your organization. Ask yourself, does the work that our volunteers do directly support this mission? People become true believers in those high ideals and values, and volunteers really need to feel that their work is helping those ideals to be achieved.



Aim to structure volunteer work in a way that provides constant reminders to answer the questions: What are we here for? What is our mission and what are our goals? A clear sense of purpose in what they are doing and why engenders greater volunteer commitment.



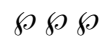
Ask your volunteers to identify the major roadblocks to building a future that corresponds with your organization's mission. Seek their ideas and solutions and involve them in the elimination of those obstacles. How satisfying to be part of breaking down the barriers!



Provide all your desk-bound volunteers with pieces of acrylic perspex for desk blotters. Encourage them to create their own personal collage of reminders and examples of your organization's mission. These may include the mission statement, quotations, photographs, cartoons, slogans or anything that they feel reinforces the mission. The great visual impact of the collage provides an excellent, ongoing reminder of why they are really there.



Run a contest asking volunteers to design a T-shirt that answers the question: 'If my organization were a T-shirt, what would it say?' Give the winner a great prize and use the winning entry as the design for new T-shirts for all the volunteers in the organization. This provides great visual impact and positive reinforcement.



Ask your volunteers to find a quotation that for them sums up the mission of the organization. Have these quotations specially printed and framed and present them to your volunteers to put on prominent display.




Run a poetry competition. Invite members to write a poem that identifies with the goals of your organization. Display the best entries around the workplace and publish them in a special anthology. All of these ideas help reinforce and revalidate for volunteers why they are donating their valuable time to your cause.

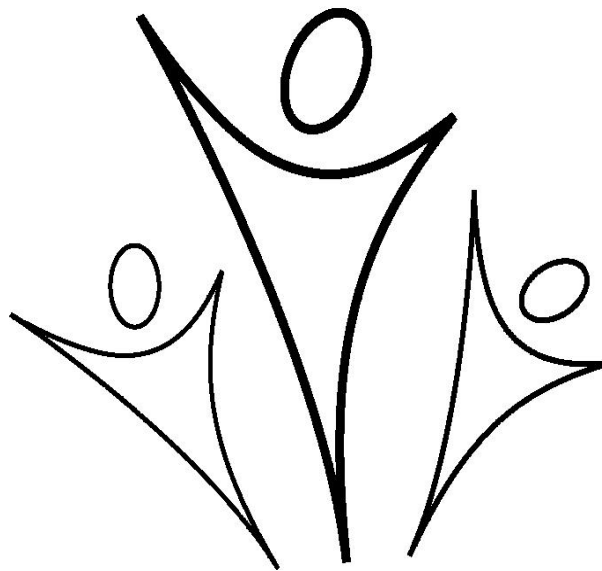


Here is the test to find whether your mission on Earth is finished: if you're alive, it isn't.

Richard Bach



The setting and having fun



With fresh eyes, take a good look at the setting in which your volunteers work. Is it welcoming and friendly? Are the physical surroundings comfortable and safe? Is there privacy where required? Are all necessary resources readily to hand?

§ § §

Make the office facilities and work location as attractive as possible for your volunteers. Challenge yourself and your volunteers to come up with low-cost creative ideas to improve the attractiveness of the facilities. A pleasant setting can lift the spirit!

§ § §

Allow volunteers ownership of their own workspace. Don't enforce rigid rules about how the area should look. The more personalized it is, the more 'at home' your volunteers will feel working there.

§ § §

Have a contest to see how creative people can be in decorating their own workspace and the team's workspace. Have some fun prizes and take everyone on a tour of the different decorated workspaces – you could even have everyone vote on their favourite design. Liven up the setting and you liven up the volunteering experience!

§ § §

Many people just don't know how to have fun at work nor are they given permission by management and others to do so. The working week is about 'Oh-no-here-we-go-again Monday', 'made-it-half-way Wednesday' and 'Thank God it's Friday'. And yet volunteers who have fun in their voluntary role are more likely to stay longer than those volunteers who do not have fun.

§ § §

Do the culture and climate of your organization allow room for fun? Or is the business of the organization considered to be so serious that anyone entering the premises should refrain from smiling ever again? This attitude is extremely energy sapping – the opportunity to have some fun keeps us energized in the work we do. Sometimes having a laugh is what keeps your volunteers going when the going gets tough.

§ § §

There are so many creative ways to ensure that people have fun along the way and to increase the enjoyment and energy levels of all. No matter how difficult, sad or frustrating the work your volunteers may do, the ability to coax a smile can make the load seem a little lighter.

§ § §

The time to be happy is now. The place to be happy is here. The way to be happy is to make others so.

Robert G. Ingersoll



Keep in mind that what may be fun for one person may not be fun for another. It is a bit like telling jokes – some may find a joke funny and others may not. Although we cannot be all things to all people, aim for an environment that has a relaxed atmosphere and where people feel it's OK to laugh.

§ § §

Be daring – experiment with ideas on how everyone can have fun. It's not about slapstick humour or dirty jokes, but it is about good, clean fun and appropriate humour to lighten the atmosphere. If what you try doesn't really work, try something else. Just keep having a go.

§ § §

Let's start with some simple 'fun' ideas for on-site volunteers. Attach cartoons or humorous anecdotes to the more mundane memos that have to be circulated. Screen a funny film in the conference room during a lunch break. Take a daily humour break and designate a person to share a joke or funny story with the rest of the team.

§ § §

How about scheduling an 'ugly tie' or 'silly socks' day with a joke prize for the winner? Or having a daily or weekly lucky dip for something small and inexpensive? Bring a camera to work and take fun candid shots of your volunteers to put on display.

§ § §

Provide a 'have a laugh' bulletin board. Put up fun quotes, cartoons, sayings, stories and jokes. Change them regularly so that it doesn't become stale. Display it in a prominent place where visitors, staff, volunteers and clients can all have a moment to laugh.

§ § §

Collect the best of the jokes, sayings and quotes from the bulletin board that everyone has contributed over the year. Then, publish them in a yearbook. What a great fun way to put together a bit of light reading for those short well-earned breaks.

§ § §

Assign a 'happiness barometer team'. Their role is to monitor everyone's morale and to keep looking for fun ways to ensure it remains high. What a wonderful job! If you have caring, outgoing volunteers who need a change of scenery, this might just be a perfect role for them.

§ § §

You don't stop laughing because you grow old. You grow old because you stop laughing.

Michael Pritchard



If you expect your volunteers to be enthusiastic and excited about coming to work, ask yourself (or a trusted colleague), ‘How much fun am I to work with?’ Take the lead in lightening the mood. Don’t take yourself too seriously and always try to find an optimistic side to any situation.



Set aside a special place in your organization where stressed volunteers can go to relax with free refreshments available. Never expect them to just soldier on through their shifts without respite and support until they go home. Allow the volunteers to decorate the ‘chill out’ area by themselves, for themselves. You’ll find people will bring in plush animals and toys, stress relievers, comics and all sorts of other comforting and fun things.



Have a fun contest of the month, such as the biggest bubble blown, the best charade or the funniest skit. Have a monthly free dress day, perhaps with a particular theme such as the beach or the snow. These regular events can give everyone something fun to look forward to.



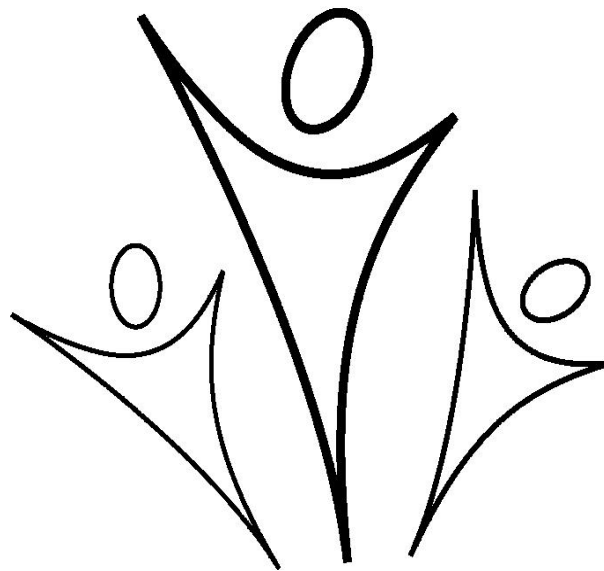
Complement the regular events with spontaneous moments of fun, just to keep everyone guessing! Put on a surprise picnic outside in the grounds or in a nearby park. Or throw a surprise party for just no reason at all.



Introduce ‘fun funds’ – where people are fined in a light-hearted way. For example, if anyone swears, or spills coffee, or forgets something, they have to drop a coin into the jar. Use the money to purchase small fun items for everyone as spontaneous rewards.



The work itself



Ensure that the culture and climate of your organization inspire volunteers to take pride in the contribution they are making. Volunteers who feel good about what they do and what they contribute are obviously far more likely to stay. Such intrinsic rewards are a very powerful ‘pull’ towards greater commitment.



So do your volunteers enjoy and feel a *sense of accomplishment* in the work they do? Is it *satisfying*? Does it contribute to their *feeling of positive self-esteem*? Do your volunteers feel that they are *making a difference*? Many traditional volunteer tasks seem to strangle all excitement a volunteer has for the work they do. Doing meaningless tasks hindered by outmoded and ineffective policies and procedures can demoralize anyone.



Be very clear about why the job you are asking the volunteer to undertake is important. If you cannot answer this question, how do you expect the volunteer to be convinced that this task is a good use of their time? All volunteers want to feel useful, not used.



Volunteers desire job satisfaction just like anyone else. Interestingly, surveys have shown that around one-third of volunteers prefer to undertake volunteer work that differs from their usual jobs. About one-quarter prefer to do similar work to their paid jobs. Different jobs give different satisfaction to volunteers, so never assume, always ask.



Invest in whatever is needed to allow your volunteers to do their very best work. To sell them short in terms of resources or support is to create a culture of scarcity and abandonment. It’s a short-term saving but it creates an ongoing long-term problem for your retention efforts.




Ask your volunteers the questions: What is it you truly need to do your best work? What can we do to make your role more satisfying? Often, it’s only a small change that is desired, but it makes a big difference to the volunteers that you asked the questions, listened to the responses and made the changes.



It is better to know some of the questions than all of the answers.

James Thurber



Ensure that there is a very clear understanding of what is considered *success* in a specific project or assignment. Desired outcomes are often never explained or are presented as vague generalizations to volunteers. Clearly defined outcomes allow volunteers to measure and reaffirm their achievements.



Remember that what gets measured gets done. Decide how to measure your goals and their outcomes. If you don't measure results, you can't distinguish success from failure. If you can't identify success, you can't reward it or learn from it. If you can't identify failures or shortcomings, you can't remedy them.



Do the culture and climate of your organization promote positive self-esteem by recognizing the *uniqueness* of each individual volunteer? Understand that just as every new person you meet socially is the sum total of their life experiences, so too every potential volunteer brings their personal 'baggage' with them. Their attitudes, expectations and assumptions all impact on their performance. Are you equipped to handle this baggage?




When we focus only on the task and not the person, we fail to recognize the unique abilities of each individual. Focus on the person and find out their unique skills and abilities. Then build volunteering tasks and opportunities around them.



Does your organization offer the *opportunity for people to grow and develop*? Can people be creative and innovative taking some risks? Or is it all about watching your back or pointless paperwork with more and more barriers to innovation? Devise opportunities for volunteers to learn, develop and engage in new and challenging assignments. This will really boost their feeling of satisfaction.

We act as though comfort and luxury were the chief requirements of life, when all that we need to make us happy is something to be enthusiastic about.

Charles Kingsley




Pump up the job satisfaction meter further by matching volunteers' interests and skills to the right jobs. Then keep adding more opportunities to continually challenge and stretch your volunteers. How terrific would it be to receive feedback from your volunteers saying 'This job just keeps getting better and better'!



Try this as an exercise with your volunteers: have everyone write down their most enjoyable volunteer jobs and their least enjoyable volunteer jobs. In a reasonable size group, you'll find the task at the top of one person's list is at the bottom of someone else's. This is great news – now you can mix and match tasks to the best possible effect for each volunteer.



Are real responsibilities delegated to volunteers, or do they always need to 'check with management' before taking action? Always treat your volunteers as capable of exercising good judgment. Give volunteers the authority to make certain decisions, don't just assign tasks. The greater the operational freedom volunteers have, the greater the retention.

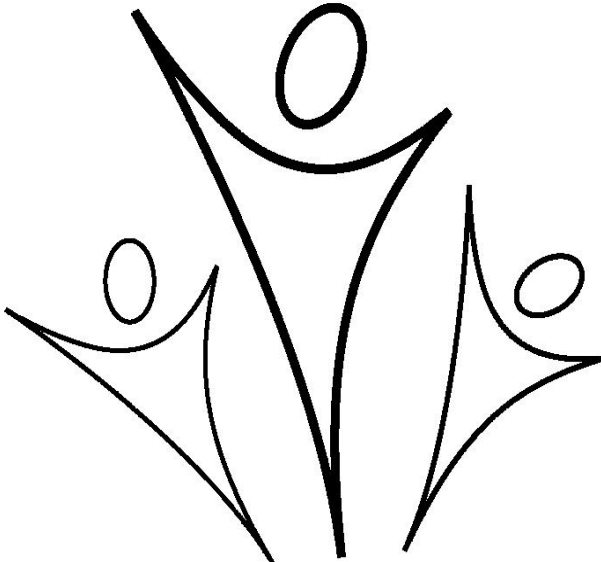
In business, many companies have increased productivity and reduced absenteeism and staff turnover by having a flexible approach to task scheduling. The aim is to allow employees to achieve a better balance between their work and home lives. This works with volunteers too! Be more flexible with volunteers as they often balance paid employment, home life and volunteer work.



Sometimes the best person for the job is two people! Try pairing volunteers in a job share arrangement. You can pair similar personalities together to provide a ready-made support system for each other. Or if you are really daring, pair together opposites to spark greater creativity and innovation.



Communication



Critically evaluate your organization’s *communication and feedback* processes – a vital part of organizational culture and climate. Is information openly shared with all involved, or are there secrets kept from some and shared with others? Do volunteers have a clear understanding of what is actually going on in the organization and where they fit in? Are volunteers kept up to date with decisions and new developments that affect them? Or are they kept in the dark, relying on rumours for information? Eliminate closed communication channels and aim for an open two-way process.



Lack of communication results in innuendo, rumour and gossip. Treat your volunteers as ‘insiders’ – bring them into the communication loop so they never have to say ‘nobody told me that’. Be alert to including rather than excluding volunteers on the ‘best bits’ of information.



Keenly observe how senior management and you yourself communicate with volunteers and paid staff. Phrases like ‘we’ve got a major problem’ or ‘there’s gonna be big changes made around here’ just instil fear and negativity. What a difference it would make to hear ‘great news – we have a terrific challenge to meet’ or ‘we have a unique opportunity to improve’.



Practise changing negative words or situations into positives. Write down a scenario or task you are facing that is daunting. Challenge yourself to write at least three things that are positive about it. You can do this as a group exercise with your staff and volunteers too. Negative language reinforces fear and drains your energy. Positive language will open up opportunities. Train yourself to become more aware of the language you are using.




Research has shown that one of the main reasons volunteers leave is because they feel ignored and undervalued. Find as many ways as possible to listen and for your volunteers to be heard. Exclude them from the communication loop and they will be gone!



Opportunities are often missed because we are broadcasting when we should be listening.

Anonymous



Run a monthly informal ‘what’s up’ session with your volunteers. Keep them up to date on what’s happening so rumours don’t get out of control, and get their feedback on things that are happening that especially affect them.



Regularly check in with each volunteer. Ask them to tell you one thing you can do better for them and how. Or ask them for one thing senior management could do better for them. This can work both ways, giving you the chance to ask volunteers one thing they might do better as well.

Always listen to responses with an open mind and take action to implement suggestions wherever possible. Feedback should be an opportunity for you to learn about how a volunteer feels and how they feel they are being treated, as much as for the volunteer to learn how their contribution is being valued.

§ § §

Try this exercise with your volunteers. Have them complete the sentence: ‘If I were in charge of this program I would . . .’ This encourages new and creative ideas and as an added bonus produces ‘ownership’ of these ideas. What a powerful reinforcement of the importance of their roles as volunteers in the organization!

§ § §

Consider whether your volunteers truly have a voice in your organization. Are they represented on important committees and boards? Are they actively encouraged to express their views? Ask yourself how readily volunteers could actually change the way things are done.

§ § §

How are differences of opinion treated? Are problems and conflicts freely aired or swept under the carpet? Friction and differences always exist in any human gathering – ensure they are used creatively rather than negatively.

§ § §

Put that suggestion box to work – clear it regularly, and read and use the suggestions. If suggestions are signed, send a thankyou note to the person who made the suggestion. Take it high-tech! Set up an internal email suggestion box. Allow people to post suggestions for others to comment on, and take the best for implementation.

§ § §

Honest differences are often a healthy sign of progress.

Mahatma Gandhi



Beware of asking for suggestions and never using them. Don’t constantly ask for input but never use it – it can be worse than not asking at all. Design a process for seeking and implementing suggestions and rewarding those who make them. Even if an idea cannot be implemented, take the time to acknowledge the person who made the suggestion.

§ § §

Regular newsletters (whether hardcopy or via email) are great communication tools. Great newsletters raise morale and keep everyone up to date as each edition is eagerly anticipated. Don’t use your newsletter for organizational information only – you might as well just send a memo from management. Balance essential organizational information with people’s good news such as births, anniversaries, birthdays or achievements.

§ § §

Get some fun sections into that newsletter – book, movie and restaurant reviews; favourite jokes; or feel-good chicken-soup-type anecdotes. Recipes, puzzles, competitions, poems, letters to the editor, bouquets and brickbats, volunteer profiles, ‘action’ photographs – the list of possibilities is endless.

§ § §

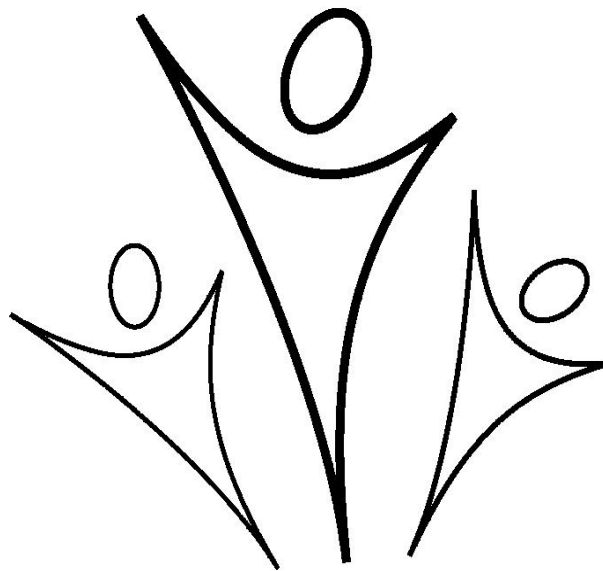
Keep the newsletter short, sharp and snappy – go for quality rather than quantity. Aim for a regular edition but don’t make it so frequent it becomes a burden. Tri-monthly can be just as effective as monthly editions. Consider recruiting a younger volunteer with a passion for journalism to take on the production of this regular volunteer newsletter.

§ § §

Circulate the newsletter to as wide an audience as your budget permits. Mail it to the home address of volunteers and their families, to clients and supporters. Make it a publication that volunteers are happy to share – it’s great publicity too!

§ § §

Relationships



Relationships can make or break the culture and climate of your organization. Good relationships between volunteers and management, volunteers and paid staff, and amongst volunteers themselves are all vitally important. Everyone needs to feel connected and to have a sense of belonging in interacting with others. The more your volunteers enjoy working with and being around other paid staff, the longer they will stay.



Actions speak louder than words. Does *senior management*, from your Chief Executive Officer (CEO) down, talk about appreciating and valuing volunteers but treat volunteers like second-class citizens? Do they really know what a volunteer looks like and what work your volunteers do? Have your volunteers ever met the CEO and the senior management team?



Valuing volunteers starts at the top. Be aware of senior management’s attitude. Are they too busy, never around or always too occupied by more important matters to notice and acknowledge volunteers? This negative message filters down to volunteers. Having senior management committed to volunteers ensures committed volunteers.



Be sure everyone in the organization can clearly answer the question – why do we need volunteers? Ensure volunteers are never treated as a stopgap measure until there’s enough money to hire more paid staff. Be clear about why volunteers are the first and best choice for the tasks they do.



How do people build relationships with people they’ve never associated with before? By mixing together. Be on the lookout for ways to bring managers and volunteers together in the same place at the same time in informal meet-and-greet sessions. After all, they’re working for the same goals. Find ways for them to eyeball each other regularly.



Make sure senior management know what’s really happening at the ‘coalface’. Arrange for them to join in and mingle with volunteers on the job. It has far greater impact for them to see for themselves what it’s like for volunteers than to be told by others.



Have managers periodically swap roles with volunteers for a day. Have volunteers decide what tasks management should undertake – making coffee, photocopying, answering phones, visiting clients, delivering meals or cleaning out the kennels. Walking a mile in another’s shoes always enhances appreciation for the other.



Hold a regular volunteer appreciation luncheon. Make it a buffet. Have senior managers cook and serve the meal. Challenge the managers to thank each volunteer by name as they move through the serving line.

§ § §

Host a forum with senior management in the hot seat. Have volunteers' fire questions and suggestions at them for immediate response or rapid follow-up. Keep it good natured and constructive, but if they can't stand the heat it might be time for them to spend more time in the kitchen!

§ § §

Sometimes, you need to understand that senior management do care about volunteers but just don't know how to show it. This is a time to exercise great subtlety! Try to arrange for management to learn these skills. Look for a recognition workshop that will explain the psychology of recognition, demonstrate different types of rewards and assist in developing recognition systems, skills and techniques.

§ § §

Honestly assess the relationship between *paid staff* and volunteers. How do paid staff really feel about volunteers? Are they truly seen as part of the team or just an unavoidable nuisance? Are they seen as fellow professionals or unskilled labour? Do volunteers feel that they are treated equally to paid staff? Are volunteers recognized and rewarded alone or in partnership with their paid staff team members? Does conflict or harmony exist between paid staff and volunteers?

A company with internal dissension is drained of energy before it has a chance to devote itself to its proper purpose.

J.C. Penney



§ § §

Harmony between volunteers and paid staff is an essential part of volunteer retention. An organization needs to treat both as teams in partnership performing different roles. Emphasise the importance of the contributions of all, as colleagues and co-workers. Ensure that paid staff and volunteers, although different, are treated as equals. Your volunteers are also members of staff – it just so happens that some staff are paid and some are unpaid.

§ § §

Organizations often fall into one of two traps: some focus all their energies on paid staff, ignoring dedicated volunteers; some over-praise volunteers with paid staff scarcely rating a mention or a word of thanks. Strive to find a balance. Unless both groups are appreciated and recognized, resentment and conflict will abound.

§ § §

Try this simple test. Ask volunteers a few general questions about paid staff and management. If volunteers answer with terminology like ‘they’ and ‘them’ instead of ‘we’ and ‘us’, there is trouble brewing!

§ § §

Aim to have paid staff involved in the orientation of all volunteers. New volunteers will become immediately aware of staff issues and staff will get to know the new recruits. Guarantee successful staff and volunteer relations by increasing the understanding on both sides from the beginning.

§ § §

Are paid staff aware of volunteers’ needs? Do they know or understand what motivates your volunteers? Do they develop effective ways to supervise and acknowledge volunteers? Conversely, do volunteers understand the demands placed on paid staff? Find more ways to make both groups aware of each other’s needs.

§ § §

Are paid staff conscious of the ‘real’ contributions volunteers make to organizational outcomes? Are volunteers aware of the contributions made by staff? Make sure the ‘good news’ contributions of both groups are widely circulated.

§ § §

Hold a discussion forum with volunteers and paid staff. Or stage a debate asking paid staff to make the case for volunteer needs and volunteers to make the case for paid staff. There’s nothing like being able to see both sides of the coin.

§ § §

Create a Bill of Rights for Volunteers. Don’t stop there! Balance the books and create a Bill of Rights for Paid Staff. Focus on giving messages of equality.

§ § §

Arrange for volunteers and paid staff to swap roles for a day, having the opportunity to walk in each other’s shoes. Start a mutual mentoring program. Just as volunteers mentor other volunteers, have volunteers mentor staff so they understand who their volunteers really are.

§ § §

How would staff react if decisions affecting them were made and imposed on them by volunteers without consultation? Outrage would abound! So why are volunteers left out of decisions affecting them? Develop decision-making processes that include rather than exclude your volunteers.

I am free of all prejudice.
I hate everyone equally.

W.C. Fields



Aim to make the following statements true of your organization: ‘Our volunteers are genuinely seen as complementing our paid staff and are not seen as a burden or as a threat to staff positions’; ‘Our paid staff believe that the time spent in supervising volunteers is worthwhile because working together we all achieve more’; ‘Our paid staff are positively evaluated and rewarded for developing good relationships with volunteers’; ‘The ability to work well with volunteers is an important factor in selecting our paid staff’.



Relationships between volunteers *themselves* contribute to volunteers feeling that they ‘fit in’, or they don’t. Ask your volunteers these questions: Do they feel accepted as part of the organization? Do they feel like part of the team? Have they made new friends with other volunteers? Many volunteers have signed up for one reason and then stayed on because of the friendships they have made along the way.



Observe and monitor relationships between groups of volunteers. Stop personality clashes from destroying relationships. Reallocate, reassign or redesign tasks to allow incompatible volunteers to continue without friction and tension. Always act quickly to nip looming conflicts in the bud.



Encourage volunteers to get together with each other outside of their volunteering work. Provide social opportunities for volunteers to interact on-site. Forging great friendships is a bonus for volunteers and enhances their feelings of being in the right place.




Promote volunteer friendships but avoid cliques. Understand that ‘word of mouth’ recruitment means that volunteers tend to ask people similar to themselves to join up – this can produce cliques. If they’re not part of the ‘in-crowd’, new volunteers may find themselves feeling on the outer. Guard against segregation amongst volunteers.

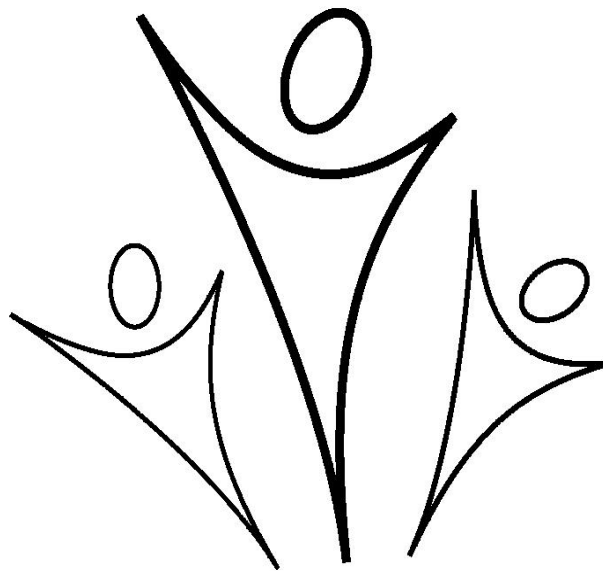


One of the tests of leadership is the ability to recognize a problem before it becomes an emergency.

Arnold Glasgow



Leadership



Challenge yourself as a leader of volunteers to utilise a myriad of ways to help retain and say thank you to each and every one of your volunteers. The best leaders begin a process of retaining and recognizing volunteers from their very first contact. Leaders find ways to recognize all types of volunteers – from the ‘hit and run’ to the long-termer.



Leadership can make or break the volunteering experience. Much has been written on the subject of leadership by Steve McCurley and others, below are *four of the most important characteristics* of great leaders identified in the literature. Read on and see how you measure up.



Firstly, great leaders have a *clear vision* of the organizational mission and of what ‘could be’. They can translate this vision into goals, outcomes and action plans. They are passionate about and able to communicate this vision to others, inspiring and motivating those around them. They are flexible, incorporating the ideas of others and recognizing that there are multiple ways to achieve the vision.




Secondly, great leaders are guided by principles of *high moral standards* based on equality and respect for all. They acknowledge the unique contribution of each individual in achieving the goals and overall organizational mission.



Thirdly, great leaders *genuinely care* about others and their wellbeing. They aim to find ways to recognize and reward the contributions of all in ways that are personally meaningful to each person. They inspire others to perform at their very best.

Leaders don't force people to follow – they invite them on a journey.

Charles S. Lauer





Fourthly, great leaders develop *processes and procedures* to move closer rather than further away from the overall mission – procedures that are simple, uncomplicated and remove barriers; processes that include and empower others. Great leaders constantly seek to learn from the past, improve the present and succeed in the future.



From leadership characteristics to *leadership recognition styles*. Some leaders see no need to talk to staff until a mistake is made. Volunteers don't even know they are there until something goes wrong, and there is no recognition of all the good work. Other leaders go to the other extreme, with constant but insincere flattery, complimenting everyone for everything without discrimination and with vague generalizations. This holds no true meaning.



True leadership is about sincere, honest and personal recognition of your volunteers. It is based on genuine warmth, appreciation and validation. You and your volunteers know the difference. How would you describe your leadership style? How would others describe it?



Do you realise that you may tend to recognize and reward others on the basis of how YOU personally would like to be rewarded and recognized? The danger is this won't really recognize the uniqueness of each of your volunteers. Examine what is your natural recognition style and how it has skewed your recognition efforts. Think about whether you are filtering your recognition techniques through your own 'rose-coloured' glasses.



Feel uncomfortable trying new ways to recognize others? Overcome that awkwardness and be prepared to test some new ideas. Learn from other leaders how they run successful recognition programs and give it a go – you might surprise yourself with the fun you have!



Studies have shown that up to 90% of people believe they have great ideas on improving their organization, but only 30% believe management has any interest in hearing their ideas. Embrace this great leadership technique and soak up suggestions from others. Ideas are an incredibly valuable resource – don't squander them by ignoring them.



Ask for ideas, listen to them, and keep an open mind. Welcome questions and treat mistakes as part of the learning process. Ensure volunteers know you value their opinions. Have a regular 'new ideas day' where all staff and volunteers are encouraged to come up with new ways to improve services, streamline procedures and develop better recognition methods.



Plan a 'futures day' so all your volunteers can come together to plan into the future. Don't just look at planning for next year, but ask what the volunteer program could look like five, ten or twenty years into the future.



Remain inquisitive, curious and thoughtful. Encourage others to ask why time is being spent on certain tasks rather than on others. Think outside the box! Continually ask, why are we doing things this way and what would happen if we did it another way?



No need for a massive overhaul – become a tweaker! Wholesale changes are not always needed. You often just need to keep 'tweaking' things a little – making some minor changes or modifications can have big results.

Keep a success diary or ‘positives log’. Once a week, set aside a few minutes to jot down the positive achievements and affirming moments and events of the week. Share these jottings with your volunteer team. Remind them that small successes add up to big achievements.



Take this idea even further and keep a success diary for each individual member of your team. Write down their achievements, great things they’ve been part of making happen. Add in how you feel about them. Let them know that you know how valuable they are. At the end of the year, this diary full of positive affirmations would make a great gift.



Remember that people mirror the behaviour of those around them, particularly those in leadership. If you show loyalty to your volunteers, you will be repaid in kind. If you are optimistic, supportive and happy, your volunteers will follow this example. You influence others daily – ensure that this influence is positive.



Some people use the excuse that if senior management do not undertake improvements, change is not possible. Commitment from the top makes a huge difference but don’t always wait for management to make some moves. Commit yourself to continuous improvement and let management run to catch up!

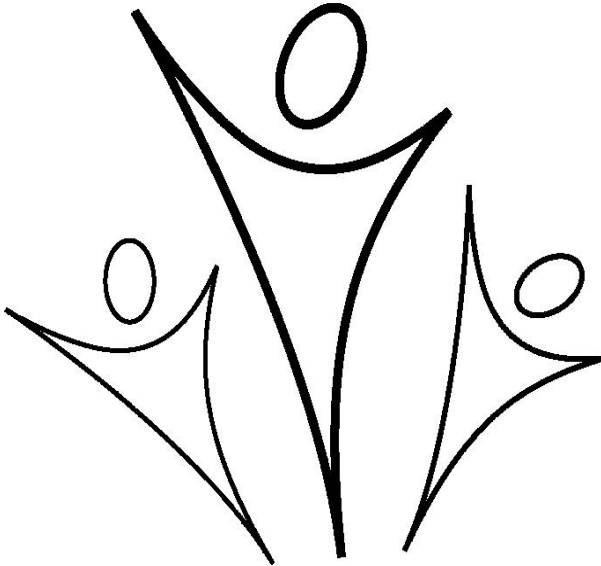


Leadership has a harder job to do than just choose sides. It must bring sides together.

Jesse Jackson



Dismissing a volunteer



Leadership requires making the tough decisions too. In business, non-contributing employees get fired. Sometimes, not often, it is the same with volunteers – you need to dismiss them. Difficult volunteers who do more harm than good and who disrupt, distress and demotivate other volunteers must be dealt with. Avoid letting unresolved conflict and resentment build up. Promptly resolve issues or remove personalities, otherwise the worst volunteer will still be coming through the front door while your best volunteers have left by the back door.

§ § §

An ounce of preparation avoids a ton of regret. Don't wait until you have a problem volunteer to be dismissed, establish a formalised volunteer dismissal procedure now. Make it a clear and uncomplicated process such as 'three strikes and you're out'. Ensure that all warnings are not vague generalizations, relate specifically to the issues, and are clearly understood by the volunteer. Always aim to find resolutions in cooperation with the volunteer at each stage so that dismissal becomes the very last option.

It isn't the people you fire who make your life miserable, it's the people you don't.

Harvey Mackay

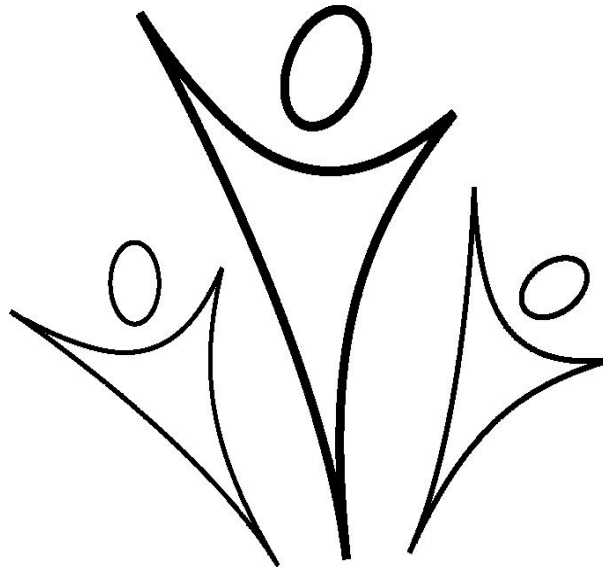


§ § §

You don't have to reinvent the wheel. Many other organizations already have established dismissal procedures for volunteers. Contact them and ask about their procedures. Check whether you can adapt these to meet your needs. You may never have to ask a volunteer to leave, but if you do, you will already have a clear procedure in place.

§ § §

Recruiting volunteers



Successful retention is closely intertwined with successful recruitment, screening, selection, orientation and training of your volunteers. Let's begin with recruitment. Start with the following ideas to get you thinking and then find 100s more in the book *Count Me In! 501 Ideas on Recruiting Volunteers*.

§ § §

Recognize that first impressions count. It is said that in the first 4 minutes of meeting someone we form an impression that can take a lot to change. What first impressions are potential volunteers getting of your organization? Are they of a shabby, unwelcoming or stress-filled environment? Or are they of a welcoming, friendly 'can do' atmosphere? You only get one chance to make a first impression – make it a good one.

§ § §

Understand that a person's *perception* is their *reality*. Even if your organization is dynamic and lively, if the initial *perception* is one of chaos, confusion and disorganization then nothing will change this *reality* in a person's mind. Be aware that every potential volunteer is constantly assessing whether they have made the right decision by approaching your organization – do whatever it takes to reassure them this is where they belong.

§ § §

Ever searched for your organization on the internet search engines? Type it in and see what comes up. Now go to your website and have a really good look around. Is it easy to navigate? Is it visually interesting? Is the information up to date? Ask your current volunteers to take a look and rate the site. Potential volunteers are increasingly checking out your organization through your online shopfront – your website. Does it make you want to buy or to fly?

§ § §

Ensure that the 'little' things are done well. You don't always know how many potential volunteers have been lost because you did not receive a telephone message, delayed returning a call, were late for an appointment or were distracted during the selection interview. Take care of the 'little' things and the 'big' decision by someone to volunteer will take care of itself.

§ § §

Look at your 'gatekeepers' – the first point of contact and entry into your organization. Are they welcoming, friendly, smiling people or stressed, busy, frowning people with workloads that make newcomers feel they are just one more intrusion upon their day?

§ § §

It's the little things that count. You can sit on top of a mountain, but you can't sit on a tack.

Anonymous



What about you? The first contact with you is a critical test for your organization. Are you enthusiastic, appreciative and welcoming? Or are you really a 'no-go zone' and a prophet of doom? As Susan J. Ellis (2002:1) in her book *The Volunteer Recruitment Book* explains: "Like so many other things in life, success as a recruiter of volunteers is highly dependent on attitude. If you can't imagine that anyone will volunteer for you, they probably won't. On the other hand, if you approach recruiting with a positive set of expectations, you will find that people will indeed join up".

§ § §

Never, ever promise what you can't deliver. Sometimes organizations are so desperate for volunteers that they will say anything. This leads to dissatisfied and disillusioned ex-volunteers. Be open and honest about your requirements and establish realistic expectations on both sides. For volunteers, when expectations and experience don't gel, disappointment is the result.

§ § §

Get serious about targeted recruiting. Target marketing can get you the best volunteers for the job and save a great deal of time in the selection process. Do you tend to ask the person most likely to say yes to volunteer? Or do you consider the qualities or skills needed, and then determine the most suitable people to target and recruit?

§ § §

Alternatively, target the people you really want and then design the job around them. If someone has lots of great attributes, you can always find or create a role to suit them. Time to stop the 'scatter gun' approach to recruiting and 'zero in' on your target.

§ § §

Remember that the number one reason given by people for volunteering is 'because someone asked me'. Ask, ask, ask! Giving people written information or telling them about your organization is not asking them, it is *informing* them. Be confident about this – there is no substitute for asking the direct question, 'Would you like to volunteer for us?'

§ § §

Understand that if someone does say 'no' to volunteering it can often mean 'not now'. Don't take it personally. Check if you can contact them in the future: no pressure but perhaps their circumstances will change. If they agree, then stay in touch via newsletters, birthday cards and an occasional phone call. Be the first organization to come to mind when they are ready to say 'yes' to volunteering.

§ § §

I discovered I always have choices and sometimes it's only a choice of attitude.

Judith M. Knowlton



Just as important as identifying *whom* to ask is to carefully consider who is the best person to *do* the asking. It may be you or a volunteer who knows them well, or it may be a friend or other colleague. Ensure that the best person is chosen to ask, and then ask, ask, ask!



Develop a system to follow up on prospects who did not join up. They may have requested information about volunteering, attended a selection interview or orientation session and never returned. There are a myriad of reasons why people do not ultimately volunteer, but get some feedback without being pushy. Find out why they decided not to volunteer. Could the recruitment process have been handled better? Are there suggestions they would make to improve the process? Would they consider volunteering in the future?




Check whether your selection or membership criteria are overly restrictive. Are they more about exclusion rather than inclusion of ‘new blood’? Traditions, joining requirements and procedures can be designed to make existing members feel good but just create barriers to entry for new volunteers. Balance the needs of the existing group with those who have yet to join – there needs to be room for all on board the ship.

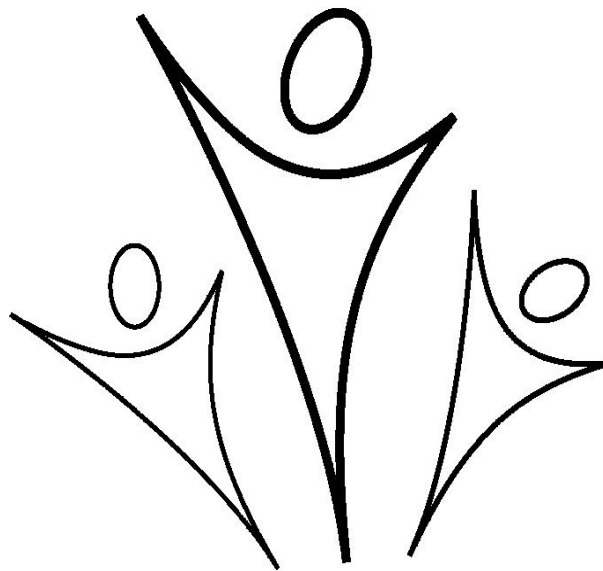


I have witnessed the softening of the hardest of hearts by a simple smile.

Goldie Hawn



Motivations to volunteer



What motivates us moves us! All behaviour is motivated – even inaction. What actually motivates a person to volunteer is a complex and vexing question. Don't assume that what motivates one volunteer, or one group of volunteers, holds true 'across the board'.



Examine the motivations of potential and current volunteers – it can provide valuable insights into focusing your recruitment, retention and recognition efforts. People will only volunteer if they are motivated to do so. Remain non-judgmental, allow for different motivations, and accept that we are all motivated by different things.



Always be able to answer the question for every potential volunteer – What's In It For Me? (WIIFM). Consciously or subconsciously all recruits ask this question as part of deciding to volunteer. It's not about being selfish, it's about 'cost benefit analysis' – what are the benefits to me (feeling good about myself) and at what cost (giving up my free time)?



Explore each potential volunteer's needs and reasons further. Embrace WIIFM to *harness* their motives rather than *judge* them. If a person is volunteering to assist in securing future paid employment, then provide tasks that complement their employment search and provide references for potential employers. Look for the 'win-win' for both sides.




Remember, people often have a combination of motivating factors in their decision to volunteer. This is why no single recruitment message is always the most effective. Weave a number of motivational elements into your message and try to include something for everyone.



Perhaps it is a 'package' of motivations, not a single motivational impulse, that drives behaviour.

Lucy Rose Fischer & Kay Banister Schaffer



Realise that the motivations of volunteers can change over time. What motivates a volunteer to be recruited may be different to what motivates a volunteer to continue and be retained. One person might have joined for social interaction with others, but is now more motivated by the challenging work they are doing. Another person might have been motivated by wanting to give back to the community, but has now found the friendships formed are a major reason they have continued as a volunteer.



Acquire an understanding of some motivational research. David McClelland and John Atkinson in their study identified three main needs that motivate employee behaviour – achievement, power or affiliation. Steve McCurley and Sue Vineyard in their numerous books on volunteering have adapted these three motivations to group volunteers. Summarised below are some practical ways to recognize and meet the needs of these three groups.

Affiliation-orientated people value relationships. They enjoy being surrounded by others and being liked. Provide affiliators with volunteering opportunities that involve direct contact with clients and group-based projects with other volunteers and paid staff. Aim to recognize affiliators through thankyou cards from clients, and opportunities for social events such as luncheons and dinners. Design awards voted on by their peers and present these awards publicly at group events.



Achievement-orientated people value achieving goals and often enjoy tasks that can be measured and quantified such as fundraising. Provide achievers with opportunities to lead projects or work alone on goal-directed tasks so they can see the results. Recognize achievers with more challenging tasks, promotion to a position of greater responsibility or additional training opportunities. Acknowledge them publicly and present ‘most’ or ‘best’ awards that they can display.



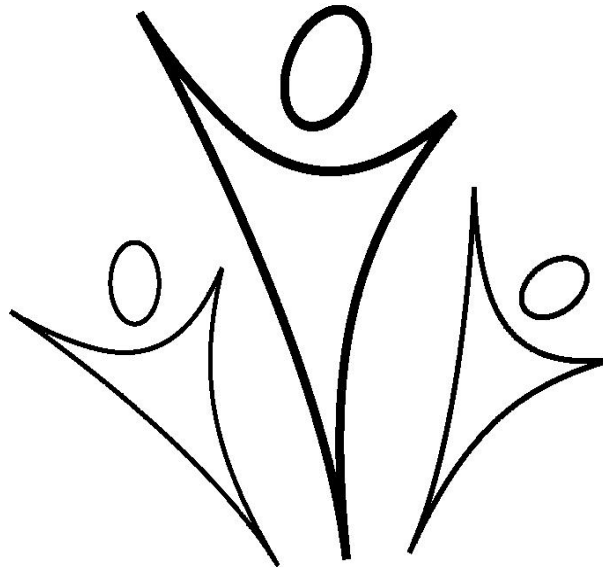
Power-orientated people like to make an impact and to influence others. Provide these volunteers with tasks that provide opportunities for them to mix with other power people and to persuade others to support the cause. Recognize power people by promoting them to more powerful or prestigious positions, sending them thankyou letters from the CEO, or naming an award after them. Acknowledge them publicly in newspapers and newsletters. Have senior management select them for and present them with an award.



Get another perspective on volunteer motivation. One recent body of research involving 2,444 volunteers identified 10 main types of motivation people have for volunteering – values, reciprocity, recognition, understanding, self-esteem, reactivity, social, protective, social interaction and career development. Want to find out more about each motivation? Send an email to judy@mtd4u.com or mtdjudy@iinet.net.au requesting the *free* research report and gain further insight into the complex world of volunteer motivation.



Screening and selection



Improve volunteer retention by picking the right volunteers in the first place. Having identified the job requirements and the personal attributes of the ideal applicant, do not compromise. Don't yield to the temptation to overlook someone's lack of suitability and allow a sense of desperation to override your better judgement just to fill the position. This short-term solution of settling for the first applicant through the door will only make your job more difficult in the long run.

§ § §

Stick with your screening and selection processes – there are numerous ways of going about it. Ask applicants to address specific selection criteria related to clear job descriptions. Conduct interviews, ask for and contact referees, and request police clearances and health checks as needed.

§ § §

When you interview an applicant, get interested in them. Find out all you can about them. Don't just stick to the obvious – discover what really makes them tick. Ask about their family, hobbies, interests, hopes and dreams, values and expectations.

§ § §

Looking for someone to work as part of a volunteer team? Consider an alternative interview process to you alone. Have current volunteers on the interview panel. Their input and insight can make the difference between a 'nice' choice and the 'right' choice. Since they are part of the selection panel, they will have a vested interest in making sure the new volunteer is easily accepted into the team.

§ § §

Always ask for a minimum of three referees and do contact them. Your other volunteers, clients and organization are depending on you to thoroughly check out the applicants – so don't just go through the motions.

§ § §

Referees often know the applicant well and can surprise you with very candid insights on the applicant's strengths and weaknesses. Give them a call and ask some direct questions. Listen, not only to their words, but also to the tone of their voice, any uncertainty or hesitation in their responses, or any reluctance to give a straight answer. Sometimes what referees don't say can be just as powerful as what they do say.

§ § §

People have made at least a start at understanding the meaning of life when they plant shade trees under which they know full well they will never sit.

David Elton Trueblood



If your applicant has recent volunteer experience elsewhere, always contact that organization. Get some feedback on how they performed there. If you get the feeling that organization was happy to see that volunteer move on, then maybe it's time for you to keep them moving on too.

§ § §

Understand that the applicant is selecting your organization as much as you are selecting them. Be upfront about your organization's strengths and weaknesses. No need to hang out all the dirty laundry, but be frank, honest and objective. If the applicant then volunteers, there are no nasty surprises – they know what they are getting into and this will enhance the 'fit' between the volunteer and your organization.

§ § §

Failing to disclose any less appealing facts may lure the volunteers in the short term but will not lead to long-term retention. Conduct 'no obligation' information sessions. Show a video of volunteers at work and talking honestly about the best and worst of their experiences. Provide tours of the premises and the chance to chat with current volunteers.

§ § §

Develop a 'try before you buy' selection system so applicants can get a taste of volunteer work for a week and then decide. Or design a more extensive system, allowing applicants to rotate through a number of jobs and locations over several weeks. Give the applicant the chance to see more of the whole organization and choose where they can make the greatest contribution.

§ § §

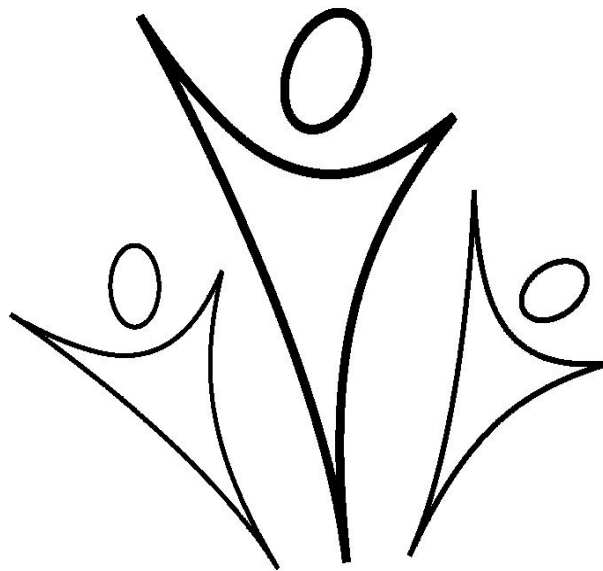
Consider developing a Volunteer Success Profile for your organization. The vital attributes will vary from organization to organization, depending on their mission, culture and structure. In some organizations, the profile might have an emphasis on client service attributes, such as excellent interpersonal skills, a strong desire to serve others, maturity and good judgment. In other organizations, passion for the cause, goal orientation, enthusiasm and creativity might top the list.

§ § §

No matter what selection and screening process you use, if in doubt, always hire the person with the positive and enthusiastic attitude. Specific skills can be learnt, but the attitude comes with the person. It is far easier to teach someone a task than it is to change their attitudes.

§ § §

Orientation



Orientation is often the volunteer's first real experience of your organization in action. The quality of your volunteer orientation and induction plan says a lot about how you and your organization value volunteers. Orientation can range from pitiful and boring to energizing and inspiring. Where does your orientation fit on this continuum?



Does your orientation consist of quick introductions to people who barely acknowledge the new volunteer's presence? Do you hand them the thirteen volumes of organizational policies and procedures to read as you disappear out the door muttering 'good luck with it all'? Or do you have a comprehensive orientation plan that aims to provide reassurance about their most important concerns on fitting in, being able to do the job, not getting lost or not looking stupid?



Go beyond supplying an impersonal copy of the usual policy and procedures manual. Find out the most frequently asked questions by new volunteers. Survey your current volunteers – ask them what they would like to have known when they started. Have them write the answers to each question and compile this into the new volunteer's handbook.



If first impressions and contacts count when recruiting, they are just as important at orientation. Make no mistake – the first few days are crucial for a new volunteer deciding whether to stay with you or stay away. Aspire to make your new volunteers immediately feel a sense of inclusiveness, connectedness and belonging.



Can you still remember your first day at your first job? Most people can and still feel the same emotions when recalling it years afterwards. When your new volunteers ask themselves two questions, 'Have I made the right decision in volunteering here?' and 'Am I going to like it here?' – ensure the answer is a resounding YES!



Make your orientation memorable for all the right reasons. Have you ever experienced the feeling of receiving a standing ovation? How memorable would it be for your new volunteers on their first day to be greeted not just with a nod and a smile, but with a thunderous standing ovation from their new colleagues?



A variation on this theme would be a guard of honour when the new volunteer arrives. Or a photo of the 'star recruit' prominently displayed in the reception area. If you have a noticeboard display of pictures of your volunteers, make sure the new recruits are already included when they start, or make a ceremony of adding their photos on their first day.

The secret of a good memory is attention, and attention to a subject depends upon our interest in it. We rarely forget that which has made a deep impression on our minds.

Tryon Edwards



Throw a welcome party or special morning tea for your new recruit. Introduce them around at the special welcoming event and have each person say a little about themselves. It is a great way to break the ice.

§ § §

Have the CEO involved in the welcoming process for all new volunteers. Whether they personally come to greet them or say a few words at the welcome event, ensure that top management are part of the process.

§ § §

Go further than the welcome when new recruits arrive – get in *before* they arrive. Call them before they start to check how they are and whether they have any queries. Remind them of how much you are looking forward to their coming on board soon. That should help with any last minute cold feet!

§ § §

Design a special newcomer shirt or badge for all new volunteers to wear for their first month. Ensure that everyone knows about its significance and makes a point of greeting anyone wearing the ‘new recruits’ T-shirt or badge.

§ § §

Create a humorous survival kit for all new recruits. The kit might contain food items and a note with each item such as a packet of jelly beans to ‘keep you jumping’. Or a packet of lifesavers for being such a ‘life saver’ and coming on board. Maybe an apple to remember to ‘keep healthy’, or a teabag to ‘take the time to relax too’. This is inexpensive and fun and new volunteers will love the kit.

§ § §

Have a buddy system with each new volunteer teamed up with an experienced volunteer. The ‘buddy’ welcomes them on their first day, shows them around, makes introductions, takes them to lunch and answers any questions. Having someone ‘on the inside’ as an ‘ask me anything’ confidante makes orientation smooth sailing.

§ § §

New volunteers have a heightened sensitivity as they settle in, so pay attention to the small details. Ensure that sense of belonging by providing a place to hang their coat, somewhere to keep their personal belongings safe, access to supplies, a workstation and a place to go and relax.

§ § §

If you are losing volunteers early in the process, it's time to re-examine your orientation process. If you currently hold one long orientation session, try several shorter sessions. If you conduct one-on-one orientations, try small group sessions. If current volunteers are not involved in the process, start including them.

☺ ☺ ☺

Regularly check with newer volunteers ways to improve your orientation process. What was missing in the process? What do they wish they had found out about sooner rather than later? What works and what could be improved?

☺ ☺ ☺

The most important thing in communication is to hear what isn't being said.

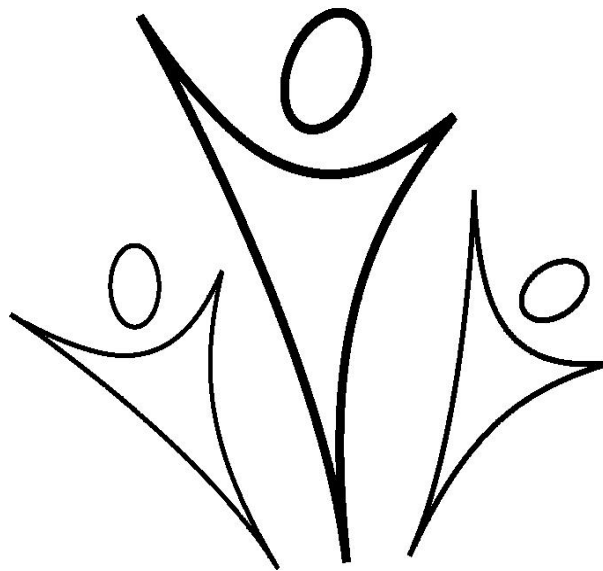
Peter Drucker



Ultimately, follow the advice of Mary Kay Ash and see every new volunteer as wearing a sign saying, 'please make me feel important and special'. Your orientation will be a success as there are very few places where people really do feel appreciated.

☺ ☺ ☺

Training



Understand that the longer your volunteers are involved in training before they get to the volunteer work itself, the less likely you are to retain them. Re-examine how much of your ‘hands off’ training is really necessary and how much could become ‘hands on’, on-the-job learning.



Now there is definitely a need for good quality training. Much volunteer training is ineffective and irrelevant and is conducted by presenters who are downright boring. Commit to designing training that is not just a case of ‘one size fits all’. Redesign your training program to eliminate the unnecessary, incorporate the different learning styles of your volunteers, and be as engaging and interactive as possible.



Want to know how to successfully meet the training needs of new volunteers? Ask the volunteers who have gone before them. What would a volunteer starting this job really need to know? What do you wish you had known earlier? What advice would you give them? What resources and aspects of training did you find the most useful when you began? And what was of no use at all?



Consider designing your entire training program around the topics chosen by your volunteers. Who better to know what is required on the job? Include them in the development and presentation of the training.



Endeavour to transform training from theoretical to practical. Look at task-oriented opportunities with new volunteers observing others in action, role-playing and assisting other volunteers performing relevant tasks. This will make the transition to performing tasks on their own much smoother.



Move beyond orientation training and look at your training as part of lifelong learning for your volunteers. Provide frequent opportunities for volunteers to observe others doing their jobs. This ‘fly on the wall’ approach provides a greater understanding of what others do and may open up opportunities for volunteers to become involved in other tasks.



Create a skills register listing all the skills of your current volunteers. Allow volunteers to choose new skills they are interested in learning. Then match them with other volunteers who will ‘skill them up’.



We are continually faced with a series of great opportunities brilliantly disguised as insoluble problems.

John W. Gardner



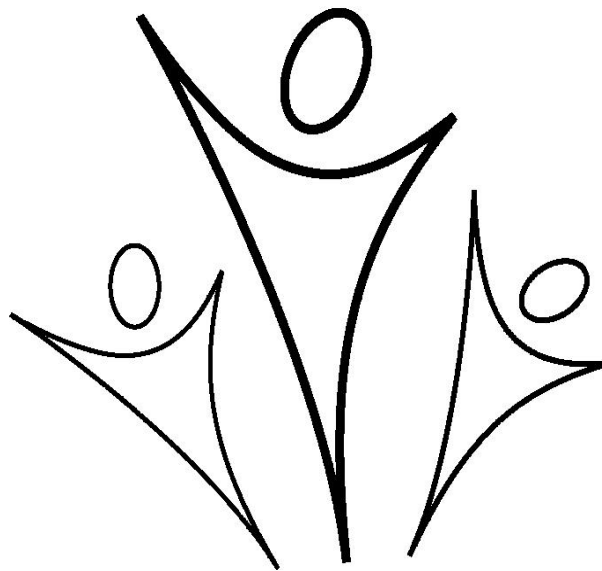
Is your training so effective that people join as volunteers just to do the training and then leave, e.g. first aid or computer training? This is a great expenditure of resources for little return. Establish a time commitment contract to increase your retention rate. Have volunteers agree to serve a minimum number of hours when their training has been completed.

§ § §

Whatever form your training takes, be committed to continually monitoring and evaluating it in collaboration with your volunteers. Always ask yourself, is this training needed, relevant and effective? Is it presented in a manner that fits the different learning needs of our volunteers? Can we do it better? Training should always be about 'gain' not 'pain'.

§ § §

Life cycle of a volunteer



Each and every volunteer has their own life cycle throughout their involvement with your organization. Being aware of and responding to the different stages of this life cycle can increase your volunteer retention. Aim to have the flexibility to deal with their changing motivations, needs and circumstances.



Start with a *personal growth plan* for each *new volunteer*. Demonstrate that as their volunteer career unfolds, they will have opportunities to learn new skills, vary their tasks, build good personal relationships and have access to your support and advice at every step along the way.



Include a scheduled one-on-one review meeting within their first month. Avoid the all too common 'gap' between a new volunteer's expectations before commencing and their experiences afterwards. New volunteers often want to achieve 'great' things, having little knowledge of what their tasks really entail. Experience on the job results in a more realistic understanding of what is possible and a need to adjust their expectations. Help them to bridge this 'expectations gap'.



During a first review meeting ask your volunteer: Does the job you are now doing meet your expectations? Are you getting what you expected out of volunteering? Is it a vastly different experience from your initial impressions? Does the job overall match your skills and interests? Do you feel you can handle what is asked of you? Do you feel a sense of achievement? Open and frank discussion can reassure your volunteer about the value of their contribution and assist you in determining if this is still the right place for them.



More volunteers leave within the first 6 months than at any other time in the life cycle of their volunteering. Reduce this attrition rate by keeping in close contact with your new recruits. Schedule several more monthly or bimonthly review interviews during this time. Continue to reassure volunteers and be ready to address any unfulfilled expectations. Accommodate them if they request reassignment to other tasks. Be flexible in restructuring their days and hours. It's all about monitoring and flexibility to retain these volunteers.



Good leaders make people feel that they're at the very heart of things, not at the periphery. Everyone feels that he or she makes a difference to the success of the organization. When that happens people feel centered and that gives their work meaning.

Warren Bennis



Volunteers often leave not because they really want to but because they are bored or trapped in unfulfilling tasks they have outgrown. Don't let this happen to your volunteers. Use periodic reviews to uncover such feelings and reinvigorate your volunteers with new and different tasks.



Include these questions in your three-monthly or six-monthly reviews with *experienced volunteers*: Are you still enjoying the work you are doing? Would you like a change? Are the jobs you are doing meeting your expectations? Do you need to look at new challenges? Are there other positions, roles and duties within the organization that you would be interested in undertaking? Is the passion still there?



These questions allow experienced volunteers to reshape their volunteer work. They may move to a leadership role. Or become part of your recruitment and recognition team. Or become a guide and mentor to new volunteers. Provide them with opportunities to do whatever it takes to rekindle the passion!



A good personal growth plan is also your best burnout prevention strategy. It accommodates the changing lives of your volunteers. Volunteers may want to stay on but now have less time to give. Ensure your periodic reviews contain such questions as: Is the job flexible enough to fit in with your life? Is the volunteer work becoming too intrusive or demanding of the time you have available? Be flexible and reduce hours when needed.



Design a volunteer 'temp' system to regenerate those tired volunteers. Have a back-up team of temporary volunteers who only need to come in every so often to relieve your current volunteers. This is a great way of ensuring they take some annual leave – just as paid staff do – to recharge the batteries.



It's really important to give over-committed volunteers permission to take a 'volunteer holiday'. Reassure them that they are not letting you down by looking after themselves. Allow them to take a break from their volunteer work and set a date for them to be welcomed back with open arms.



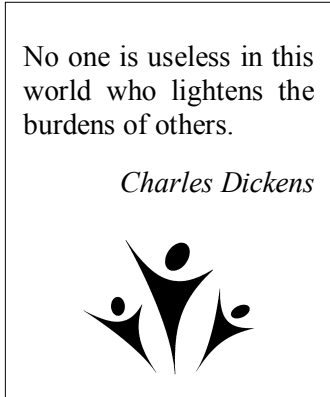
Some volunteers find it difficult to say no – to clients, to staff, to YOU. Identify these vulnerable volunteers and say no *for* them. Have clear guidelines and define boundaries on their involvement. Set limits on their time and contribution. Let them know they are too valuable for you to allow them to run themselves into the ground.



Develop role rotation opportunities for your volunteers. Keep experienced volunteers creative and fresh by rotating them through different roles, including leadership positions.

§ § §

Volunteers providing support roles without direct contact with clients often don't see the results of their hard work behind the scenes. Lift their spirits by finding ways to ensure they see the difference their contribution is making to the 'front-line'. Have clients contact them to thank them for their work. Arrange for them to spend some time with upfront volunteers. Show them they are a vital link in the chain.



§ § §

With committee or board positions, always have a succession plan. Stop the 'brain drain' so skills and knowledge are handed on and not lost. Plan for retirements in an orderly way.

§ § §

This effective way is very simple. Design overlapping terms of office. For example, instead of a one-year term, make it eighteen months. Have them spend the first three months working with the outgoing office-bearer, learning the ropes before they retire. Then, have them serve a twelve-month term. In the final three months, have them work with the incoming successor passing on all that vital knowledge.

§ § §

Are there committee or board positions that have been traditionally occupied by a single person struggling in the role? These positions can be very hard to fill as the workload seems overwhelming. What about having two people working in the role to share the load. Try co-secretaries – that's better than 'no' secretaries!

§ § §

When volunteers leave, ensure that exit information is collected via personal or telephone *exit interviews or surveys*. Include questions about the culture and climate and their general level of satisfaction as a volunteer. Ensure that their 'real' reasons for leaving are understood.

§ § §

Also ask questions around the job itself: What are the current priorities associated with your role? How have you modified the job compared to the job description? Are extra resources needed for the job? Is the training relevant and effective? What are the pluses and minuses associated with the job? Seek answers that will make things easier for their replacement to step into the role.

§ § §

Well-conducted exit interviews provide the feedback needed to ensure continual improvement. When objectively received, you will find that criticism can be just as useful as compliments. The interview is also a final chance to personally say thank you and provide closure for both you and the volunteer.



If you simply don't have time to conduct these interviews yourself, choose wisely and delegate to others in the organization if possible. Or outsource it. Engage a research firm to obtain honest, anonymous feedback from departing volunteers through surveys, and to make recommendations for positive changes based upon the information gleaned. Don't waste this valuable feedback opportunity.



Sometimes, despite all your best efforts, a volunteer placement simply does not work. Don't try to stop an unhappy volunteer from leaving. Attempting to hold on to them is a 'no win' for you, your organization, clients, other volunteers and the current volunteer themselves.



Try to part on amicable terms. Manage the outgoing volunteer as sympathetically as possible and learn from their feedback. In the past, it was estimated that an unhappy customer would tell 5 to 10 other people. Today, your unhappy ex-volunteer can log on to the internet and tell millions worldwide!



Some turnover of volunteers is healthy for your organization – new volunteers bring fresh ideas and a fresh perspective. Changes in lifestyle mean even the most satisfied volunteers will need to leave one day. Accept this as part of the territory and don't take it personally.




Never use guilt-tripping messages like 'you can't let us down' as a lever to retain a valued volunteer. Give them your thanks and permission to leave and do what is right for them. After all, they have certainly done right by you and your organization.

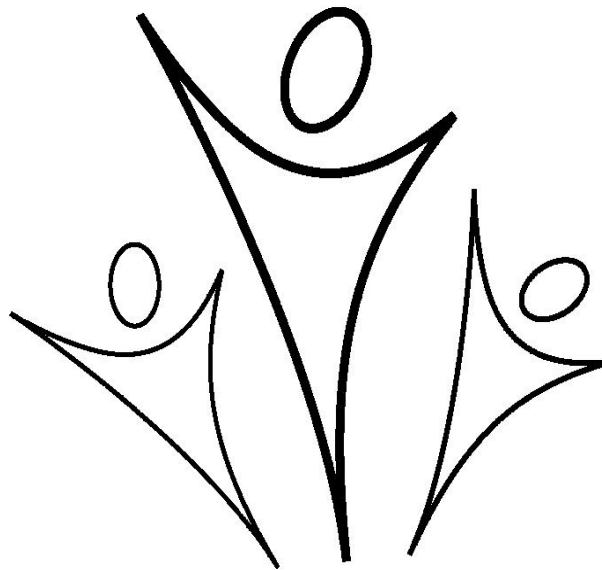


In volunteer administration, there is a lot of focus on keeping volunteers. But I think it is important to say to a volunteer that it's okay to leave. Many volunteers struggle with that issue for a long time. But it is important to say to them, 'You can move on'.

Lucy Rose Fischer & Kay Banister Schaffer



*Developing a successful recognition
and reward program*



Recognition is a crucial component of volunteer retention. A retention plan implementing lots of ideas already discussed in this book will not be successful without incorporating an effective recognition and reward system for your volunteers. Put simply, unappreciated and unrecognized volunteers will vote with their feet and leave.



We are all human! The need to be recognized, rewarded and appreciated is a basic human need. Without recognition, you need a really thick skin and great internal drive to keep on going. Every one of us needs to feel valued for our efforts, our skills, our achievements and our potential.



It has been said that volunteers do not want to be thanked. Rubbish! Studies consistently show that people don't volunteer just to be recognized, but the number one reason they give for leaving is that they do not feel appreciated. Be clear that it's not that volunteers don't want thanks, it's how each individual volunteer wants to be thanked that is the key. It's different strokes for different folks! For some, it is a public display of recognition at an event, for others it is a private moment of thanks. For most volunteers, it's a combination of both public and private recognition.



It's not enough to have 'warm and fuzzy' feelings inside about your volunteers and feel grateful to them without expressing it. It means 'zip' that you think positively about them if they are never told. Ensure your volunteers are recognized and reinforce that someone notices them and cares about them. What is the point of giving your all when nobody acknowledges what you have given?



Whatever type of recognition and reward program you have in place, there are *five* key components to making it an outstanding success. Recognition needs to be: sincere and honest, consistent and based on equality, timely and specific, continuous and frequent, and most of all customized and personalized.



Firstly, make sure that your recognition is *sincere and honest*. Give praise when it is well deserved and give lots of it. If you give false praise to one volunteer for substandard work, then exactly the same praise to another volunteer for outstanding work, it will be come meaningless. Volunteers know when they truly deserve praise and when they don't. Undeserved or insincere flattery that 'lays it on thick' will hinder rather than help your retention efforts.



Secondly, make your recognition *consistent and based on equality* for all. Give it without fear or favour. Be consistent and remove any favouritism by establishing clear criteria for achieving rewards. Ensure all your volunteers have equal opportunity to receive these rewards through their achievements.



Thirdly, recognition should be *timely and specific*. Timing is critical. The sooner you praise and recognize your volunteers for their achievements, the more impact it will have. The longer a volunteer waits to receive recognition, the less value it will have.



Be specific with your praise. Dump the general platitudes. Always explain why the praise is being given and in the context of what has been achieved. For example, ‘you’ve done a great job’ holds far less meaning compared to ‘you really handled that difficult task very well and I really appreciated how you . . .’




Fourthly, be *continuous and frequent* in your recognition. Understand that recognition is never a once-off event – it is an ongoing process. Each and every day, find someone doing something well and acknowledge them.



Praise can be short-lived and wear off quickly. Leave it several months before praising again and the volunteer’s perception will become one of not being appreciated. Find ways to provide frequent and continuous appreciation to your volunteers.

Appreciation is a wonderful thing. It makes what is excellent in others belong to us as well.

Voltaire





Fifthly, search for as many ways as possible to *customize and personalize* your recognition and rewards – it is definitely a matter of different strokes for different folks.



Fortunately there are a myriad of ways to recognize and reward volunteers. Great programs go beyond the usual annual event as this is certainly not the only component of a highly successful recognition program. There are high-cost, low-cost and no-cost ways to recognize your volunteers. There are highly public to private recognitions, structured formal events to spontaneous rewards and day-to-day feedback, and once-off events to on-going programs. The possibilities are endless!



James P. Gelatt in his book *Managing Nonprofit Organizations in the 21st Century* suggests that recognition and reward programs need to accomplish four things. Firstly, help the volunteer to feel that their work is valued. Secondly, invite the volunteer to maintain, if not upgrade, their level of participation. Thirdly, attract others to contribute their time. Fourthly, present the organization in a positive light. Keep these points in mind when designing your program.

§ § §

Whatever form your recognition takes, it must become a way of life that permeates throughout the entire organization. To ensure truly successful volunteer recognition, it's essential to develop a *program* and a *system*. Without a system, recognition is nothing more than a 'hit and miss' process. Some people are thanked, others forgotten. And the more volunteers you have, the more will go unrecognized.

§ § §

Establishing a successful recognition and reward program will ensure you show your appreciation to all volunteers and retain them longer. A system will assist you to recognize everyone, whether you have 6 or 600 volunteers. It will make informal recognition look spontaneous, and formal recognition even more memorable.

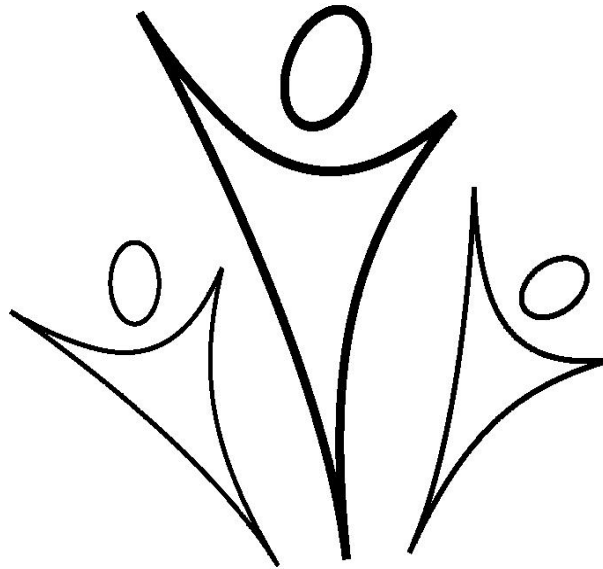
§ § §

We all draw a lot of energy from sincere recognition and honest appreciation. It's like a warm ray of verbal sunshine.

Jim Clemmer



*Researching outside and inside
your organization*



Be aware that most people simply go ahead and organize their recognition and reward program based on what type of recognition and rewards they personally feel comfortable promoting. This eliminates a variety of other rewards and develops a program derived only from your own 'comfort zone'. Are you prepared to step out of the zone and broaden the recognition experience for you and your volunteers?




Do some research before establishing or revitalising your present recognition and reward program. Go surfing on the web. Email other organizations and find out what they do in their programs.



Get on the phone. Contact other volunteer managers and talk about what is working and not working for them in recognizing and rewarding their volunteers. Don't have the time? Then recruit a volunteer whose only job it is to surf the net, send emails or make the calls to find out what others are doing.

There is real magic in enthusiasm. It spells the difference between mediocrity and accomplishment.

Norman Vincent Peale



Don't limit yourself to the nonprofit sectors. See what business does to recognize and reward their employees. Great ideas can be shared and adapted. This early research can save you time, avoid costly mistakes and streamline the further development of your recognition and reward program.



Research also *within your own organization* and talk to your volunteers. Gain a real understanding of how they feel about how they are currently recognized and rewarded.



Few organizations conduct any research into their recognition and reward programs – it simply becomes a tradition. The same annual event, same location and same speeches year after year. Let's not knock tradition. But if you never ask what your volunteers think, you will never know how many more effective ways you could be recognizing and rewarding your volunteers.



There are numerous ways to ask your volunteers. Use focus groups, individual interviews, whole group sessions or on-site, mail-out or online surveys. Whatever method you use, keep it objective. Consider having someone else conduct interviews or group sessions, or outsourcing the preparation of non-leading questions for your surveys.



Critically evaluate your current recognition and reward program. Using a 3 point scale of never, sometimes and always, find out how your volunteers would answer the following:

- I receive meaningful recognition from my immediate manager for the work that I do.
- I receive meaningful recognition from others in the organization for the work that I do.
- I feel appreciated for the volunteer work that I do.
- I give recognition to others in the organization for the work that they do.

§ § §

Go even deeper and gather responses to the following:

- The most meaningful type of recognition I have received is . . .
- I feel most appreciated when . . .
- I like to recognize others by . . .
- My ideas for further recognition and reward are . . .


§ § §

Listen to your volunteers as they explain how well they currently feel recognized and how they would personally like to be recognized in the future. Get ready for some surprises. Use the responses to the statements above to help design your future recognition and reward program.

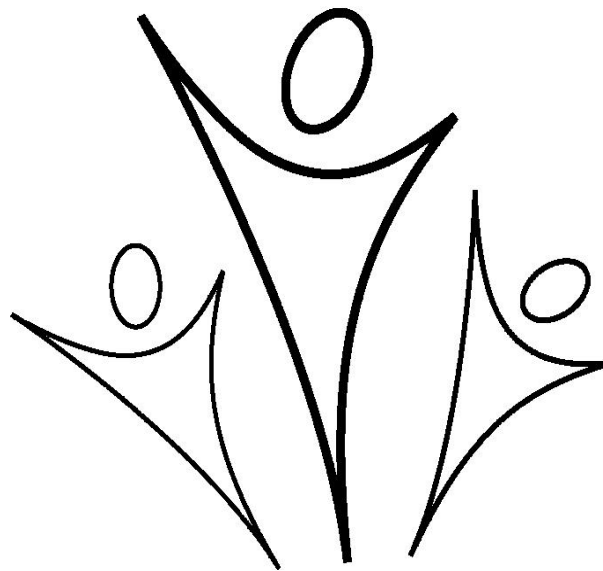
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The engineer's first problem in any design situation is to discover what the problem really is.

Anonymous



Involving others in the recognition program



Your recognition practices and reward systems speak volumes about your organization's values. Are they designed and delivered *to* volunteers or *with* volunteers? Do they reflect a management view of 'we know what's best for you'? Are they partial and piecemeal or part of a larger planned system?

§ § §

Get people at *all* levels – volunteers, paid staff and management – involved in the design, planning and implementation of the recognition and reward program. If the program is being sponsored or funded, include a representative from that body. The more that people are involved, the more likely they are to commit to various activities and truly feel they 'own' the program.

§ § §

Anything can get accomplished as long as you don't care who gets the credit.

Anonymous



Develop ways to achieve broad involvement in designing the program. This can be through seeking written recommendations, suggestion box ideas, surveys, whole group meetings or a representative team. Aim to use a combination of approaches. If you have a small number of volunteers, then involve everyone! If you have a large number of volunteers, elect or appoint a truly representative recognition team.

§ § §

Whatever name you give your group – 'thankyou team', 'spirit team', or 'recognition and reward team' – get started! Within the overall team, you can also develop more specialized teams. The 'birthday' team can send out cards each month to those with current birthdays and post the monthly birthday list. The 'social' team can plan monthly fun events or other theme events. The 'publicity' team can keep the bulletin board current, send press releases, and design and distribute the newsletter.

§ § §

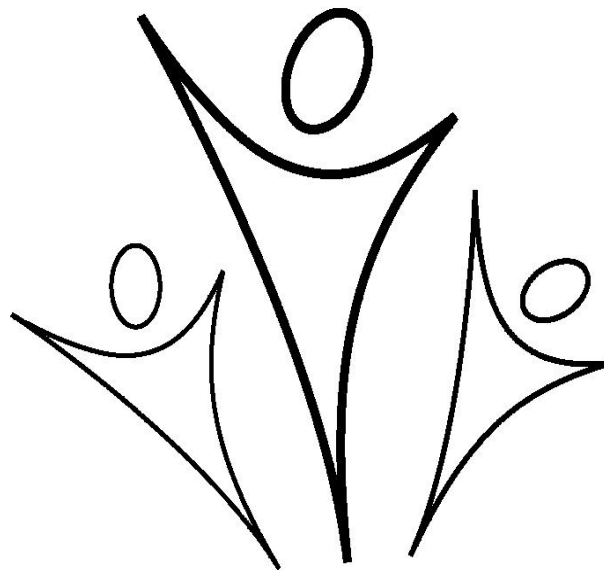
When your recognition team first meets as a group, aim to answer such questions as: What will be the scope of the program? What are the expectations and goals of the program? What is the program budget going to be? What reporting and measurement processes are to be used to evaluate the success of the program? Set the ground rules now to ensure the future success of your recognition and reward program.

§ § §

Also design *clear processes* for your recognition program that answer the following questions: Who is the target group? Who do we want to recognize? Who is eligible to nominate? What will be the rewards given? When, where and how can they be given? Who will administer the program? How do we make the program easy to use? How do we record the program and keep track of costs? When and how will we review the program? Overall, how are we going to know that this program is an outstanding success?

§ § §

You get what you reward



Remember that you get what you reward. Whatever you do reward will become the focus of volunteer behaviour. You may wish, hope or beg to see other behaviours. But you will see more of those behaviours that you do actually reward and recognize than those behaviours that you don't. So, make clear links in your recognition program between organizational goals and why people are recognized and rewarded.

§ § §

Be sure that your organization truly does value and reward what it says it does. Does your organization say that it values 'quality' but reward 'cutting corners and skimping on costs'? Does it say that it values 'creativity' then reward 'conforming to the old ways'? Does your organization state that it values 'teamwork' but only reward 'individuals'? Does it say that it 'cares about our volunteers' but only rewards 'working until they burn out'? Be honest and be consistent!

The ratio of 'We's' to 'I's' is the best indicator of the development of a team.

Lewis D. Eigen



§ § §

Beware of rewarding everyone the same way. Ensure that the type and level of recognition reflect the actual type and level of involvement. Fuzzy and meaningless recognition for all quickly loses its impact. If your high and low achievers are all rewarded the same way, what then becomes the point of going the extra mile? If a volunteer who contributes week after week and another who is seldom seen are recognized and rewarded in the same way, there is a clear message that less effort can bring the same reward. Strive for clear and well-communicated connections between accomplishments and rewards.

§ § §

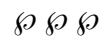
Be sure that your recognition and reward system is inclusive so all volunteers can fairly participate in the program, but provide effective reinforcement by recognizing the relative significance of achievements. Lesser accomplishments certainly deserve praise but larger accomplishments should get something more. Establish clear criteria and reward all those who do meet the criteria so your volunteers are competing against goals and standards and not each other.

§ § §

If you reward people purely on the basis of length of volunteer service, then are you really just rewarding someone for hanging around long enough to receive the award? Bill Wittich in his book *77 Ways to Recognize Volunteers* explains that you are rewarding volunteers for being there, rather than for getting results. You may give a certificate based on hours, but recognition needs to be based on results.

§ § §

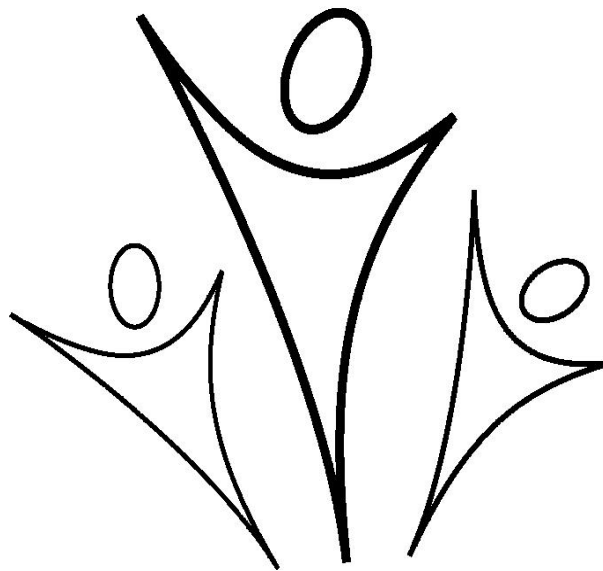
Move beyond a focus just on years of service. There are many other behaviours to reward and recognize, such as meeting goals, learning new skills or making system improvements. You could also look at rewarding creative ideas, mentoring other volunteers or fostering greater teamwork.



How about rewarding a volunteer for going that extra mile, or for volunteering for work no-one else will do. All these ideas can be successfully used even for relatively short-term volunteers who are very effective, but who may never qualify for length of service awards.



The budget



Secure a budget for your volunteer recognition program. If senior management or your board of directors do not provide a budget, then it is time to question how much they really do value your volunteers. A recognition and reward program can start small and grow over time. But it will wither and die without obvious and tangible support from the senior echelons within the organization.

§ § §

The budget does not need to be large. What is valued as a reward in the eyes of your volunteers often has little to do with the price tag attached. You can design a low-cost but very successful recognition and reward program.

§ § §

Investigate the possibility of obtaining funding through community purposes grants, State or Federal government departments, lottery organisations or local councils. Or seek a commercial sponsor from community-minded corporations or businesses seeking to promote their image of supporting good causes. Keep in mind that the sponsorship need not necessarily be monetary – donations of goods or services for the reward program would also be welcome!

§ § §

Budgets will vary with the size of the organization, the number of volunteers and a host of other factors. But a budget must be provided that allows sufficient resources to operate the program. Adequately funding a recognition and reward program is an investment in your volunteers, not an expense – and the organization will receive a very substantial return on this investment!

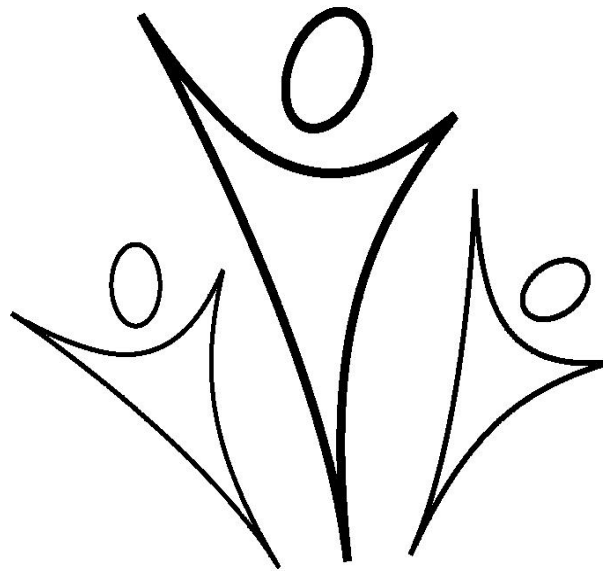
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Money is the opposite of the weather. Nobody talks about it, but everybody does something about it.

Rebecca Johnson



*Individualized and customized
recognition and reward*



Look for ways to personalize and customize how you recognize and reward the uniqueness of each and every one of your volunteers. This is the most powerful action you can take to ensure that your program is an outstanding success. It is all about *relationship recognition* – knowing your volunteers and having a relationship with them that allows you to respond with the most effective recognition for each of them.



One size does *not* fit all in the recognition stakes. Some volunteers really enjoy the public annual event, others prefer a private and simple thankyou card. The more you customize your recognition to the individual volunteer and the broader your range of recognition techniques and rewards, the more powerful your recognition becomes.




Whatever rewards you do use, make sure they pass the ‘snicker test’. Awards that are seen as juvenile or of little value, or where every volunteer receives the same coffee mug year after year, become a joke. Remember, a reward is considered a reward only when the recipient perceives it to be.



Even a reward that is small and inexpensive can take on enormous value when it is personalized and means something special to that particular volunteer. Ask yourself – if your house were burning down and you only had a few minutes to grab some items, what would they be? Are they personalized items that would mean nothing to anyone else but mean the world to you?

There are two things people want more than sex and money . . . recognition and praise.

Mary Kay Ash



So how do you customize your recognition and rewards? Start with some research! Since the most significant rewards are personalized, the more you know about each individual volunteer the more impact your rewards will have. Get to know your volunteers by spending more time with them or finding out about them from others who work directly with them.



Enquire about things that are important to each volunteer – their hobbies and interests, their family, and important achievements and accomplishments in their lives. Knowledge is the key to making your recognition and rewards ‘fit’ for each volunteer.



Be even more direct in your research – ask the volunteer concerned. Explain the reward you are considering and ask whether they would feel comfortable receiving that reward. Don’t be fooled by the comment ‘I don’t need to be rewarded’. Impress on them that you intend to give them a reward, but want to be sure it’s something of value to them. If it is not, invite their suggestions of what would be.

Want a special reward to remain a surprise? Contact a good friend or close family member of your volunteer. Explain the public event you have planned. Ask for their advice and further suggestions. Be sensitive to the risk of putting the volunteer ‘on the spot’ and avoid embarrassing them so they can really enjoy the recognition experience.



Do you have too many volunteers to remember all those important details? Design a *personalized and customized database* for each volunteer. Keep a file on each and every volunteer and continually seek to update your information. Useful details to help personalize your recognition and rewards might include: spouse’s/children’s/grandchildren’s names and birthdays, pastimes, memberships, affiliations, talents and paid employment. Include details of their favourite sports, books, movies, places they have travelled to and any other significant life events. Be on the lookout for this information – from volunteers themselves, other volunteers, paid staff, friends and family. Listen and learn!



Surprise and delight your volunteers by knowing about upcoming events in their lives. Events might include overseas holidays, birthdays, marriages or graduations of their own or of their significant others. Acknowledge these special events by announcing them in the newsletter, at meetings, on bulletin boards or on your website. Send a card where appropriate. The message to your volunteers is that you really care about them as individuals.



Make even better use of your customized database by recording how each volunteer would like to be recognized and rewarded in the future. Arrange for every volunteer to complete a survey with the answers to these questions: How would you prefer to be recognized – publicly, privately or either way? What types of recognition and rewards would you like to receive? Add a list of rewards on offer and ask each volunteer to rank them from least to most meaningful.



Don’t get discouraged if a reward doesn’t provoke the response you were expecting from your volunteer. Their response is useful feedback as to whether you are on the right track or need to alter course. Ask the volunteer what would be a more meaningful way for them to be recognized in the future. Make notes in the database, take notice and take action.



Constantly seek to broaden the range of recognition and rewards on offer. Do you know someone who draws great caricatures, cartoons or portraits from photographs? Ask them to draw your volunteer. Frame it and present it to them, either to be hung at home or on the office wall.



Never regret. If it’s good, it’s wonderful. If it’s bad, it’s experience.

Victoria Holt



Know any keen photographers? Arrange for them to take candid shots of your volunteers at work. Again, frame them and present them to your volunteers. Or what about glamour portraits for that truly individualized reward?

§ § §

Organize a ‘This Is Your Life’ for a special volunteer. Include all the highlights from their voluntary work and their life involving significant people throughout this time. Or for a volunteer who would be uncomfortable with all the attention, design a ‘This Is Your Life’ scrapbook for them to take home containing all those memorable moments.

§ § §

The world is like a mirror,
frown at it, and it frowns
on you. Smile, and it
smiles too.

Herbert Samuel



Individualize Christmas cards. Avoid sending mass-produced Christmas cards with the signature printed on it. These might be cheaper and less time-consuming, but the purpose of the card is lost – the message is ‘I don’t have time to even sign my name for you’. Make these cards count – add your signature and a personal message for each volunteer.

§ § §

Vary the tradition of sending Christmas cards. Be a bit different and send volunteers a New Year’s card instead. Personally sign it and wish them another great year of working together.

§ § §

If you send cards to your volunteers, particularly for birthdays – be sure that you never forget! Once you start you must never stop. Diarize all those birthdays with a reminder note a week before to get that card in the mail. It is the one year you forget that will stay in the volunteer’s mind, not the other five years you remembered!

§ § §

Beyond the birthday card, do something a bit special for each volunteer’s birthday: a couple of movie tickets, a book by their favourite author, a free pizza or a rousing verse of ‘Happy Birthday to You’ in person or by phone. Don’t have the budget? Can local businesses be approached to donate tickets, pizzas or books?

§ § §

It sounds obvious, but celebrate everyone’s birthday. This is an extremely powerful retention tool. Forget about expecting the birthday person to bring in a cake on their birthday – this is entirely counterproductive. How does it make someone feel special if they have to bring in their own cake to remind everyone of the special date? Set aside a small budget to provide treats to recognize these special days.

§ § §

Make sure no-one falls through the cracks. Celebrate the birthdays of those who are part-time. If their birthday falls on a day when they are not there, make sure that the next time they are in, there are goodies all round!

§ § §

Too many volunteers and too many birthdays? Would you be eating cake daily? Here's a solution. Acknowledge the birthdays of all those born during a certain week or month and celebrate these birthdays en masse. Still ensure that each individual is mentioned by name so that everyone is acknowledged.

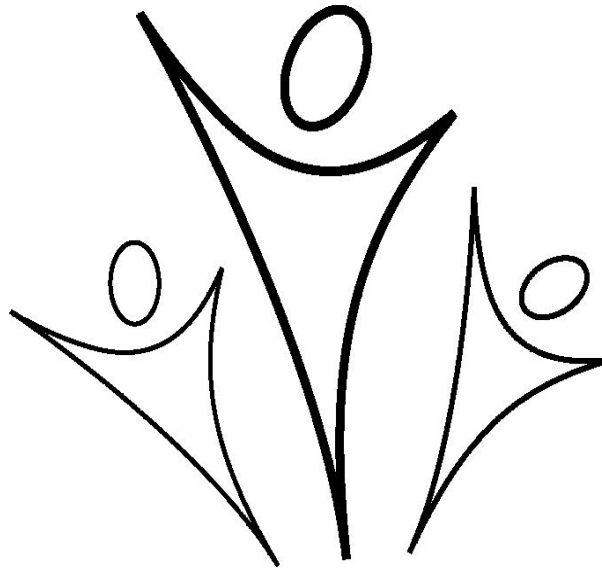
§ § §

Remember there's no such thing as a small act of kindness. Every act creates a ripple with no logical end.

Scott Adams



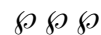
Family and client recognition



Want to continue to increase the impact of your recognition? Find ways to allow the recognition to be shared with others who are significant to those volunteers being honoured. The families of many volunteers actually have no idea of the great voluntary work they do – let them in on the secret!



Send an inspirational letter to the volunteer's significant others – partner, children or close friends. Explain what their mother, father, wife, sister, brother and so on has done as a volunteer and what a difference it has made to the organization and clients. This unexpected recognition is very powerful for the volunteer.



Go further than an explanatory letter. Send those significant others a thank-you note and small gift. Acknowledge the continuing support of significant others in accepting the time spent away from them by their loved one involved in volunteering.



Organize a 'bring your family to work' day or 'open house' so that families can come to learn about what their loved one actually does as a volunteer. They will see for themselves the wonderful volunteer work they do – and they may even decide to join the volunteering team!



What if allowing the family visit is not an option in your organization? Videotape your volunteers at work. Have a walking tour showing where each volunteer is located, what they do and how they do it. Include positive comments from senior management, paid staff, other volunteers and clients. Send the section of the recording for each volunteer to their home for their family to watch and enjoy.



Do you already arrange to have lunch and a chat with your volunteers throughout the year? Check with them about inviting another family member along. Take the opportunity to speak in glowing terms about your volunteer and thank the family member in person for supporting their volunteering.



Run a competition with donated prizes asking the children and grandchildren of your volunteers to draw a picture of what they think their mother, father, grandmother, grandfather and so on does when they come in to volunteer. These may be framed and given to the volunteer at a special celebration or hung on the walls throughout the building. Make sure the children have an opportunity to visit and see their picture on the wall.

If you knew what I know about the power of giving, you would not let a single meal pass without sharing it in some way.

Buddha

A stylized logo consisting of three human figures in black silhouette, arranged in a triangular formation with their arms raised, suggesting a group or community.

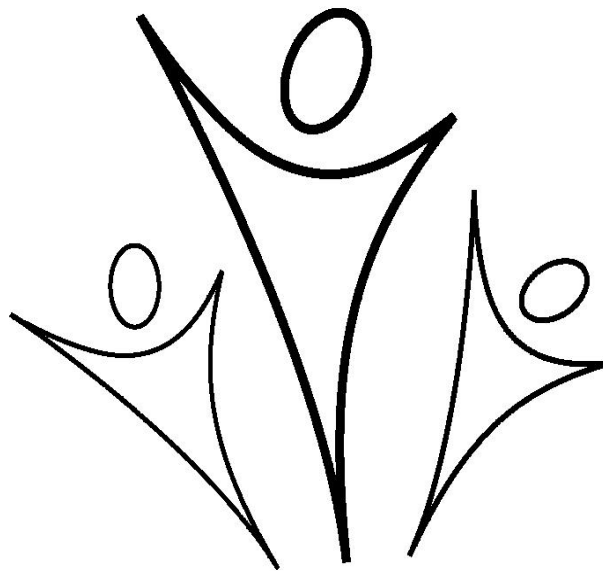
Find opportunities to involve clients in your recognition program. Provide clients with small thankyou cards to fill in and give to the volunteers who assist them. These are wonderful appreciation messages and reminders for volunteers of the difference they are making in another person's life.

§ § §

Visit the clients of your volunteers. With their permission, videotape a short message of thanks to their volunteer. These short clips can be shown at the annual recognition event with every volunteer receiving a copy of their own video clip.

§ § §

Peer-to-peer recognition



Consider developing a peer-to-peer recognition program to increase morale and team spirit. In one such program, each person would receive coupons to distribute to others. When they see a colleague doing something extraordinary, they fill in the coupon with the reason for the recognition and give it to the person. Coupons could be collected for goods or services donated as prizes by local businesses.



Another peer-to-peer recognition idea involves reminding management of the great work being done by your volunteers. Have ‘care cards’ filled in by peers when they see other volunteers doing great things. These cards have two perforated sections – one section is filled out by the giver and handed to the recipient. The other section is filled out by the giver and sent to the recipient’s manager. The manager can then acknowledge the recipient’s achievements based on the information written on the card.



A further variation is to use ‘recognition slips’. Slips are filled in by a peer, half going to the volunteer being praised and the other half into the suggestion box. At the end of the month, the person with the most slips in the box becomes the ‘Volunteer of the Month’. Even if you are not the monthly volunteer, you may get some really great written messages.



What about ‘pass it around’ cards for everyone? Provide each person with a supply of these cards to hand to anyone in appreciation. On one side of the card are the words ‘You are a special person – thank you for all you do’. On the other side, the words ‘pass it around’. The recipient then hands it to another person in appreciation. The good vibes just keep spreading!



At Christmas time, place a box of plain cards with holes and threaded coloured ribbon beside the Christmas tree. Encourage people to write a few words of appreciation to another and tie it to the tree. Soon the tree will be covered with cards and people will love to take their cards home to show their families during the Christmas break.




Why wait until Christmas? A ‘tree of thanks’ could be a permanent fixture in a prominent place. Encourage people to decorate the tree with messages of praise and appreciation to each other any time throughout the year.



Any time we affirm what someone has done, we not only validate their existence on this earth, but we are also recognizing that they are making a positive difference in the world.

Barbara Glanz



If you are conducting a workshop with your volunteers, here is a great peer recognition exercise. Have each person write their name and trace an outline of their hand on a coloured sheet of paper. Pass the sheets around with each person writing a compliment within the hand of the person whose name is on the sheet. Keep going until each person has their own sheet back, with wonderful comments to cherish.



Run a ‘secret friend’ appreciation campaign. Have everyone fill out a questionnaire containing details of their likes and dislikes, hobbies and interests. Put each completed questionnaire in an envelope and have people pick one out as a lucky dip to ‘select’ a secret friend. Ensure that nobody picks out their own envelope! For a week to a month, secret friends will leave small, inexpensive surprise gifts for their friend. At the end of the campaign, throw a party where each person’s secret friend is revealed.



Another idea is to design an ‘appreciation board’. Have appreciation forms available to fill in details of people’s appreciation and praise for others. Ensure all forms are posted on the board and at the end of the month, put all forms in a draw to win a donated gift certificate. It’s wonderful when people say nice things to you, but it means something more when people take the time to write it down.



Make great use of a bulletin board. With it placed in a prominent place, volunteers can post photos, newspaper articles and other items that show what other volunteers are achieving in and outside the organization. Keep it current and ever-changing so everyone is always checking it out.



Consider a ‘Sharing Award’ as part of a peer-to-peer recognition program. Obtain a perpetual plaque with spaces for engraving. The plaque is presented with their name engraved to a ‘sharing and caring’ volunteer. This volunteer holds on to the plaque until they decide on another volunteer who deserves the award. The plaque is then engraved for the new recipient and presented with due ceremony and so on . . .

The best thing to do behind a friend’s back is to pat it!

Ruth Loudermilk Brillhart



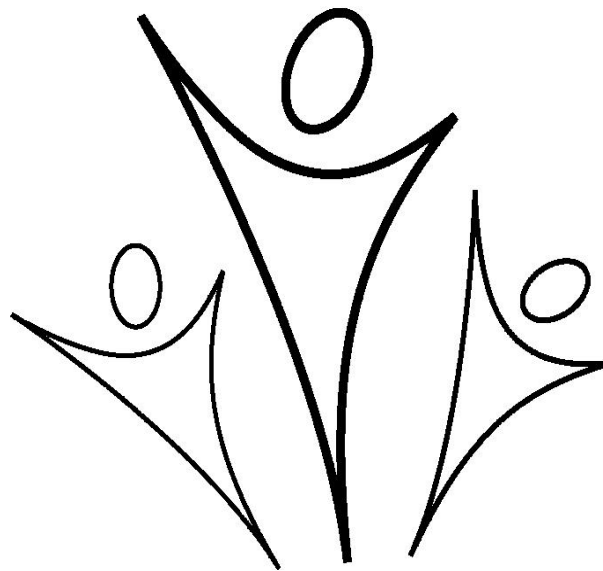
Does a nomination system appeal to you? Anyone can nominate another person by filling in a nomination form. All forms go to an elected committee and each month a ‘Very Important Person’ (VIP) is chosen. Each VIP receives a certificate and prize and also an article in the monthly newsletter. All VIPs are then in the running for selection as the ‘VIP of the Year’, receiving their award at the annual dinner.



Do you have a ‘Volunteer of the Month’ award voted for by all your volunteers? Make these awards memorable. Each month, present the recipient with a small item that reflects something wonderful about them. One month it could be a first aid kit for the volunteer who is always there in emergencies. Another month it could be a relaxing massage for the volunteer who always makes everyone feel comfortable. Get the idea?



The power of the personal thankyou



Understand that informal recognition can often have more impact and be more important to people than formal recognition events. Volunteers do not constantly expect fancy awards and events but they have a right to expect ongoing feedback and appreciation for what they do. Never underestimate the power of a simple thankyou.

§ § §

Simple thankyou's are the best ongoing reinforcement for the work volunteers do. They keep volunteers going when doing routine tasks or working towards completing a lengthy project. Lift the spirits of your volunteers and thank them often and in as many different ways as possible.

§ § §

A thankyou can come in two main forms, verbal or written. It can be used anywhere, anytime – it is the most immediate, most timely and most overlooked of all forms of recognition. Discover new ways to customize and say thank you to each and every volunteer.

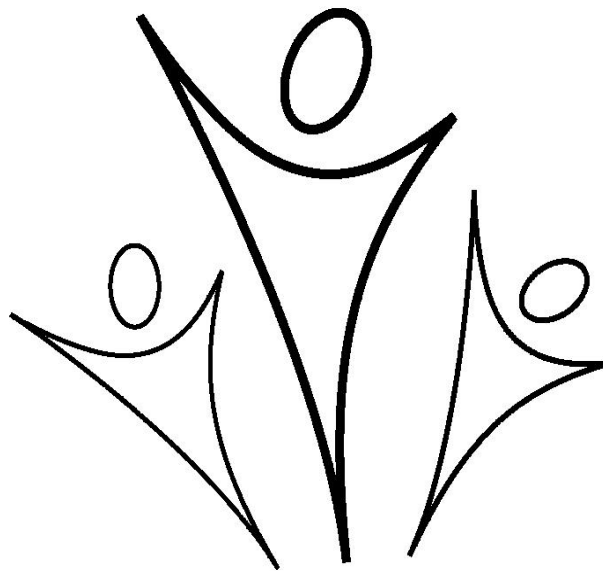
§ § §

The importance of recognizing volunteers is so rudimentary, so ingrained in the whole concept of volunteering and voluntarism, that we tend to take it for granted. We treat it routinely: once a year, the president of the board signs a bunch of plaques, thanking <Fill in Name Here> for his or her free-will work for the organization.

James P. Gelatt



Verbal recognition



Begin with learning ways to remember people's names. Whether you have 30 or 300 volunteers – learn their names. There are lots of memory techniques you can use to help you remember people's names.

§ § §

Finding it difficult to remember names? Then one simple way is to provide all your volunteers with great name badges to wear. It can certainly make it much easier!

§ § §

Use your verbal thank-yous immediately. Get out there, catch people doing things right and say thank you on the spot. Avoid waiting until they are less busy or until the monthly staff meeting or annual event. Too often praise is left unsaid, or only given at a time totally disconnected to the event.

§ § §

Move beyond vague and generalized thank-yous about 'a job well done' or 'keeping up the good work'. Get clear and make it specific to the person involved, the action taken and the importance of what they have done for your organization. Follow these steps to get specific in thanking your volunteers. Step one – thank the person by name. Step two – state specifically what they have done that they are being thanked for. Step three – say how you feel about what they have done. Step four – identify the importance of what they have done for the organization, for the team and for others. Step five – thank the volunteer again by name.

§ § §

Now put the steps all together: 'Jenny I wanted to say thank you for how you handled that irate person who came to the counter. You used your skills to listen and calm them down and assist them when they were obviously upset. I feel very reassured to know that you are the first point of contact for anyone coming into our office. It means that the rest of the team are able to get on with their jobs because you are dealing so competently with people and solving many of their issues before they need to go any further. Thank you again Jenny, it is very much appreciated'. Much more powerful than just 'good work Jenny'!

§ § §

Heard a positive comment made about one of your volunteers by someone else – senior management, paid staff or clients? Don't keep it a secret! Seek out the volunteer, give them the feedback and let them know what was said.

§ § §

Verbal recognition comes in many forms and doesn't just begin and end with a verbal thank-you. Asking volunteers for advice and their opinions sends a message that you truly value them. It is a message of equality and of respect for their knowledge and ideas. Use their ideas when appropriate and publicly acknowledge them as the source.

If you remember my name, you pay me a subtle compliment; you indicate that I have made an impression on you. Remember my name and you add to my feeling of importance.

Dale Carnegie



Take a few volunteers out to lunch or coffee once a month. Select different volunteers to get a wide range of views and opinions. Ask for their feedback on what could be improved. You will get to know your volunteers better, receive valuable feedback and reinforce their feelings of importance by asking for their opinions.

§ § §

Arrange regular lunches or coffees with senior management. Periodically invite a small group of volunteers to have lunch with the CEO. It is a great chance for the CEO to establish a personal connection and verbally say thank you to your volunteers in an informal setting.

§ § §

Start each week or each day by holding a short ‘good news’ session. Give your volunteers a chance to share some good news that is happening in their personal lives or in their voluntary role. It keeps you current about what’s happening for your volunteers and provides verbal recognition for them from others in the team.

§ § §

Start each monthly staff meeting with each person briefly reporting a positive experience. Take the opportunity as well to acknowledge the achievements of your volunteers during that month and thank them for their ongoing contribution.

§ § §

Schedule a six-monthly ‘how it’s going for you’ session with each of your volunteers. This is not a formal performance review, but an informal chat. Catch up on what is happening in their personal lives and their voluntary work. Create opportunities to build on your relationship and enhance their feelings of connectedness.

§ § §

Too many volunteers to see each one personally? Schedule an informal chat over the phone. Divide the number of volunteers by the working days available and undertake to ring that number of volunteers each day to say thanks and ask ‘how’s it going for you?’

§ § §

Still too many volunteers for you to ring? Recruit recognition volunteers who undertake to phone your volunteers for periodic informal chats about what is happening for them. Arrange for new details to be added to each volunteer’s personalized database, where appropriate. Stay connected and tuned in.

§ § §

Appreciation can make a day, even change a life. Your willingness to put it into words is all that is necessary.

Margaret Cousins



Arrange for the CEO and other senior management to become part of the phone recognition team. Give them each a list of volunteers to ring over a specified time to thank them for their efforts. Imagine how wonderful it would be to receive an unexpected thankyou call and chat from ‘the big boss’.

§ § §

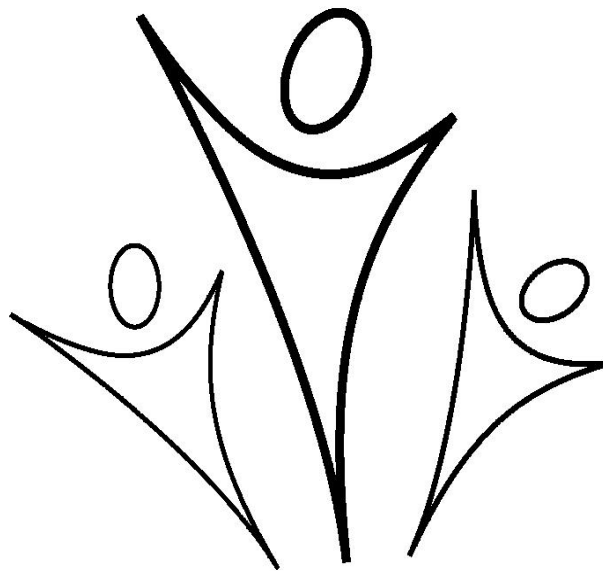
Again, include the families. While your volunteers are hard at work on-site, call their family at home and thank them for supporting the volunteering efforts. What a great surprise for your volunteer to hear about when they get home!

§ § §

Do you have younger volunteers? Telephone their parents or caregivers and thank them for allowing their son or daughter to volunteer and speak in glowing terms about their contribution. Other than the school report, when do parents really receive feedback on their child? What a great impact such positive feedback would have on your younger volunteers *and* their parents.

§ § §

Written recognition



There is something very special about receiving a written thankyou. It is a permanent reminder of appreciation and can be shown to significant others. It also makes your volunteers feel special that you have actually taken the time to write to them. In combination, written and verbal thankyou's can be some of the most powerful recognition tools you use.

Good thoughts not delivered mean squat.

Kenneth Blanchard



§ § §

The thankyou card, letter or note, like the verbal thankyou, needs to be carefully constructed to have the greatest impact. Shun any form of letters or cards addressed to 'dear volunteer' with your printed signature at the bottom. This is worse than sending no written thankyou at all.

§ § §

You do not need to write a novel or some creative prose. But your thankyou card has a greater impact if handwritten and, at the very least, personally signed by you. Anything less is guaranteed to demotivate volunteers as the message is that you are really too busy to notice and too busy to care.

§ § §

As you do with your verbal thankyou's, be specific. Vague 'well done' messages detract rather than add to the impact of the written word. Be clear and acknowledge specific aspects of the work your volunteer has done that you truly appreciate.

§ § §

Follow the same steps in writing your thankyou as in your verbal appreciation. Step one – thank the person by name and handwrite the note or card. Step two – describe specifically their actions or behaviours you want to recognize. Step three – explain how you feel about what they have achieved. Step four – identify the importance of what they have done for you, the team, the organization and others. Step five – thank them again by name and personally sign.

§ § §

Struggling for the words to write? Here are some key words describing positive actions that might fit for your volunteers: innovative, energetic, resourceful, supportive, focused, helpful, patient, efficient, reliable, committed, diplomatic, effective, enthusiastic, caring, dedicated, insightful, approachable and dependable. Keep your thesaurus handy for variations on these themes!

§ § §

Need more inspiration? Here are some key phrases to convey your appreciation for their actions: 'problem solver', 'good listener', 'rising to the occasion', 'thinking on your feet', 'motivating others', 'team player', 'out-of-the-box thinker' and 'going the extra mile'.

§ § §

Personalize it. For that *reliable and dependable* volunteer: ‘Your reliability has always been something that I can really depend on’; or ‘I really appreciate that I can count on you to follow through and focus on completing the task’. For that volunteer who provides *great service to your customers or clients*: ‘I appreciate the way you treat our clients’; or ‘You deliver wonderful service to our customers’; or ‘You always know how to exceed our customer’s expectations’. For that volunteer who is an excellent *team member*: ‘I appreciate the way you share your knowledge and expertise with other team members’; or ‘Thank you for the way you contribute to a positive team spirit’.

§ § §

A great tip is to sit down, visualise the volunteer you are writing to and tune in to the words that describe what type of person they are – ‘people person’, ‘quiet achiever’ or other key words or phrases that ‘fit’. Let yourself be guided by the words that come to mind – this ensures that your written thankyou is sincere, honest and personalized.

§ § §

When volunteers organize an event or complete a project, get those written thankyou delivered to them quickly. A simple handwritten note sent within the week is more powerful than an elaborate letter arriving a month after the event occurred. The longer it takes to send that written thankyou, the less impact it will have. Time is of the essence!

§ § §

Just as you spread the verbal recognition around, do the same with your written recognition. Send that ‘letter of praise’ or testimonial to the volunteer, with a copy going to the CEO and other senior management. Make sure a copy is included in the volunteer’s personal file and one is sent to their family.

§ § §

Spread that written recognition still further. Write to your volunteer’s employer praising the achievements of their employee and encouraging them to continue to support their volunteering efforts. How thrilling for your volunteer to have their boss tell them they’ve heard great things about them!

§ § §

Are some of your volunteers seeking paid employment? Offer to provide powerful written recognition through outstanding letters of reference or testimonials. They’re helping you, so help them out any way you can.

§ § §

I want to thank and pay tribute to all of our volunteers – those dedicated people who believe in all work and no pay.

Robert Orben



As with verbal thankyou's, consider contacting the partner, family or other significant people in your volunteer's life. Send *them* a thankyou card or letter explaining the wonderful contribution being made by their loved one and thanking them for supporting their volunteering efforts.

§ § §

Do the same for your younger volunteers. Just as you would with verbal feedback, contact the parents, grandparents or caregivers. Write them a letter expressing how much you appreciate the voluntary work their child is undertaking. Thank them also for their support.

§ § §

Written recognition can have a great impact when it is from others. Vary the sender of your written thankyou's – it doesn't always need to be you. Involve the CEO, other senior management and paid staff in writing and signing thankyou cards and letters.

§ § §

The more the merrier! Approach other recognition team members, volunteers and willing clients to write thankyou cards to volunteers. Coordinate the process so that a volunteer may receive several thankyou cards throughout the year, each from a different individual.

§ § §

Telephone or write to prominent public figures, particularly those you know a volunteer may admire. Explain what your volunteer has achieved and ask them to write a commendation for your volunteer. Have it framed and present it to your volunteer, or even better have the writer of the letter present it to them.

§ § §

Does all this written recognition sound overwhelming? Design a *system* to accommodate all your volunteers. Involve others in the writing process but ensure that all volunteers receive, at the very least, one thankyou card from you each year. Divide your number of volunteers by the number of working days during the year and then aim to write the required number of cards per day. For example, 470 volunteers divided by 235 working days in the year equates to 2 thankyou cards per day.

§ § §

Just as effective as thankyou cards are *postcards*. These are a quick and easy way to send a message and very cost effective to design. Take a plain sheet of photocopying paper and create a template of four postcards per page. Have a photocopying centre run them off on colourful card stock and then cut into quarters. On the front side put a famous quote, motto or symbol, or a thankyou message. On the reverse, leave room on the right-hand side for the address and a stamp, and on the left-hand side write a short message.

§ § §

Got a bigger recognition budget? Then have a supply of postcards professionally designed and printed. Postcards can be used in a multitude of ways: as ‘thank you’ cards, ‘welcome’ cards for new volunteers, ‘congratulations’ cards for special achievements, ‘welcome back’ cards for volunteers returning from holidays, or ‘missing you’ cards for volunteers who have been on an extended absence.



Here’s another way to use generic thankyou postcards. Choose a monthly theme and attach a small treat to the card. In January, start with a New Year theme. Write a short note about how much you’re looking forward to working with them in the coming year and attach a chocolate treat. Then pick a theme for each following month.



Want some more inspiration for those postcards? How about the message ‘we are nuts about you’ and attach a small packet of nuts to the postcard. Or ‘you are a real lifesaver’ with a packet of lifesavers attached. Or ‘you really stick at things’ with bubble gum attached. Think of your own themes and design ever-changing postcards.



Another way to provide inexpensive and instantaneous written recognition to volunteers on site is to carry around a pad of *post-it notes*. When inspiration strikes, write a quick note of thanks to place on the volunteer’s desk, office door, computer screen, coffee cup or car windscreen. They’ll never know where one will pop up next!




Stretch the budget and get post-it notes with the organizational logo on them. Next time your volunteer goes to lunch, write five quick appreciative comments on post-it notes and stick them around their desk. This ‘on the spot’ recognition will bring an instant smile to your volunteer’s face when they return from lunch.



Only two groups of people thrive on sincere recognition and genuine appreciation – men and women.

Jim Clemmer



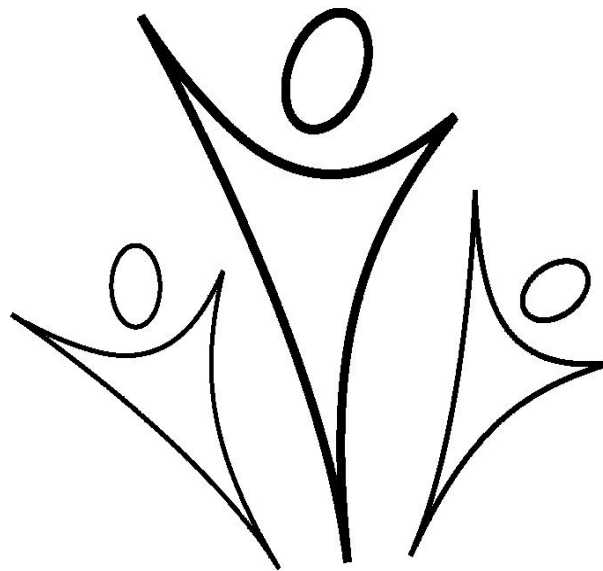
Or swap the post-it notes for a supply of your *business cards* with a blank back. When you catch someone doing something right, just jot down a few words of thanks on the back of the card and give it to them or leave it for them to see.



Going it alone? Again, develop a *system* that combines a variety of written forms of recognition. For example, set a goal to provide each volunteer with 3 forms of personalized written acknowledgement throughout the year. Design a reminder system to send that birthday card and a thankyou card at a different time of the year. Pop a ‘great work’ postcard in their in-tray with a personalized thankyou message and a small treat at another time.



More creative and varied ideas



Do you want even more creative ideas on how to recognize and reward your volunteers? Bob Nelson in his book *1001 Ways to Reward Employees* discovered that the most popular specialty items people enjoy as rewards are: writing instruments; desk and office accessories; glassware and ceramics; calendars; sporting goods; wearables; buttons, badges and ribbons; auto accessories; housewares and tools.

Habit is habit, and not to be flung out of the window by any man, but coaxed downstairs a step at a time.

Mark Twain



§ § §

Want to give T-shirts, bags, hats, coffee cups or pens? Ensure that these items are easily recognizable and have the organizational logo. Even these inexpensive items have greater significance when customized with the logo of the organization to which volunteers proudly contribute.

§ § §

Personalize these specialty items too. Have an artistic volunteer design and decorate a coffee mug with each volunteer's name on it. Or take a picture of each volunteer and have their picture emblazoned on a T-shirt to wear when they are volunteering.

§ § §

Books are great rewards and those containing inspirational quotes are always popular. Personalize the gift by choosing books your volunteer likes to read and inscribe the inside cover with a message of appreciation. Purchase these books at discount prices or ask for donations from publishers or bookstores.

§ § §

Framing rewards increases their value to a volunteer. Here are some 'framing' ideas: a favourite quotation done in calligraphy; a caricature of the volunteer; an autographed picture of a favourite sports or entertainment personality; or a picture of 'the team' they work with autographed by each team member and including their positive comments about the volunteer. Let your imagination run wild!

§ § §

Gift certificates donated by businesses are great rewards. Certificates such as lunch at the local restaurant, a free spa and massage, and admittance to an upcoming concert are all appreciated by volunteers. Endeavour to match the certificate to the volunteer's likes and interests and make it much more meaningful.

§ § §

Traditional monetary gift certificates meant that you had to decide what to buy for exactly \$20, \$50 or \$100. Electronic gift cards that are like credit cards have changed all that. You simply use them to pay for various purchases until the credit runs out. Have a supply of these cards as rewards for your volunteers.

§ § §

Team up with local businesses to offer discounts for your volunteers on goods and services. This can be done at local restaurants, specialty stores, hairdressers, drycleaners and so on. This can be a win-win all round – great for businesses by boosting their customers and great savings for your volunteers.



Design an internal coupon book for your volunteers as a reward. The volunteer can redeem coupons from other paid staff or volunteers who may have expertise in dressmaking, gardening, plumbing, house painting, cooking and hairdressing. What other hidden skills do your people have?



Arrange for volunteers to attend learning activities they would enjoy. Seminars, workshops or conferences are always available on a range of topics. Organizers will often provide discounted attendance costs as sponsorships for volunteers.



Food items will always be a very popular reward for volunteers. Catering for morning tea or lunch occasionally is a great way to say thank you. Contact local caterers who may donate cakes or special desserts for morning tea or finger food for lunch.



Pot luck or ‘bring a plate’ meals go down well and are a great way to dine, share and network. Make them even more special by taking turn about. Volunteers supply the dishes for one event, with senior management and paid staff doing the catering on the next occasion.



Does your organization serve meals on site? Ensure that volunteers are rewarded by either eating free in the canteen or receiving the same food discounts given to paid staff.



Gourmet food baskets are a popular reward for volunteers. To make it even more special customize the basket to suit the tastes of each individual volunteer. For example, organic fruit for the health conscious, a range of chocolates for the chocolate junkie or a selection of teas for the tea sipper.




Design a ‘thank you’ basket containing inexpensive items, each with a short note attached. Here are some items to get you thinking: chewing gum to say ‘thanks for sticking with us’, or a safety pin to say ‘thanks for the way you hold things together for us’.



Some people strengthen the society just by being the kind of people they are.

John W. Gardner

A stylized logo consisting of three black human figures of varying heights, with their arms raised, suggesting a group or community.

How about an elastic band to say ‘thanks for being so flexible’ or a band-aid to acknowledge ‘the way you heal the hurts of others’. Or a small candle to say ‘no one holds a candle to you’.

§ § §

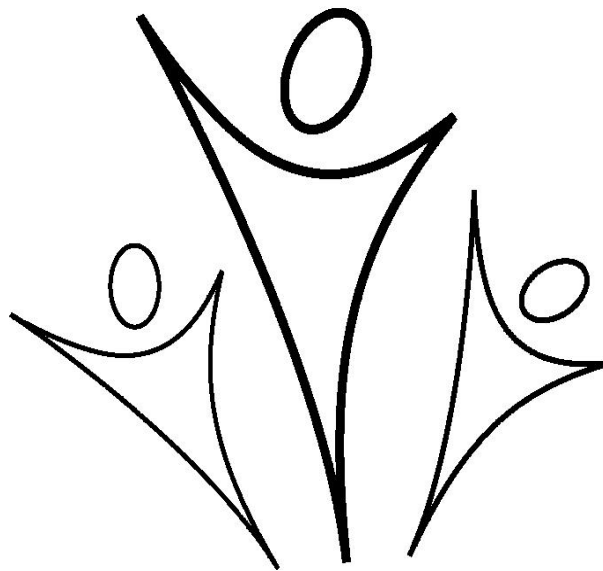
Add a balloon to remind your volunteer to celebrate their achievements, a herbal tea bag to remind them to relax, or a small packet of grass seeds for them to occasionally take the time to just watch the grass grow. Got the idea? Get creative with your own array of items.

§ § §

Want to recognize your whole team of volunteers, rather than one individual volunteer? Consider giving rewards that would help the team to do their jobs better and achieve their goals. Present a new photocopier, computer or coffee maker wrapped in a large ribbon to the team. Or better still, ask the team what would really help them to be even more productive and then aim to provide it. This team reward works really well for those who like something more practical and the ‘I really don’t want an award’ volunteers.

§ § §

Themes for the recognition program



Nothing is more boring than doing the same thing year after year with your recognition and reward program. Time to challenge yourself and others to come up with creative and varied ideas. Develop different annual themes for your program to rejuvenate and re-energize it every year.

§ § §

Using different themes each year can be a terrific way to ensure variety and encourage fun and excitement. A theme allows people to unify and rally and can convey specific ideas. Use themes for once-off events, or for ongoing events over a week, a month or a year. Choose a theme by having everyone vote for the most popular from an array of suggested themes.

§ § §

‘Fun in the sun’ is an example of a yearly theme. Start the year off with an indoor beach party. Invite everyone to come to work dressed in summer beachwear. Set up the conference or staff room with beach towels, beach balls and umbrellas and serve summer fun food. Later in the year, hold a swimwear day when everyone wears their swimwear under their work clothes. Give away inexpensive items during the year such as sunglasses, beach balls, zinc cream, T-shirts and sunhats. In the middle of winter arrange a summer theme barbeque or picnic indoors. Hire the volleyball courts at an indoor sports centre to play beach volleyball. Finish the year by having a beach theme at your annual event and award a donated holiday at a beach resort to the ‘Volunteer of the Year’.

§ § §

What about a ‘less stress’ theme for the year? Give each volunteer a ‘care pack’ containing an aromatherapy candle, bath oils, soothing cream and herbal teas. Once a month, provide neck and shoulder massages to volunteers who want them. Ask qualified instructors to donate their time to undertake regular exercise or yoga classes on site. Invite everyone to join the early morning or lunchtime walking club. Arrange monthly talks to be given by speakers on different health and wellness topics, including nutrition, relaxation techniques and stress reduction.


§ § §

Got those creative juices flowing? There are so many themes to choose from, you will never run out. How about an Olympics theme, a circus theme, a ‘great outdoors’ theme, a magic theme, an adventure theme or an around-the-world theme? Get brainstorming with your ‘theme dream team’!

§ § §

If we don't change, we don't grow. If we don't grow, we aren't living.

Gail Sheehy



Want an alternative to the full year-round theme? Arrange events to coincide with special days throughout the year. Go beyond Christmas and New Year. Consider other days such as Valentine's Day (present each volunteer with chocolates), St Patrick's Day (supply cakes with green food colouring) and other national holiday themes. Mothers' Day, Fathers' Day and Grandparents' Day is a good time to reward the parents and grandparents in the group. Add the special racing days and other major sporting event themes and this will keep everyone busy, excited and energized.

§ § §

Think further outside the box and add to your list of themes with unusual special days or weeks. Check out the website www.holidayinsight.com for really different ideas. Did you know that February 6th is 'compliments' day, July 1st is 'jokes' day, October 5th is 'do something nice' day and November 10th is 'forget-me-not' day?

§ § §

At this website you can also find monthly themes for your recognition ideas. Did you know that it is 'craft' month in March, 'salad' month in May and 'icecream' month in July? There are also weekly themes throughout the year. The 3rd week in February is 'international flirting' week, the 2nd week in October is 'pet peeve' week and the 3rd week in November is 'games and puzzle' week. No matter where you are located, you can always make up your own special themes.

§ § §

If you have a very large group of volunteers, you may need to break things down into bite-size pieces! Plan a 'Volunteers of the Month' program for different volunteer groups. For example, March for volunteers working in aged care facilities, April for volunteers working with youth, May for volunteers working with the unemployed. Choose a relevant, fun theme for each group.

§ § §

Investigate ways to combine your themes throughout the year with other organizations. Celebrating unusual themes with others can increase the fun and the opportunities to meet other volunteers. Variety is the spice of life!

§ § §

Feeling just a little overwhelmed with all these ideas? Well don't be! Utilize your recognition and reward team to implement these ideas. Consider recruiting volunteers whose duties are specifically to assist with recognition ideas. One volunteer can update the recognition database, another volunteer can coordinate the bulletin board and newsletter and several volunteers can arrange themed events. These tasks might just suit more experienced volunteers looking for a change of roles. After all, who would know better how volunteers like to be recognized and rewarded?

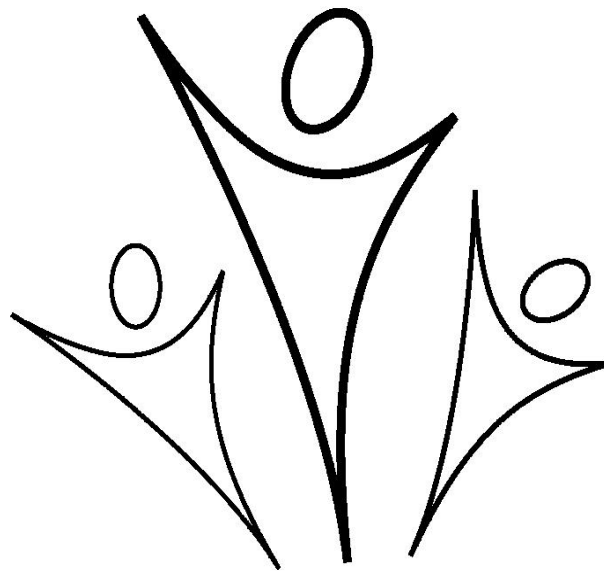
§ § §

Large gifts, they are there for your organization. Men and women, waiting to be asked. Men and women, waiting for the right program, the proper motivation, the excitement and exhilaration of sharing in a great adventure

Jerold Panas



Making it public



Take every opportunity to make your volunteer recognition public. Celebrate in front of as many people as possible. Recognition has a greater impact when other people know about it. Instead of one person saying well done, a group can often say it more effectively.

§ § §

Never, ever underestimate the power of symbolism and ceremony. Sometimes the most inexpensive award can take on enormous value when surrounded by an impressive amount of trumpet blowing. After all, how much impact would it really have to win an Academy Award or Nobel Prize and receive it in the mail?

§ § §

Giving public recognition to your volunteers is not just about them. It's also about blowing the trumpet for your organization – it's an excellent way of gaining publicity. It can be a win-win for all, as it keeps the good works and efforts of your volunteers *and* your organization in the public eye.

§ § §

Keep those press releases flowing about the achievements of your volunteers. Local newspapers are always looking for human interest stories, so find as many angles as possible to write about the deeds of your volunteers.

§ § §

With your 'Volunteer of the Month' award, have a presentation and take a picture of the volunteer receiving their reward. Send the photograph and a short article to the local paper or contact the local paper in advance for them to take photos of the presentation. You may not get published every month but even once or twice throughout the year is good publicity and a great feeling for your volunteers.

§ § §

Take out a paid advertisement in the local newspaper every year to thank your volunteers. Include a list of the names of every volunteer. It's human nature – if people see a list of names, they'll read it to see if there is anyone they know!

§ § §

Utilize other visual methods of public recognition. Don't miss the opportunity to use your recruitment brochures to acknowledge your current volunteers as well as publicize further volunteering opportunities. Circulate these widely throughout the community – local libraries, community centres, civic groups, local council offices and volunteer centres.

§ § §

No one ever has complained about being praised too much.

Helen Little



Participate in local festivals and fairs. These are a great way to publicize your organization, recruit new volunteers and recognize the great work done by your current volunteers. Volunteers are your local heroes, so recognize them locally.



Increase the visual forms of public recognition in your offices. Place a banner or poster in the foyer reinforcing the importance of your volunteers. Distribute eye-catching badges to your volunteers containing such quotes as ‘I am an important person in this organization – I am a volunteer’ or other positive sentiments.



Take every opportunity through audio and videotaping to collect stories and interviews from clients and others about the wonderful work your volunteers are doing. Record testimonials from paid staff and senior management. Play these as a feature at your annual event or on the screen in your stall at the local fair. Give a copy to each featured volunteer as a wonderful personalized thank-you gift.



Encourage those aspiring artists to come out of the shadows. Have your volunteers, either individually or as a group, design a poster about what they do. Provide all the necessary art supplies so they can really produce great ‘works of art’. Display all the posters along the corridors to transform those boring walls. Present a great prize to the winning entry voted for by secret ballot.



Get the community involved. Have a poster contest in the local schools to promote your organization and your volunteers. In collaboration with the art teachers in the schools, have the children design a poster to say thank you to your volunteers. Display all entries in the local shopping centre and have the press there to capture the prize presentation to the winner. Consider laminating all the entries to be displayed within your offices.



Snap away with that camera! Have a photo bulletin board with pictures of volunteers engaged in their voluntary work. Update the board regularly and ensure that every volunteer appears in a photo at least once throughout the year.



Design an ever changing ‘wall of fame’ to highlight your volunteers. Besides the photos, include testimonials from clients and news articles about volunteers. Have a different volunteer featured every week with their picture and details showing, for example, ‘Meet Our Volunteer – Jenny Brown’.



Do you have a volunteer with journalistic skills? Can they become your ‘good news’ reporter? Have them go about collecting good-news stories about your volunteers. These stories can be creative and fun containing details of your volunteers in their winning footy team, or as a member of the local theatre company. They can be used in a multitude of ways – on the ‘wall of fame’ bulletin board, in newsletters or in press releases.

§ § §

Keep all those photos, stories and articles you have collected over the year for the bulletin board and publish them in an annual yearbook. Give a copy to each volunteer and display a copy in the foyer of your offices for people to browse through.

§ § §

It’s amazing that the amount of news that happens in the world every day always just exactly fits the newspaper.

Jerry Seinfeld



Make good use of your organization’s website as your cyber bulletin board. Design a section that is all about your volunteers. As well as including the most frequently asked questions about volunteering, list all the names of your volunteers and some interesting ‘titbits’ about them. Include testimonials thanking them from clients and others and acknowledge their other achievements.

§ § §

Go beyond the regular stories about volunteers in your newsletter and plan an annual special ‘recognition edition’. This edition would be dedicated only to your volunteers – recognizing and praising their voluntary efforts. It could contain snapshot profiles of volunteers, interesting personal achievements, group photos and letters of praise from clients, senior management and others.

§ § §

Do you have volunteers who run their own businesses? Include a no-cost advertisement of their goods or services in your newsletter. Have them offer a discount to other volunteers and it will be a win-win all round.

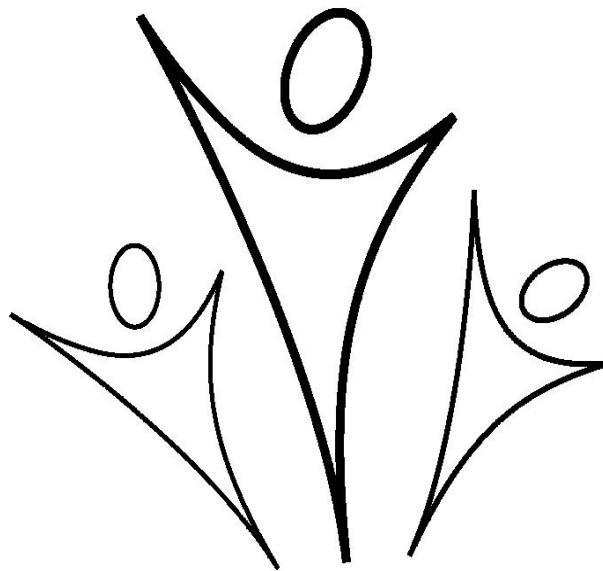
§ § §

Keep your key donors and supporters in the ‘communication loop’. Send them copies of your regular newsletter and the special recognition edition so they too can read of the wonderful work your volunteers are doing. Let the volunteers know they are being mentioned in dispatches!

§ § §

Do you have a volunteer who has done it all and won it all? Maybe it’s time to establish and name an award after them. It might be the Jim Smith award for the volunteer voted the best team member by their peers. Ensure that every time this award is presented, a few minutes are spent acknowledging the volunteer after whom the award is named. This means you will continue to publicly honour a volunteer legend in your organization.

Recognizing trends



Be aware of new trends in volunteering and how they impact on the needs of different types of volunteers you engage. The greater your responsiveness to these trends and the needs of different volunteers, the more successful you will be at retaining and recognizing them.

§ § §

What demographic group are the trendsetters and will have the greatest impact on volunteering in the future? Yes, it is the Baby Boomers (born between 1946 to 1964). Their sheer size and numbers make them a very formidable force. Ken Dychtwald and Joe Flower in their book *Age Wave* found that at each of stage of their lives, whatever were the needs and desires of the Baby Boomers became society's most dominant concerns. They suggest that if you can anticipate the movement of the Baby Boomer generation, you can see into the future!

No volunteer program lives within a vacuum. It is shaped, influenced and often moulded by the world in which it resides. Its clients, services, volunteers, paid staff and efforts are subject to its ups and downs, its variables and changes.

Sue Vineyard



§ § §

Baby Boomers are set to reshape and redefine volunteering. Have a peek into the future. Start by sending an email to judy@mtd4u.com or mtdjudy@inet.net.au requesting the *free* research report entitled *BOOMNET: Capturing the Baby Boomer Volunteer*. To retain those Baby Boomers longer, here are some ideas from the report.

§ § §

Many Baby Boomers are now experiencing their 'mid-life' and are asking themselves 'what am I doing with the rest of my life?' Be aware that for Baby Boomers this is a time to reflect on the past, question the present and refocus and reprioritize into the future. Many of them have been *successful* in their careers, they now also want to be *significant* in their lives. That's great news, because volunteering offers the Baby Boomers the ideal opportunity to feel significant through social and community involvement.

§ § §

Get ready for the Baby Boomers – get your house in order! Baby Boomers are better educated and more assertive than their parents. They are used to giving feedback and are not prepared to just stand by without comment. They will 'vote with their feet' and leave those organizations that do not communicate openly, encourage feedback and respond appropriately.

§ § §

Do tensions and inequalities still exist between your paid staff and volunteers? Watch out! Baby Boomers will not put up with this. They expect to be treated as equals. If the contribution of both paid staff and volunteers is not equally appreciated within your organization, you will find yourself without Baby Boomer volunteers.

§ § §

Be aware that Baby Boomers are both the ‘stress’ and ‘sandwich’ generation. They are caught between their ageing parents who are living longer and who will require their care, and their adult children who will not leave home. As the pace of life has increased, Baby Boomers have found themselves ‘time poor’ with little time for family, friends, children, parents, career, hobbies and, oh yes – volunteering.

§ § §

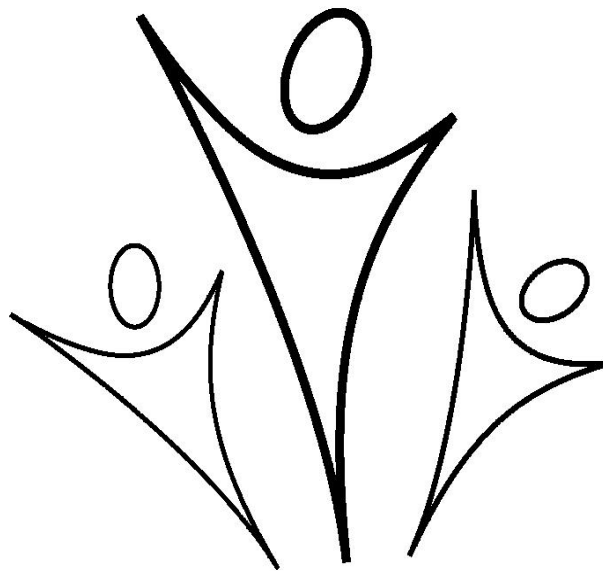
The most precious commodity of a Baby Boomer is time. Baby Boomers will give of their time only if it will be an interesting, challenging and meaningful volunteering experience. It might be time to adopt a new strategy by asking potential volunteers, beginning with the Baby Boomers: ‘What are your *needs* from volunteering?’ If organizations are able to identify the needs of the potential volunteer, then they are more likely to be able to ‘match’ the individual to a volunteering opportunity that meets those needs.

§ § §

Baby Boomers will not allow themselves to be caught in the one volunteer role forever. Even so, Baby Boomers see volunteering as a high priority in approaching retirement. It’s just that Baby Boomers have a very different view about retirement – they see themselves as taking up new learning opportunities, pursuing travel and hobbies, exploring their creative talents, continuing in part-time employment and of course, volunteering. It will be a time of *transition* rather than *termination*. Baby Boomers will still want to volunteer, but they will have less time to commit to their volunteer work and will require greater flexibility in what is being asked of them.

§ § §

Short-term volunteers



Consider whether your organization is still geared for the regular long-term volunteer. Are recruitment, training, supervision and management structures designed for such volunteers? To effectively respond to the Baby Boomer generation, redevelop your strategies to meet the needs of the short-term, time-limited volunteer.



So where do you begin? Nancy Macduff explains in her book *Episodic Volunteering* that many people who can't take on long-term, regular voluntary work may be interested in episodic volunteering. This can mean a short-term, finite assignment (such as a one-day clean-up campaign or a six-month term on a board) or service for short periods of time at regular intervals (such as for one month each year preparing for an annual event). Have you explored the possibilities of using these short-term or episodic volunteers?



Undertake a task analysis. Ask yourself these questions: Are there large jobs that can be broken down into smaller parts? Can long-term projects be carried out in discrete stages? Can new jobs be created that will suit short-term assignments? If you answer yes to any of these, you have the potential to attract even the most time-strapped people. Get moving and design strategies to emphasize the limited time commitment you're requesting.



Ensure that the volunteering opportunities match the time these volunteers have available. Allocate tasks that do not require them to come into the office and can be accomplished in their own time and in a location convenient to them. Or tasks that are truly time-limited and project-oriented, so that when the project is finished, the volunteer can leave with your thanks and blessing.




Consider utilizing other types of volunteers in an exchange program with these time-strapped task-oriented volunteers. For example, in exchange for two hours of their time a week for several months, other volunteers might run various errands for the volunteers. For example, allocate one volunteer to buy fresh fruit and vegetables for all the other volunteers at the local growers market. Buying in bulk for a group could mean saving money too and the volunteers know that they don't have to worry about finding additional time to shop.



Make arrangements for local businesses to come to you, to save volunteer time. For example if you have a group of volunteers come in each week to work on a project, the local drycleaner can drop by to take and return dry-cleaning and the mobile oil-change service can be arranged in the parking lot once a month. And local caterers can drop by with great take-home dinners for a small price so the volunteers do not need to cook a meal that evening.

Our vision controls the way we think and, therefore, the way we act . . . The vision we have of our jobs determines what we do and the opportunities we see or don't see.

Charles Koch



So to keep short-term volunteers who are feeling time poor coming back again and again, you have to be very creative in finding ways to give them back time. Shopping, cooking, house cleaning and household repairs are all examples of activities that people often feel they have no free time to complete. So aim to give them back their time and sometimes short-term will change to long-term.

§ § §

As many short-term volunteers feel so time-strapped, they are not prepared to do just anything that is asked of them. If they have a particular expertise, their time may be better spent utilizing their specialist knowledge, rather than simply being the willing generalist. Make every minute count!

§ § §

Other volunteers prefer to move away from their occupational skills, like the accountant who is willing to volunteer for anything except doing the books! The easiest way to find out which way to go is to ask the volunteer themselves.

§ § §

Focusing on the amount of time required of volunteers to help your organization is one way of utilizing volunteers. Another way is to focus more on *talent* and to identify how volunteers can use their talents. For example, knowing someone has skills as a journalist may mean that instead of trying to get them on the fundraising committee, you have them use their talents by writing press releases and newsletters. The concentration is then on the task to be completed rather than the time involved. Reward not only quantity of time, but also quality of time.

As far as we can discern, the sole purpose of human existence is to kindle a light of meaning in the darkness of mere being.

Carl Jung



§ § §

If you concentrate less on time and more on talent, you can more effectively make the ‘mind shift’ to utilizing short-term volunteers. You can also become much better at recognizing and rewarding this type of volunteer so they do come back again and again. Thank not only the long-serving volunteer who has done 2,000 hours, but also the short-term volunteer who gave 20 quality hours to arrange a successful once-off fundraising event.

§ § §

When the project is completed by the short-term volunteer, Steve McCurley and Sue Vineyard in their book *Best Practices for Volunteer Programs* suggest that you might create a ‘pass’. This pass thanks the volunteers for the work they have done, suggests they enjoy a short break from volunteering, but guarantees a smooth re-entry into your program as soon as they are ready to return. Now that’s a message of appreciation and ‘y’all come back now, you hear’!

§ § §

Rewards and recognition for the short-term volunteer must also be part of your whole recognition program but will differ to those for your long-term volunteers. There should never be the same reward for the volunteer giving 10 years of service as the volunteer giving 10 days. So aim to find a balance between truly rewarding and constantly applauding. Have a mixture of volunteers on your ‘recognition team’ to ensure that long-term volunteers are not offended and short-term volunteers are not forgotten.



No matter how short-term your volunteers, do some research so you customize your recognition, just as you would do with your long-term volunteers. Have them complete a ‘tell us about you’ sheet so you can personalize your recognition of them. Focus on recognition that is easy for the volunteer to take with them when they leave, such as an inspirational book with an inscribed thank you inside, a signed picture of the volunteer with the team or with clients, or memorabilia with the organizational logo.



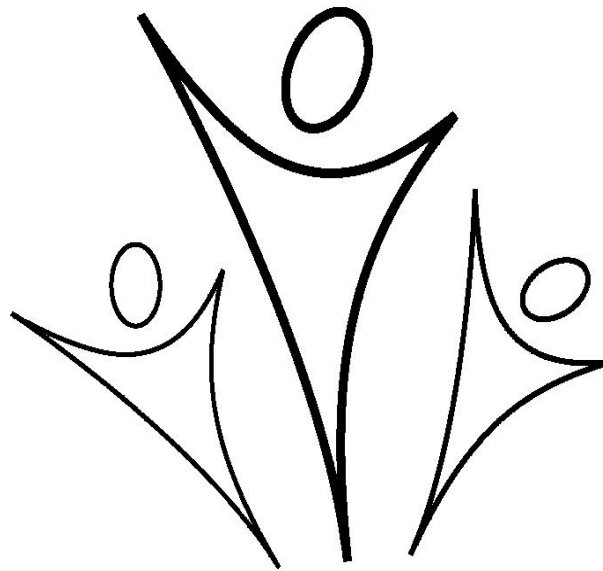
Make sure the short-term volunteer also feels appreciated with a verbal thankyou given in front of their current volunteering team. Also don’t forget the written thankyou with a letter or card sent to their home and a mention in the newsletter. Be sure to include them on the invitation list for the annual volunteer recognition dinner.



Keep in touch with these short-term volunteers. Send them the regular newsletter or a copy of the latest article about your organization in the newspaper. You might also send the occasional ‘how are you going’ email, note or postcard or a quick telephone call. These personal touches can be coordinated so that they always feel connected. Keep a list of these short-term volunteers and, depending on numbers, aim to write to say hello two or three times each year. This simple ‘catch up’ note can help ensure that they will come back again when needed and always feel special and important.



*Online volunteers and other
long-distance volunteers*



There are some volunteers who you may never physically meet and yet are providing important volunteering services online or from a great distance. Many people are using the internet to search for volunteer roles, and other people are using technology to carry out volunteer work online. They may be doing so for a variety of reasons: time constraints, personal preference, their remote location or a disability that prevents them from volunteering on site. Whatever the reasons, don't ignore these valuable volunteers.



The range of online volunteering assignments is only limited by your imagination. What about: database maintenance; translating documents; designing promotional material, newsletters and websites; providing professional consulting services online; providing online tutoring, mentoring or coaching; researching on the web; supporting clients or group members via chat rooms. What other ideas do you have?



You may never meet your online volunteers face-to-face, but it's just as important to recognize them as your on-site volunteers. Communicate with them regularly, keep them informed of activities and changes within the organization, and email or post them newsletters. Make sure you have a personalized 'recognition form' for each of these volunteers, just as you have for your on-site volunteers. Most of all, find ways to recognize and reward their valuable contribution to your organization.

Small opportunities are often the beginning of great enterprises.

Demosthenes

A stylized logo consisting of three abstract human figures in black, arranged in a triangular formation with their arms raised, suggesting unity or support.

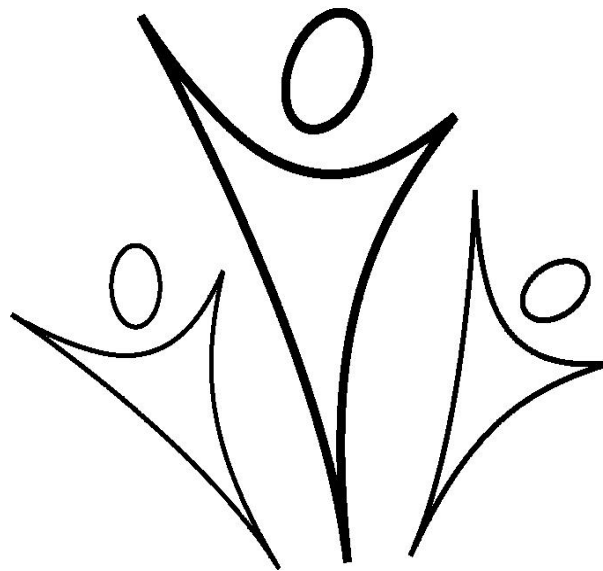
Here are some ideas to get you thinking about how to recognize your online or long-distance volunteers. Schedule phone times, convenient to both, to contact volunteers to find out how they are going. Visit these volunteers when you are actually in the area. Send an e-certificate directly to their in-box or post a framed certificate to say thanks.



Send cards on important dates such as birthdays. Send letters to their family or employers thanking them for sharing the volunteer. Forward thankyou letters from clients. And always, invite them to the annual recognition event.



Families, young people and seniors



Another increasing trend is family volunteering. Time is of the essence, so if it's a choice between spending time with their family or volunteering, volunteering will miss out. But if all the family can volunteer time together, then two goals are achieved. More and more families are seeking opportunities where they can volunteer together.



To promote family volunteering and retain volunteers longer in your organization, be sure that you make room for everyone in the family. Devise projects that can involve the various family members, from children to adults, in age-appropriate tasks. If you can meet this challenge, you can have 2, 3 or more volunteers for the metaphorical price of 1!



Aim to include rewards that are suitable for the whole family – adults and children. What about a donated family pass to the movies, the local theme park, the circus that is coming to town or dinner for the whole family. This type of recognition reinforces that the family volunteering together are also rewarded together – allowing families to spend even more time with each other.



If you are wanting to retain young people, do some research. Especially note the report by Katharine Gaskin, *What Young People Want From Volunteering*. She uses the acronym **flexivol** to summarize her research. This stands for **flexibility**, **legitimacy** (in terms of significance and positive image), **ease of access**, **experience** (for personal and career development), **incentives** (a reference and out-of-pocket expenses), **variety**, **good organization** and some **laughs**.

Being considerate of others will take your children further in life than any college degree.

Marian Wright Edelman



How do you give recognition to these young volunteers? Develop their skills, commend their new skills and give them a great reference for their curriculum vitae. Send letters of commendation to their parents, grandparents and teachers. Arrange an article mentioning them in the local paper. Nominate them for youth-based awards. Explore the opportunity for them to receive class credits from colleges for their volunteering and give them the chance to speak publicly about volunteering.



Wanting to attract and retain *older* volunteers? Lucy Rose Fischer and Kay Banister Schaffer, in their book *Older Volunteers*, provide some answers. They found that older volunteers are seeking opportunities for personal growth, social interaction and making good use of their free time. When targeting older people, emphasize that you can provide these sorts of opportunities.



Understand what you mean by the term ‘older’ or ‘seniors’. One of our fastest growing age categories is the over 90s! A person retiring at 55 may have different reasons for remaining active in volunteering to someone over 70. Be aware of these differences and always be willing to ask people, ‘What attracted you to volunteer for us and what do you want from this volunteering experience?’

§ § §

How do you give recognition to these senior volunteers? Provide for out-of-pocket expenses such as transportation. Designate parking spaces near the building entrance. Arrange discount coupons for food, groceries, entertainment or services. An on-site handyman to do repairs for seniors in their homes at reduced rates could be a big hit. Also provide lots of opportunities for socialization, recreation and networking.

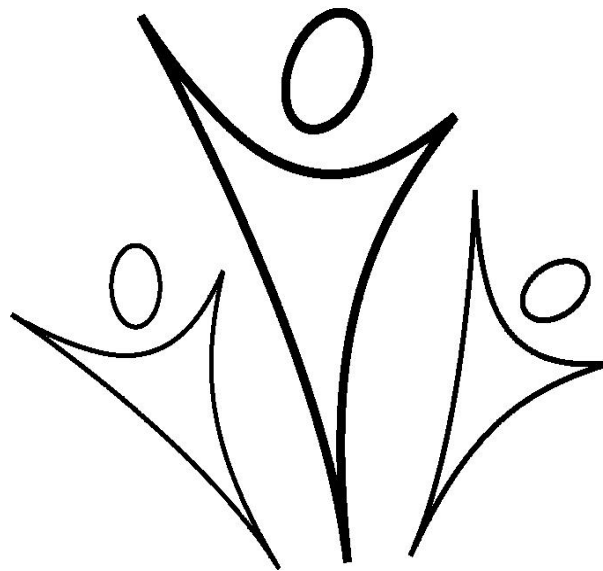
§ § §

The longer I live the more beautiful life becomes.

Frank Lloyd Wright



The annual recognition event



Celebration should be an integral part of any recognition and reward program for your volunteers. The power of celebration can be boosted by a special event. An annual recognition event reaffirms your volunteers as important individuals to the organization.



Does your organization hold an annual volunteer recognition event? Has it been a tradition for years? Has it become a bit tired, boring and ‘ho-hum’? Is it being held in the same location, with the same speeches, the same menu and the same or no theme year after year? Time to spice up the event and add some variety. The annual event can be managed by your recognition and reward team. Or appoint an annual event team whose sole role is to undertake organizing this formal recognition event.



Your annual recognition event can take many forms based on budget, past events and those involved. Whatever form the event takes, here are 10 keys to making it a truly memorable experience:

- standardize your awards
- do your research and ask your volunteers
- ensure there is a budget
- make it inspirational
- educate everyone
- involve senior management
- make it entertaining with fun and humour
- involve the audience
- recommit and revitalize
- evaluate, improve and vary in the future.

Tradition is what you resort to when you don't have the time or the money to do it right.

Kurt Herbert Alder



First, *standardize your awards*. Establish written guidelines and a standardized system of nomination and selection for all awards. Make all procedures transparent. Standardization ensures that the award process will continue to be consistent and fair despite any turnover in paid staff and volunteers.



You may give awards for outstanding service or length of service, or awards related to particular job types such as administrative, client contact or leadership. Sometimes awards do not fit a particular category at all. But you do need to have a standardized process.



One of the most successful and fairest ways to give awards is to have everyone involved in nominating winners. Then have the final screening and selection process of the winners made by a representative committee. This process ensures equality and fairness in the bestowing of all awards.



Second, do some *research*. Ask your volunteers what they would like to do for the annual recognition event. Plan the event *with* your volunteers and not just *for* them. You may be surprised about some suggestions they make. List all the suggestions and have your volunteers vote on what event suggestions they like the most. Now that is a truly representative approach!



Third, confirm the *budget*. It does not need to be an unlimited budget but it does need to be realistic for the event. You can certainly hold a memorable event with a very limited budget. But never, ever make it look ‘cheap’. Cheapness sends the message that volunteers are not important or truly valued by your organization.



Utilize a range of different strategies to keep the budget under control. Print simple invitations in-house and have paid staff make the decorations. Seek donations for the event for room hire, catering, transport and those lucky door prizes. Aim for a win-win for your donors, allowing them to get something back in return – perhaps free publicity and future business from your volunteers and your organization.



Investigate the availability of sponsorship for awards by businesses or prominent community members. Also, many State governments and local councils have small grants available. National Volunteer Week or International Volunteer Day can attract funding. Visit your local Volunteer Centre for some ideas of funding avenues to explore.




Fourth, the event needs to be *inspirational*. Make sure it lifts the spirits of those attending. Allow volunteers to see and hear how they are making a difference to those they serve. Use the power of testimonials from paid staff, clients, other volunteers and senior management – either in person or via video or PowerPoint. Other testimonials from family, friends and others can also be truly inspiring.



Involve the best speakers you can to tell the most inspiring stories. Just because someone is the CEO it doesn’t mean they are the best public speaker. Clients can often give the most genuine and heartfelt speeches. At a recognition event for volunteer ambulance officers, a gentleman told the story of having a heart attack while out fishing on the rocks at the local beach. Two off-duty ambulance volunteers resuscitated him and saved his life. He spoke softly of the events and the actions of the volunteers, and humbly thanked them for ensuring he was there today and able to watch his grandchildren grow. It was truly inspirational!

The only certain happiness in life is to live for others.

Leo Tolstoy



Fifth, the event needs to re-educate everyone there about the value and importance of the work volunteers are doing for the organization. Inform and remind senior management, board members, sponsors, paid staff and volunteers themselves of the depth and breadth of what your volunteers are actually doing. Avoid vague generalities – highlight specific examples of what volunteers have achieved over the year.



What is said when the awards are given is important education for all. Ensure that with each award presented, a few minutes are spent talking about the history of the award, why it is given, how the recipient is chosen and why this particular volunteer is receiving the award. Generalisations will not do. Provide whoever is presenting the award with ‘cue cards’ about the specific actions and accomplishments of the individual receiving the award.



Allow the volunteer recipients to say a few words. Too many times, recipients are called onto the stage, given a quick handshake, have the award thrust in their hands and are then marched off again. When a volunteer has earned an award, let’s hear what they have to say about it. The words of a recipient will often move the awards ceremony from an impersonal process to a heart-warming personalized experience.



Make absolutely sure when giving awards that recipients’ names on awards are spelled correctly. There is nothing more embarrassing than getting it wrong. Misspelled names simply send a message that ‘you don’t care and didn’t even bother to find out how to spell my name’. There is no excuse for not double-checking and triple-checking the names of award recipients.



But what if it does happen? Apologize immediately. Don’t make excuses or blame others. Have a new award with the correct spelling prepared immediately after the event. Publicly present the award again, even if it is only in front of fellow volunteers in the office, or deliver it personally to the recipient at their home.



What if an award recipient is unable to attend the event because of illness, prior commitments or other reasons? Still make sure to acknowledge the volunteer and announce the details of the volunteer’s award at the event. With the recipient’s permission, invite a close family member or friend to accept the award on their behalf. If not, aim to have another occasion at which the award can be given publicly to celebrate that volunteer.

I now perceive one immense omission in my psychology – the deepest principle of human nature is the craving to be appreciated.

William James



Sixth, as with any other form of recognition, have *senior management involved* in the annual recognition event. Plan for your CEO and others to attend the *entire* event. Avoid having them just ‘pop in and out’ of the event, thinking no-one will notice – everyone will! This is not involvement – it is just passing by. If the CEO or other dignitaries are to give a speech, unless they are skilled public speakers, ensure they keep them short and sweet!



Challenge the CEO and other senior management to go beyond the usual speeches and handshaking and lighten up! Can they do a fun ‘skit’ at the event? Short skits are great fun when done appropriately and they have a special meaning when management are able to not take themselves too seriously and poke a little light-hearted fun at themselves.



Try to avoid having senior management, the board of directors or other dignitaries all sitting together at the front tables. Scatter these people amongst the tables with your volunteers. It will give your volunteers a feeling of equality and promote networking by all.



Seventh, make the event *entertaining and include fun and humour*. Have a presenter or master of ceremonies (MC) who is quick off the mark and able to adlib and bring good ‘clean’ humour and laughter to the event at the appropriate times. Laughter lightens the mood and makes it more enjoyable for all. Consider including some light-hearted stories about volunteers, a short visual presentation of volunteer bloopers and some fun, non-threatening games.

Smile, it increases
your face value.

Dolly Parton



No need to spend a fortune on expensive or lavish entertainment, music can make the event more memorable. Some catchy tunes playing in the background add to the atmosphere. Your volunteer choir, the local school band or the local theatre and dance troupe can perform for the event. A sing-a-long to some well-known tunes also works well, particularly with older volunteers. Time to let your imagination go wild!



Choose a fun theme for the annual event. Choose one that coordinates with the overall theme of your recognition and reward program, or consider taking a different direction. A theme will also add to the fun, be a surprise for your volunteers and ensure that it is never boring and the ‘same old same old’ year after year.



Different themes add variety, excitement and anticipation each year. Seek donations based on your themes. If you have a theme of ‘growing your volunteers and organization’, approach local nurseries or garden supply stores to provide seedlings or small plants for each volunteer to represent growth. Have larger plants or other garden products donated as prizes. Book publishers could donate gardening books. Or a garden design company may provide consultations for your volunteers. Just some ideas to plant the seeds for you!

As it is an awards event, what about an Academy Awards theme? Make mock statuettes, roll out the red carpet and have flash photos being taken when people arrive. Add awards for ‘best volunteer in a drama’ (good in emergency services area), ‘best volunteer in a foreign film’ (volunteer interpreters), ‘best supporting volunteer in an administrative role’ and more. All that is left is for the envelopes to be opened and ‘the winner is . . .’ to be announced!

§ § §

Why not choose a space theme – after all, volunteers are ‘out of this world’! Have the MC in a spacesuit and name the tables after different planets. Want some more ideas? What about a ‘rock and roll’ theme as ‘volunteers keep the place rocking’. Or a music theme from either the 60s, 70s, 80s or 90s will work really well.

§ § §

Other great events can be developed around a circus theme, a magic theme, a beach theme, or a jungle theme. The list goes on and on . . . it is only limited by your own imagination and the creativity of your recognition and reward team.

§ § §

Eighth, aim for *audience participation*. Provide opportunities for everyone to be part of the event. Just sitting and watching while a few people do all the talking is not participating. Add games, contests with donated prizes and other fun activities to engage people.

§ § §

Have some icebreakers to help people network and mix. There are lots of books with ideas on icebreakers and many more ideas can be found on the internet. Don’t have anything too threatening or embarrassing but just great ways to ‘meet and greet’ others. The more people are engaged in the activity, the more enjoyment they have and the more memorable the event becomes.

§ § §

Base the annual event on a popular game or quiz show. Award recipients can ‘come on down’ to receive their awards with everyone clapping and cheering them. Crazy questions can be asked with inexpensive prizes to be won as the audience become willing contestants.

§ § §

Ninth, see the event as an opportunity for volunteers to *recommit and be revitalized*. It is a time to acknowledge the past, recognize the present and look to the future. Reinforce and remind all your volunteers of ‘why we are here and what we are aiming to achieve’ so that they can recommit for another year. A symbolic signing up again of volunteers at the event for another year is a great way of harnessing their commitment and continuing their involvement.

The measure of success is not whether you have a tough problem to deal with, but whether it's the same problem you had last year.

John Foster Dulle



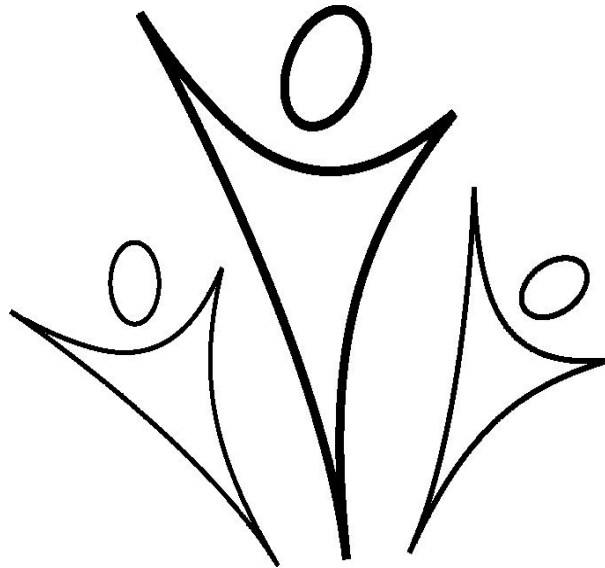
Tenth, *evaluate, improve and continue to vary* the annual recognition event. Gather feedback from attendees soon after the event through a short questionnaire or by asking them directly. Use this feedback as the basis to improve upon each year. What a rewarding feeling to be part of an event program that just keeps getting better year after year!

§ § §

Broaden your horizons. Consider joining with other organizations to produce powerful recognition events. Working together, larger budgets can be established, networking opportunities are increased and understanding across organizations is enhanced. National Volunteer Week or International Volunteer Day are great chances to combine celebrations.

§ § §

Successful events



So the recognition and reward event is on! Let's mention some of the main tasks that need to be covered along the way to make it a success. Appoint an event team that includes volunteers. Begin by preparing an event schedule, add some deadlines, and give yourself a good lead up to a smooth event.

§ § §

Pick the day and time. Choose a time most suitable for your volunteers. Check what else is happening 'around the traps'. No recognition event can succeed when clashing with sporting grand finals and royal shows. Check rather than regret.

§ § §

Visit some suggested venues. Look at suitability and cost. Consider the 'big points' of audience size including number of required tables and chairs and parking availability. Pay attention to the smaller details too such as electrical outlets for the audiovisual presentation. Book the best venue to meet your checklist and budget.

§ § §

Carefully choose your MC and other speakers. Avoid boring and go for entertaining every time! Have a list of potential speakers and approach them to attend. Have them 'lock in' the date. Prepare the speeches or briefing notes if required for the local dignitaries – but keep it short. Check on the needs of all presenters – PowerPoint, mobile microphones and so on.

§ § §

Food, glorious food! Decide on the type and quantity of food required. Is it a potluck or bring-a-plate affair? Or is it being catered for? Are waiters and formal table settings required? What will happen with serving food, pouring drinks and cleaning up. Be clear on what you need and always obtain three quotes on catering costs. Then book the preferred caterers well in advance.

§ § §

Develop that invitation list. List all of your volunteers first, then add paid staff, senior management and other important guests. Get those invitations right – don't forget the date, time and location. Include a request for replies (RSVPs) and ask guests to advise of any special dietary or disability access needs. Give people about 3 weeks to respond. But if you want a politician to join you, a longer lead-up time will be needed for acceptance.

§ § §

Check, check and re-check those audiovisual requirements, from power points to PA systems. What equipment does the venue supply, what can you supply and what do you need to hire? And who is going to operate it all on the day? Get some quotes, select the best and book it in.

§ § §

Laughing at our mistakes can lengthen our own life. Laughing at someone else's can shorten it.

Cullen Hightower



Have you other entertainment in mind: live musicians, belly dancers, performing seals, the local choir? Are they volunteering their services or are there costs involved? Is the entertainment the right ‘fit’ for your audience and your theme? If the budget allows for entertainment, then get some quotes, choose your entertainment, and book them in too.

§ § §

Aiming for some media coverage? Draw up a list of all the possible media outlets for your event. Prepare a short media release. Include details of time, date, venue and the name of the event. Add some ‘teaser’ sentences about the event and what well-known people will be speaking and in attendance. Line up spokespeople to be interviewed and include some volunteers too. Use your imagination – almost anything is newsworthy if you find the right angle.

§ § §

Prepare a more comprehensive media release to send the day before or on the day of the event. Remember when preparing your release, stick to the golden rule of A, B, C – strive for accuracy, brevity and clarity. Always have a catchy headline. Keep it to one page in length using short sentences, plain language without any jargon, and avoid repetition. Include contact details for further information.

§ § §

Always put the what, where, when, why, who and how early in that media release. Understand that when editors reduce articles to fit the space available they cut from the bottom up.

§ § §

Competition for media attention is fierce and coverage of your event is most often a bonus rather than a given. Also be aware that you can’t always control what the media will publish. What you would *like* reported may be different from what actually *is* reported. Try to reduce the risks by issuing clearly written releases and liaising with the media involved.

§ § §

Capture the event in pictures. Don’t miss this great photo opportunity. Decide what the photographs are to be used for – glossy publications, newsletters, memorabilia photos for your volunteers, publicity shots or pin-ups on the bulletin board. Engage a professional photographer or assign a camera-savvy person to snap those shots. Camera technology today has moved the amateur closer to the professional. Avoid taking photos yourself – you will be far too busy and you will forget to snap or will take blurred pictures of feet, walls and half a head as you dash around trying to do it all.

§ § §

If you don’t know what to do, call the media and at least give the appearance of doing something.

David Peterson



Take the chance to get some great publicity shots via the media. If they do attend your event and take photographs, ask to view all the shots taken. You can later purchase some professional prints relatively cheaply. Sometimes, if you acknowledge the newspaper as the source, they may even donate them to you.

§ § §

What other visuals will be needed on the day? Will there be decorations, displays and other materials? Is a sign writer, printer or designer required? Get some specific quotes from suppliers and then book what you need. Or do you have the materials already? Think about your audience, tailor your visuals to suit the event and add some sparkle to the eye!

§ § §

Don't ever try to do an event all alone. Utilize your event team. Delegate, delegate and delegate! Make a list and allocate tasks. Have people responsible for media releases and liaison, speakers and guests, decorations and displays, invitations and acceptances, and so on. Meet regularly, keep updated and have fun!

§ § §

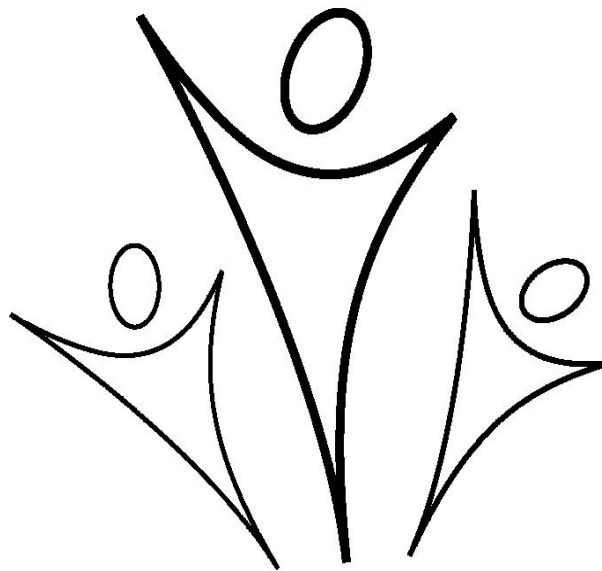
Be sure to undertake an evaluation after the event. Verbal and also written replies through a short survey of attendees can provide valuable feedback for future events. Always include an open-ended section for other event ideas, especially from your volunteers – there are always some real 'gems' in their responses.

§ § §

Celebrate! After all is said and done, and the event has been and gone – hold an event team celebration. Out to dinner, out to lunch or out to brunch, find a way for all the team to come together to be thanked and celebrate the success of your event.

§ § §

Reviewing regularly



Continue to regularly review and vary your recognition and reward program. When things are going well with your program, sometimes the standards that were applied to get there in the first place can begin to slip. Complacency breeds mediocrity! Aim to constantly review your operations and continually ask two questions: Why are we doing it this way? and What if we did it differently? These are the key questions to ensure that your retention, recognition and reward program will just continue to get better and better.

§ § §

Welcome feedback and be attentive to complaints. Understand that just because nobody complains to you, it doesn't mean that everything is going smoothly. Only a small percentage of people ever complain when they receive poor customer service. Even fewer volunteers would complain about not feeling recognized or rewarded.

§ § §

Most volunteers never complain because they believe it's too difficult, there's too much rigmarole, it doesn't do any good and nothing changes anyway. Others believe that as volunteers they should never complain and it is easier just to move on. So most dissatisfied volunteers simply slip away.


§ § §

Understand that the mere existence of a retention, recognition and reward program never guarantees its success. The very best programs are continually evolving and changing. Always aim to deliver more than you promise – that way you will always exceed the expectations of your volunteers in wonderful ways.

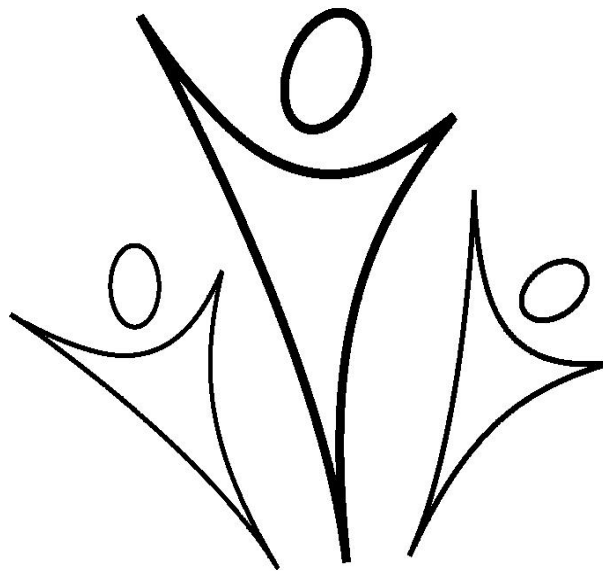
§ § §

Our lives improve only when we take chances – and the first and most difficult risk we can take is to be honest with ourselves.

Walter Anderson



Coming to a close



Thank you for reading this book. *Count on Me!* is full of 100s of retention, recognition and reward ideas. Take the ideas, tips and techniques in this book and begin today to try some ideas that could work for you. For even more ideas, please go to my website at www.mtd4u.com. Why not send me an email at judy@mtd4u.com or mtdjudy@inet.net.au and share your own ideas with me.



You don't need to change the world on your own. It is critical to establish a retention, recognition and reward team to assist you in developing the ultimate program for your volunteers. And always remember YOU are an important part of any successful retention, recognition and reward program for your volunteers. So please look after yourself, take care of your health and happiness, and always find the time to laugh, to dance, to sing and to paint. Aim to enjoy the journey and the adventure that is your life.

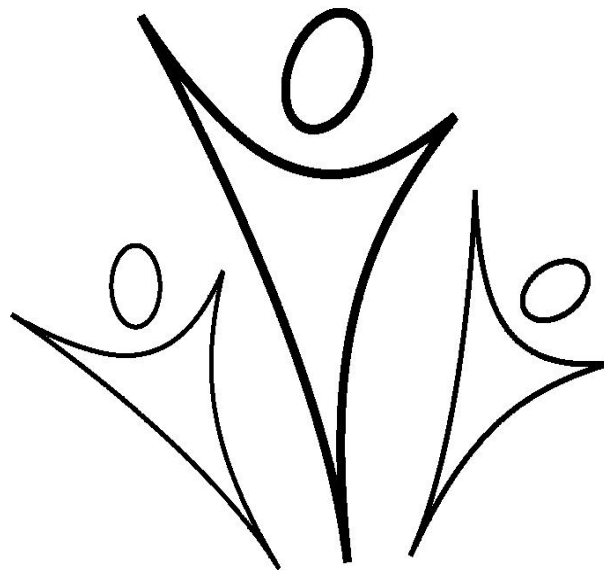


From the moment I picked up your book until I laid it down, I was convulsed with laughter. Some day I intend reading it.

Groucho Marx



Suggested readings



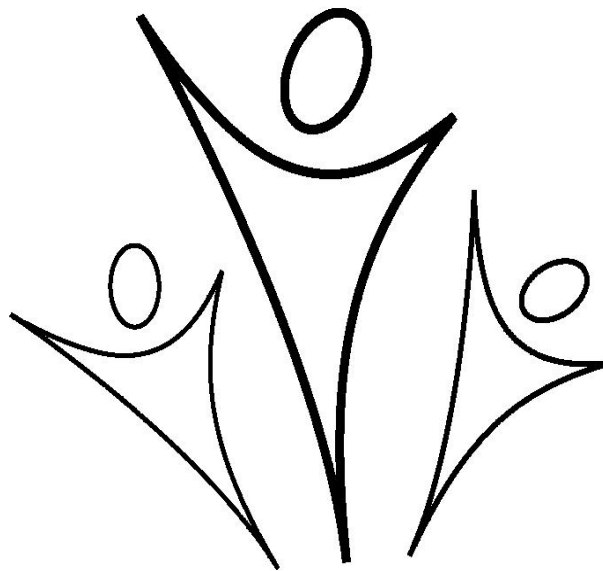
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About the author



Judy Esmond, Ph.D.

Dr Judy Esmond is the leading expert on how to gain, sustain and retain volunteers and members. She is one of the most in-demand speakers, consultants and authors on volunteering and membership issues and has worked with and presented to thousands around the world. Judy is the author of the best selling books *Count Me In! 501 Ideas on Recruiting Volunteers*, *Count on Me! 501 Ideas on Retaining, Recognizing and Rewarding Volunteers* and *Beyond Just Words! 501 Quotes for Those Who Serve*.

Judy is also an adjunct research fellow at the Centre for International Health at Curtin University and holds a Diploma in Welfare Psychology, a Bachelor and Masters degree in Social Work from Curtin University and PhD from the University of Western Australia. Her government commissioned research reports on *Baby Boomer Volunteers* and *Volunteer Motivation* are some of the most extensive in the world.

Judy comes from a background of volunteering in sports and represented her country in two sporting fields.

Judy's current work with her FREE 'Ultimate Ideas' Mastermind Group is attracting 1000s of new members. You too can receive complimentary membership and get her great FREE E-Book and newsletter filled with 100s of ideas on how to lead, recruit, recognize and retain volunteers and members at www.morevolunteers.com