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VOLUNTEERS: Will they Love us or Leave us?

What Makes Volunteers Stay?

To retain volunteers, an organization needs to be aware of what motivates each one to feel satisfied with the time he or she donates.

Accomplishments

Direct Service- For some volunteers the most rewarding work is direct contact with the individuals an organization serves. They can see the direct benefits of their work in their role as a mentor, helper, or other capacity.

Skill Development- Some people volunteer to develop new skills, enhance old ones, or do work other than their primary skill set.

Personal Growth- Some people volunteer to advance their careers, cultivate new interests, or assist in making career or education choices.

Challenge- Many volunteers leave out of boredom if not assigned challenging tasks.

Appreciation

Compliments- Informally, something as simple as "You're doing a great job!" can be a big morale booster.

Thank You Notes- Written thank you notes, whether form-letters (with personalized p.s. notes) or hand-written, are vital in encouraging continued involvement.

Snacks- Make snacks available during projects or meetings.

Appreciation Events- A special time to award efforts provides recognition and publicity for both the volunteers and your organization.

Publicity- Publicly acknowledge your volunteers' work and accomplishments.



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Gifts- Consider small gifts such as buttons, bookmarks, tote bags that promote the volunteer's service as well as your organization.

Privileges- Effective rewards can include such simple, no-cost things as reserving parking spaces for volunteers or giving them their own desks or workspaces.

Promotion- Volunteer jobs can be designed in hierarchical levels, allowing a volunteer to advance over time and acquire a higher "status."



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What Makes Volunteers Leave?

Organization- Many volunteers complain about the level of disorganization within an organization, if volunteers feel the organization is wasting time, money, or energy they will take their talents elsewhere.

Appearance of Office/Workspace- A cramped, cluttered, or outdated space is not appealing to be in. Make sure that the space is well lit and inviting.

Equipment Quality- Give volunteers the proper tools to do their tasks. A hole punch that doesn't work or a computer that freezes can drive a volunteer to frustration and departure.

Orientation and Training- A new volunteer should be introduced to the organization and its mission as well as the skills necessary for their tasks.

Communication- Volunteers should receive clear, day-to-day instructions about assigned tasks. Make sure every volunteer knows to whom s/he may go for additional instructions or clarification.

Feedback- Make sure to ask periodically for volunteers' feedback. Soliciting feedback can be asking, "How's everything going?" or conducting a formal survey.

Evaluation- Whether done formally or informally, providing information about a volunteer's work makes expectations clear and avoids resentment on both sides.

Interpersonal Relationships- Turnover tends to reduce when volunteers develop good interpersonal relationships with others and feel they are part of a team and have a support network within the organization.

Working Conditions- Educating paid staff about the value volunteers bring to an organization is crucial. Paid staff should give volunteers the same respect as any other coworker.