

# THE TOP 25 METHODS TO RETAIN VOLUNTEERS



By John L. Lipp

25. Each of us has our own unique motivators. If you really want a volunteer to stay, learn what motivates that person and then put that information into practice.
24. Successfully place the volunteer in the beginning. If you place a volunteer in a position that maximizes their potential for success—logic says that he or she will succeed. And successful people tend to be happy people and happy people tend to stay.
23. If your agency doesn't already have one, hire a professional volunteer program administrator.
22. Don't be afraid of saying "Thank You" too much. I've never heard of a volunteer quitting because he or she felt over appreciated. Over worked, yes! Over appreciated, no!
21. Vary your recognition program. The same old banquet every year with the same old rewards gets boring. When volunteers stop attending because they've already re-papered their house in certificates of appreciation, you know it's time to move on to something new.
20. Take the time to train your volunteers so that they know what they need to know to do their job.
19. For absolutely no reason at all, send your volunteer a note just to say "hi."
18. Once a year, ask the volunteers to give an anonymous evaluation of the agency, the paid staff and the programs (including the volunteer program).
17. Promote volunteers to new positions that require new skills, additional training and added commitment. Just because Dan is great at stuffing envelopes doesn't mean that he is going to be happy doing it for the next ten years.
16. Acknowledge that the agency is not your volunteer's number one priority in life. Guilt may have worked for your parents, but it doesn't work with volunteers.
15. Don't call the same volunteers over and over again. It's too easy to become dependent on the "Yes" people and burn them out. Plus, you miss out on developing a whole new pool of talent.
14. Use the media to promote your active volunteers. The media just loves stories about volunteers; next to all the depressing headlines, these stories create a nice balance. Plus, no matter what they say, people just love to see their name in print.

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13. Begin a Volunteer Advisory Committee. (Note: The key word is "advisory.") Such committees help to empower the volunteers, giving them a stronger connection to the agency and its mission, and a reason to stay involved.
12. Practice the fine art of informal evaluations. It's amazing how much feedback you can get by just chatting with your volunteers.
11. Resist the urge to "play favorites." In other words, be consistent with your policies.
10. Always emphasize your agency's mission statement. People no longer volunteer for agencies, they volunteer for causes.
9. Be flexible as an agency.
8. Be flexible as an individual.
7. Smile. No matter how much you want to grab the computer terminal and throw it across the room, don't let it show. Never let them see you stress.
6. Make the volunteer environment at your agency fun. No matter what work the volunteers are doing, they should have a good time doing it.
5. Set limitations with the paid staff. If the Operations Manager suggests that they use volunteers to clean up at the annual "Farm Animal and Petting Zoo Fundraiser," just say "No!" Your volunteers are too valuable to be given the tasks that nobody else wants to do.
4. Every once in a while, work along side your volunteers. Give them the sense of teamwork and the knowledge that you won't ask them to do anything that you wouldn't do yourself.
3. Consider your volunteers as unpaid staff and include them whenever possible in office parties, lottery pools, etc.
2. Be sure to balance the needs of the agency with the needs of your volunteers. Remember, it has to be a mutually satisfying relationship for both parties.

*And the number one method for retaining volunteers:*

1. Convince the entire paid staff to follow rules 2 through 25 because one person can't do it alone. Volunteer programs only work with a commitment that starts at the very top of the organization and continues all the way down through each successive level. ■