Creative Ways to Retain and Appreciate Volunteers

VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR TRACK
TNMHO CONVENTION
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What’s the common denominator in retention and appreciation?
• **CREATIVE** ideas attract creative people

• **CREATIVE** organizations attract creative volunteers

**Creativity**

*can solve almost any dilemma*
Make it fun for all your volunteers
WHAT IS RETENTION?

ACTIVITY OR OUTCOME?
RETENTION

- Occurs when all the pieces are in place
  - When meaningful work is done by the right volunteer in a welcoming environment
- No external standard to retention
  - Relative to each assignment and the agreement you make with the volunteer
- An “outcome” of doing things right
Retention Requires:

- Knowing what **motivates** volunteers
  - Reinvesting energy
  - Trying something new
  - Searching for something specific
  - Gaining new skills
  - Learning more about a topic that interests them

**There is no “one size fits all” answer**
Retention Reflects:

- What volunteers learn
- How they are treated
- How their work makes them feel
- What they want to accomplish or contribute
What might change their minds about continuing to volunteer?

- Not getting the opportunity they were expecting
- Encountering something they did not know how to handle
- It stopped being fun or rewarding
- Detected friction or corruption
- Perceived that their input was not wanted
Research: Positive factors impacting retention

- Use volunteers to recruit other volunteers
- Management practices that focus on a good experience for volunteers more than operations
- Allocate sufficient funds to support volunteer involvement
- Cultivate an organizational climate that welcomes volunteers and gives them an experience worth sharing.

Volunteer Management Capacity Study launched by the USA Freedom Corps. Research conducted by the Urban Institute
Research: Factors impacting retention

- Ratio of paid staff to volunteers is not related to retention
- The size of the charity does not impact retention
- Problems recruiting volunteers coincides with retention difficulties
- “Charities” that value volunteer involvement have a higher rate of volunteer retention than “charities” that perceive volunteer service as costly and unreliable.

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Training Designed by Volunteers

1. Volunteer Q & A training: Giving them what they want and what they need.

2. Seasoned volunteers shadow staff in developing new volunteer opportunities.

3. Team volunteers with staff on short term assignments.
Trainings That Build Confidence

Group Annual Reviews

- Keeping the organization’s mission, goals, and standards front and center
- Facts that validate the programs and correct misinformation
- Listening to volunteer feedback
Feedback Ideas

– Anonymous Feedback Form
  • Respond and taking action
– Capturing the volunteer perspective
  • Ask questions when volunteers finish a shift

Perhaps the most sincere form of recognition that impacts retention is “Seeing one’s own ideas put into action”
MAKE IT SPECIFIC

Supervisory Observations:

- Interaction with clients / comfort level
- Accuracy in reporting
- Communication with staff and volunteers
- Willingness to accept new assignments
- Understand policy and adapts to change
Appreciation is a wonderful thing. It makes what is excellent in others belong to us as well.

Voltaire
THE ANNUAL VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION EVENT IS BIG, WONDERFUL AND

Creative Ways to Appreciate Volunteers
Formal Thank You Events are absolutely worth the effort

**HOWEVER…**

Informal, continuous recognition is more important!

Susan J. Ellis

*From the Top Down*

*The Executive Role in Volunteer Program Success*
Creative Ways to Appreciate Volunteers

Possibilities:

• Individual letters to family or pastors
  
  Source: Lou Ann Smith, Volunteer Solutions

• Christmas cards from staff

• Ceremonies with volunteer’s peer group

• Partnership with KTBB Radio “Someone Special” Awards
You are a key piece to our success!

All your time and effort made this project a success. We appreciate your good work!
The Hartfield Company
Validating Volunteer Efforts

“When we ask ourselves which persons in our lives mean the most to us, we often find that it is those who can face the reality of powerlessness...and have chosen rather to share our pain, and touch our wounds with a gentle and tender hand. The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in our hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing, not curing, not healing...that is the friend who cares.”  

Author Unknown
Gems to Remember

Gratitude attracts support

Each volunteer’s needs differ

Appreciate each volunteer’s strengths and talents

Appreciation creates success

Timing counts

After you give volunteers something to do, get out of the way and let them do it.

Appreciating volunteers must be continuous
TOGETHER EVERYONE ACHIEVES MORE

SHARE YOUR BEST IDEAS

Creative Ways to Appreciate Volunteers
Is Your Bucket Empty?

• The “to thank” list
• Appreciate the great work you are doing
• Appreciate what your organization is contributing
• Seven minute *attitude adjustment*
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Presenter Information:

Vicki Harvey
Director of Community Relations & Development
The Hospice of East Texas
4111 University Blvd. Tyler, Texas 75701
903-266-3405
vharvey@hospiceofeasttexas.org