

Canada Conference 2023 Re-Engaging Volunteers

Introduction: Many churches are struggling to recover their volunteer momentum in this post-pandemic culture.

- Some people have a problem with the term, *volunteer* in the context of the church and ministry.
- I want to give scriptural perspective on this: *Philippians 2:6-7, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. New King James Version (NKJV)*
- Paul is reminding us that Jesus was not forced, the cross was his passion, his purpose, his place of personal sacrifice.
- Jesus was not a victim; he was a volunteer.
- Jesus was the worlds' greatest volunteer; He volunteered his life on our behalf:

To volunteer is to say, "Yes" from your heart.

- What makes volunteering at a church so special is this; people are saying "yes" from their heart, and they are saying "yes" to one of their greatest purposes.
- Now, as leaders it's easy to say, they are not volunteers, they are ministers, they are doing the work of ministry!
- It's true, these people are using their God given gifts, yes, they are serving the body of Christ, but at the end of the day, they are doing what Jesus Christ did, they are volunteering themselves to serve the Kingdom of God and others.

The danger of rejecting volunteer language: We could potentially under-deliver what volunteers deserve.

- Do you know what volunteer deserve?
 - Support
 - Appreciation.
- When we forget that people are volunteering their time and energy, we default to an entitlement mentality.
- We start saying, "It's your ministry, you *should* be doing this. You *should* be making a sacrifice."
- We will destroy our volunteer culture with that mentality in a Post Pandemic Volunteer Culture.

This is what I've heard from pastors in this post-pandemic church culture:

1. "We've lost volunteers."
2. "Volunteers want to serve on a more limited basis."
3. Volunteer Excellence is a down

How should leaders react when they are having a volunteer problem? What do we do when we believe in commitment and excellence, but we aren't getting these things from our volunteers?

- *Genesis 33:13-17^{12 13} And he said unto him, My lord knoweth that the children are tender, and the flocks and herds with young are with me: and if men should overdrive them one day, all the flock will die.¹⁴ Let my lord, I pray thee, pass over before his servant: and I will lead on softly, according as the cattle that goeth before me and the children be able to endure, until I come unto my lord unto Seir.*
- Two key ideas: 1) Don't Overdrive 2) Lead Softly
- We can push to quickly recover what we've lost in the pandemic, or we can lead softly, lead appropriately to the season we are in.
- Don't kill people to make progress

Volunteers in a Pandemic Culture (Don't & Do's)

Don't

- Don't be program focused, be people focused: Remember that the key to having success in volunteer culture is to value people over programs.
- Don't slide easily into a frustration mindset with volunteers.

Do's

- Let your energy reflect motivation not frustration.
- Expect excellence from volunteers, but also accept that excellence is a process.
- Your team's level of focus will vary, find positive ways to get their focus back. (Training, Tag-In's, Informal gatherings)
- Understand that not everyone has the gift you have. (Music, Teaching, Hospitality, Seeing the Details)

Volunteer Retention

Retention Strategy 1: Value Volunteers Above Programs.

- If you focus on retention, you don't have to recruit as much.

Retention Strategy 2: Hit their Sweet: "Sweet Spot"

- When a volunteer is not properly paired with the right role, the work is emotionally draining rather than life-giving.
- Some leave the church because they feel trapped in a ministry role.
- This person doesn't need another job.
- Stay away from the "just put me where you need me" trap. It sounds amazingly generous and flexible, but it's sure-fire way to have a short-term volunteer.
- We can't afford to put people where WE need them, we need to place them where THEY need to be.
- You are plugging a hole with a paper towel.
- People can feel "stuck" when they are not serving in their sweet spot.
- **Disclaimer: We ask our members to serve in a sweet spot ministry and also in a ministry where there is a need.**
- **Obligation Paradigm**
 - Focuses on asking people to serve out of duty because of what has been done for them.
 - Focuses on desperation for help
 - Characterized and fueled by guilt
 - Results in high-turnover and low morale
- **Satisfaction Paradigm**
 - Focuses on asking people to serve based on vision for them.
 - Focuses on properly pairing people in ministry
 - Focuses on proper care of volunteers
 - Characterized by high-level commitment and long term volunteers.
 - Satisfaction results in devotion
- **The S.H.A.P.E. Assessment. (Rick Warren)**
 - Spiritual Gifts
 - Heart
 - Abilities
 - Personality
 - Education/Experiences

Retention Strategy 3: A strong sense of moral motivation

- Volunteers thrive when they have an, “I’m making a difference” attitude.
- Volunteers thrive when they know how they are contributing to the larger story.
- Help them to see how what they are doing is crucial to fulfilling the mission of your church.
- ATC KNOW GROW SHOW
 - Our ministries can you which part of the KNOW, GROW, SHOW mission they impact.

Retention Strategy 4: A Healthy Culture

- In 1 Kings 10 the Queen of Sheba visited Solomon. It wasn’t just one thing she was impressed with, it was everything. The hospitality, the food, the organization, the staff, the leadership, the worship. In fact, she essentially said that they exceeded her expectations. There was a culture of excellence.
- Culture of Excellence
 - Culture of Excellence is doing the best you can with what you have.
 - If excellence is a problem, you will have a volunteer problem.
 - Excellence is a choice, and it’s an expensive one.
 - It costs a lot to achieve excellence.
- Culture of Servant Leadership (Mark 10)
- Culture of Christianity (Matt 5)

Retention Strategy 5: Appreciation

- Volunteers are giving their time, their energy, their talents.
- They are giving tangible things. Volunteer hours’ dwarf paid hours.
- (On average, 70% of all served hours at a church are volunteer hours.)
- Volunteers aren’t helping you; they are partnered with you in your mission! With that in mind, we must remember that volunteers don’t work for free, appreciation is their paycheck
- Remember, mass appreciation can’t be the only appreciation you offer
 - Volunteers have a bucket that needs to be filled with appreciation
- A few questions to help appreciations
 - How can I let this volunteer know I am thinking about them?
 - What would make this volunteer laugh?
 - What could I leave on their desk or in their room before they arrive?
- Ideas
 - Bring food or their favorite coffee drink/soda
 - Write Notes
 - Host a volunteer appreciation event

Retention Strategy 6: Fun & Friendship Moments

- Volunteers don’t need another job.
- Don’t take yourself too seriously as a leader
- Show a funny video that illustrates a problem your tackling
- Hand out a few “candy bars” or bring food to meetings
- Celebrate “Wins”
- Take time to catch up and find out what is happening in their world.