

3 TIPS FOR RETAINING VOLUNTEERS

When it comes to building strong ministries we often talk about recruiting volunteers.

However, once a person joins the team, do we know how to keep them?

3 Tips For Retaining Disability Ministry Volunteers

- BUILD RELATIONSHIPS** - The first way to help retain volunteers is to understand that volunteer appreciation is not an event - it's a relationship.
 - **Ministry is about the people you serve AND the people that serve with you.** They are equally important. Both have the same opportunities for growth from the ministry. God values the spiritual growth of both. So should we. When we stop seeing volunteers as a resource, and start seeing them as people that God values - everything changes.
 - **Ministry is people.** Sometimes what is more important than getting through our ministry checklist is being interruptible. When a team member wants to share with you about their life - stop and listen. This is ministry too.
 - **Watch where they shine.** When we take time to get to know our volunteers we also get to know their gifts. When you identify where someone shines, look for a way to invite them to use their specific gifts in your ministry. Provide guardrails, but also give them some ownership. There is nothing more fulfilling than using your God given gifts for God. When people feel seen, appreciated, and fulfilled they want to keep coming back. Send thank you notes. often.
 - **Create community.** Look for opportunities to foster relationships between team members. Can you have the same people serve together on a regular basis. Can you add bonding activities to your training meetings. What about a prayer ministry, where the whole team supports each other.
 - **Utilize the Jethro Principle.** If your team is large, then pour into some who are empowered to pour into others. (Exodus 18:14-24)

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2. **BUILD SKILLS OVER TIME** - The second way to help retain volunteers is to equip them by teaching them the way people actually learn - *a little at a time over time*.

- **Onboarding is a process.** Instead of viewing onboarding as one big training session, understand that onboarding takes time and many small steps. After the initial training where policies and expectations are gone over verbally and in writing, schedule the new volunteer to shadow more experienced volunteers. Keep doing this until they feel comfortable on their own. This is where the real training happens.
- **Bring the Training to the Team.** Instead of asking volunteers to come to one or two big trainings, bring smaller trainings to them. Share short training videos, lessons, demonstrations when volunteers are already at church. Try before service huddles, or even email out short videos for volunteers to watch at home. Wonderful Works provides many for free.
- **Reminders.** Don't expect a volunteer to remember everything they learn, especially when there's a stressful situation. Instead create a culture of continual learning by posting important reminders around the rooms, having student information easy to access, and checking in with team members and offering constructive reminders when you see the need. (Since you have already developed a trusting relationship - tip 1 - this is often well received.)

3. **BUILD PERSPECTIVE** - The third way to help retain volunteers is to learn to look at things from their perspective.

- **Don't blame the culture.** If you keep losing team members it can be easy to blame our culture of business and not look for issues that you may be able to fix. Doing this creates powerless ministries, and leaders who don't grow. Instead ask the members who are leaving a few questions to learn more about their experience. This will help you see if any common issues come up that you may have not realized were problems. This will allow you to make some changes and improve your ministry. This is actually empowering!

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3. BUILD PERSPECTIVE (Continued)

- **Consider asking these questions.** When a team member leaves (also for those who are still on the team) consider asking these questions to gain insight into what is working and where improvements need to be made.

- What did you love about serving?
- What was challenging about serving?
- What would have made it better?
- What do you wish we would have asked you before?

- **Common reasons why team members leave.** Many, many times team members leave because there is a systemic problem within the ministry that can often be easily fixed. Here are some of the most common issues:

- They don't feel seen. **Solution** - *Build relationships on the team.*
- They feel uninformed and confused. **Solution** - *Take a hard look at your communication system. Where can improvements be made?*
- They don't feel protected from being scheduled too often or from being put in a situation they don't feel equipped to handle. **Solution** - *Look to see where boundaries need to be added into your ministry system. Pair volunteers and students based on volunteer experience and skill level. Continue training them and recruiting more team members.*
- They don't have the resources they need. **Solution** - *Build better relationships and support with church leadership.*

- **Encouragement matters.** Watch for times when volunteers are doing a great job. Tell them you noticed. Tell them how what they do changes lives and impacts the Kingdom. Share these stories with your church leadership too. If possible, share wins with your whole church as often as you can. People don't want to leave teams that make them feel amazing.

- **Always keep praying! The most important thing you can do for your ministry team is pray for them. Pray. Pray. Pray. And pray some more.**