



Power Booster

DuPage Association of Volunteer Administration

Recipe for Retention

How can you retain volunteers when you have limited resources and there is stiff competition from other organizations? Retention is a process not a product and it starts with recruitment and your initial contact with a volunteer. Volunteers who feel a personal connection to your organization will stay. They want communication - so tell them what is going on, how they can help and how their help impacts the organization. They want to be recognized - so do so in a personalized way. Know their motivations and recognize them accordingly. You do not need the expensive 3Ps - plaques, pins and parties. It truly is the thought that counts! Create your own recipe for retention.

First get some “help in the kitchen”

Do you get stuck at your desk when you could be out communicating with your volunteers? Perhaps you need “help in the kitchen”. Recruit a team of volunteers with creative ideas, excellent communication skills and then delegate. Involve them not only in daily tasks but also helping with communications. Let your volunteers know these volunteers are helping because of your limited budget and time. Engage everyone in the solution. Use their creativity to find innovative ways to recognize your volunteers based on their motivations. You and your team of volunteers might try to:

- follow up in person or by phone with new volunteers to see how they are doing
- personally call and thank volunteers especially at Valentines’ Day and Thanksgiving. Make a call just to say thanks not “oh, by the way, can you volunteer next week?”
- send/give them thank-you notes, a fun bookmark, a photo of the volunteer, on-site recognition
- “give back” to your volunteers. Give them useful information about special events in their community, job openings, fun trivia facts like today is “National Bring a Teddy Bear to Work Day”. Use Give to Get marketing concepts. www.givetogetmarketing.com. Give them something that enhances their motivation and they’ll feel a more personal connection to your organization.

Ingredients

Use the “ingredients” or resources you already have such as:

- your volunteers who have the greatest resource of all – their time
- your volunteers’ skills like graphic design, communication skills, creative ideas, etc
- use available technology (email, webpage, email newsletters, blogs, podcasts, etc)
- use inexpensive bulletin boards, posters, flyers, handouts, etc
- involve your staff and community partners in providing perks and in-kind donations

“Mis en place” - have everything in place

One of the most common reasons for volunteers leaving is that they don’t have the information they need and don’t know where to get answers. Ensure that what your volunteers need is in place and easily accessible to them. Ask them what they need and do your best to provide it. It could be as simple as a chair to sit down, a cup of coffee, a friendly welcome, etc. Provide communication tools on-site where they check in (ideally someone to meet them but also bulletin/message boards, extra copies of your volunteer handbook, newsletters, schedules, discount coupons, etc).

Then add a dash of humor, season to taste and you are on your way to a successful recipe for volunteer retention. Check out more ideas at <http://www.energizeinc.com/art/subj/Reten.html>

