

The Volunteer Challenge

By Tony Guerrero

Argh. Let me just say it for all of us. Argh. Recruiting volunteers can be a difficult, frustrating and, sometimes, full-time job. And yet, which of our ministries could survive without them? They are the lifeblood of church work. And they are, in most cases, treasures. People who after a long day at work will still show up to usher, or on their only open weekend will still show up to play drums. They not only make our job easier, they make it possible because without them few of us could do what we do. But, as stated, it is often a challenge trying to recruit and maintain the large number of volunteers our ministries require.

The truth is, I'm not really great at it. I have deep-rooted pangs of guilt when I ask anyone to do anything that I might deem inconvenient if it were asked of me. And somehow, I never seem to learn the lesson, no matter how many times it is expressed to me, that volunteers are volunteering because they want to.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

I am learning, though. I'm learning that it isn't my job to just "get the job done," but that I am to use my job to help create community among believers by including as many as I can. And, I am to provide people with opportunities to serve. While sometimes it might be easier to just pay someone for a task or just do it myself, it isn't my right to take away someone else's ministry opportunity. So, I'm learning to dream bigger dreams that would require more volunteers than I might want to find and trust God that not only can He deliver them, but when they show up it will be because they want to be there.

We recently had an event that required about 90 volunteers serving in a capacity that required training. It was in the middle of several other big events, and the task of trying to coordinate that was being tossed around the office like a hot potato—no one wanted to do it, as it seemed an impossible task. We explored all the avenues that would let us pull off the event without needing those volunteers, but we consistently came up short. In the end, we did what we could and, to make a long story short, God sent us the exact number of people we needed. What really struck me was the number of thank you e-mails we received from the people who served—people who would not have gotten the chance had I taken an easier way out.

WALK A MILE IN MY SHOES

I've learned that in order to understand the needs and experiences of volunteers, I needed to be a volunteer, as well. My job basically pays me for a 40-hour workweek. But, as you well know, ministry often requires far more than 40 hours of our time. I knew



that if I showed up to play for a funeral after my workweek was done, I was really volunteering, as it was over and above my regular hours. But it surprised me to learn that the volunteers under me did not see it that way. They saw anything that looked like my job—such as playing piano for any church event—as a part of my job, and so I was always "getting paid," at least in their eyes.

This realization made it even more difficult for me to ask people to volunteer. How could I ask of them something they don't see me willing to do? I couldn't. I made a conscious decision that I needed to be a volunteer. I was going to start volunteering in my church in an entirely non-music related ministry, so there could be no question that I, too, was volunteering my time. This did mean that I was

going to have to spend even more time at church, on top of my 40-plus hours the job required of me. The fact is that most of my volunteers work 40-hour weeks also—I'm no different. But it's not like they call me to come to their real estate office or restaurant to volunteer my time—and most likely, I wouldn't do it. So, why should I expect them to come help me with my job?

Well, the real answer is that Christians serve others as a way to serve God. But the conflict brewing inside of me wasn't resolved. Instead, I needed to be able to share the volunteer experience regularly by serving outside my regular capacity. The payoff has been huge. I love my job, but I feel such a different sense of fulfillment when I am giving of myself outside of my comfort zone—just like a real volunteer. Is that why they do it? I have also learned that the volunteer experience—how we take care of them—is better understood from that vantage point. For example, when I'm running an event and leading volunteers, I may forget something as simple as needing to have water for them to drink. But, I sure notice those things when I'm the one volunteering.

LEAD WITH YOUR ACTIONS

So, this is my challenge to you. Find a ministry in your church that needs your non-job related help. Who needs a floor swept, or crafts made or food prepared? Trust me, I don't need to visit your church to know they exist. Serving as a volunteer will not only help you share their experience, it will also help your volunteers to see you as someone willing to do the same things you are asking of them.

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