

How to Recruit High Capacity Volunteers

THE ART OF 
CHURCH GROWTH

As your church grows, you will have to add leaders. When I meet with church leaders, I always ask this question - “How many of you have more volunteers than you know what to do with?” The room can have a thousand people in it, and not a single hand goes up.

A few years ago, we had a staff meeting, and I asked the question “Who needs volunteers?” and not a single hand went up. After 15 years, I was truly amazed that we had reached that point. We made some changes to get to the point where we had a lot of volunteers AND, specifically, high-capacity volunteers. This is what I want to help you with today.

Let’s start with the reasons why you don’t have high-capacity volunteers.

1. THE CHALLENGE ISN’T BIG ENOUGH.

Have you ever heard people recruit volunteers this way: “We know you’re all probably all busy and nobody wants to serve in kids ministry, but we have some openings and want to know if anyone wants to sign up. We know it’s a lot of work, and you only have to sign up once every 16 weekends...”

The question is, who is signing up for that announcement? NOBODY. It’s completely unattractive.

Imagine standing up and doing the opposite. Imagine saying this:

“I need a group of people who are committed to building into the next generation. I want people who will pray for kids, get to know kids personally, who will come alongside kids and find out what they are going through. Don’t you wish someone would have done that for you? Well, we have an opportunity to instill faith and hope in the next generation. I am looking for leaders who are up for that kind of challenge. Who’s in?”

That’s a completely different message and issues a bigger challenge. People want to give their lives to something that is bigger than themselves.

2. YOUR MISSION, VISION, AND STRATEGY ARE FUZZY.

Try this: Sit down and ask your key staff and key volunteers “What is our mission? What is our vision?” If you do not get the same answer from four different people, you have a problem.

If you are the point leader and someone asks what your strategy is and you don’t have a defined answer, no one is going to sign up for that because it’s fuzzy.

If it's fuzzy in your own head, it's fuzzy to the people you are trying to serve. High-capacity people are attracted to clarity—to a clear, compelling mission, vision and strategy.

3. YOU ARE DISORGANIZED.

Let's say you attract a high-capacity volunteer like a vice president of a company, the mom who organizes everyone in the neighborhood or school, or a dad who heads up the whole soccer league. You ask them to be a small-group leader. They agree and you promise them all the material will be available Thursday at noon.

The high capacity leaders are checking their inbox on Thursday at noon for those. If it's not there, they will get frustrated. They might give you until 4 or 5 o'clock, but then the high-capacity leader will say "Hey Carey, where is the material for the small group that you promised me?" If you are disorganized, high-capacity people will not stick around.

4. YOU LET PEOPLE OFF THE HOOK TOO EASILY.

This is a real challenge, and church leaders do this all of the time.

Let's assume that a volunteer shows up late.

The volunteer says "Hey, I'm sorry I'm late." The average church leader usually responds with "It's alright." BIG MISTAKE! It's a mistake because there were other people who showed up on time, and you just let that volunteer off the hook.

A much better answer would be something like this - "I am sorry you were late, was there a problem? Did your car break down? Were we unclear about the time?"

They respond with "Oh no, no, no... I was just late."

You respond with "Okay, but the team is relying on you, and we need you here on time." When you start doing that, all the leaders who showed up on time will respect that, and you'll tend to get high-capacity people sticking around.

5. YOU ARE NOT GIVING THEM ENOUGH PERSONAL ATTENTION.

High-capacity leaders require a level of attention that they will never demand, but you would be extremely wise to give as a senior leader. Here's how it works in most scenarios.

a problem—tend to get the attention. Monday rolls around, and you are dealing with all of those problem people. You know who gets ignored? Your best people! Your best small group leader, your best worship leader, your best giver all get ignored because they don't cause any trouble. Think about how you feel when you leave a meeting with a volunteer who never shows up on time. You feel drained, exhausted and question if the person will show up on time next time.

How do you feel when you walk out of a meeting with your top worship leader, top donor, top small group leader or top volunteer recruiter? You feel energized and excited! They feel honored that you even took the time to meet with them. Do you know what they will do? They will do an even better job next time.

6. YOU DON'T HAVE ENOUGH HIGH-CAPACITY LEADERS AROUND.

Do you know what we do as humans when we walk into a room? We look around to see who is like us. If a high-capacity leader gets onto a team with a bunch of people who show up late, are disorganized, and don't really care about the mission, then this leader is probably not going to stick around. The best thing you can do once you find a high-capacity leader is to find the next one right away and make them friends.

I want to give you a couple of other things. Your volunteers are asking these questions, but most likely they won't verbalize them.

1. Are the relationships around here healthy? Does the staff and the board get along? They want to know they are stepping into a healthy culture.
2. Will serving here help me grow spiritually? I really want to grow in my faith, and I'm hoping that my service will accomplish that.
3. Am I just a means to an end? Am I just another body or check mark in a box? Do you really care about me?
4. Will you help me develop the skills I need? They may have a lot of heart for the area where they are serving, but they don't feel confident in the skills they currently have to execute it well.
5. Am I signing up for life? A lot of times we ask people to serve forever. It would be better to say, "We need people to serve until Christmas or the summer, or we need people to serve through the summer." High-capacity volunteers tend to lean in when we give them a clear end date.

EXERCISE

What are the main teaching points that stuck out to you or that most apply to your church?
Write them down below!