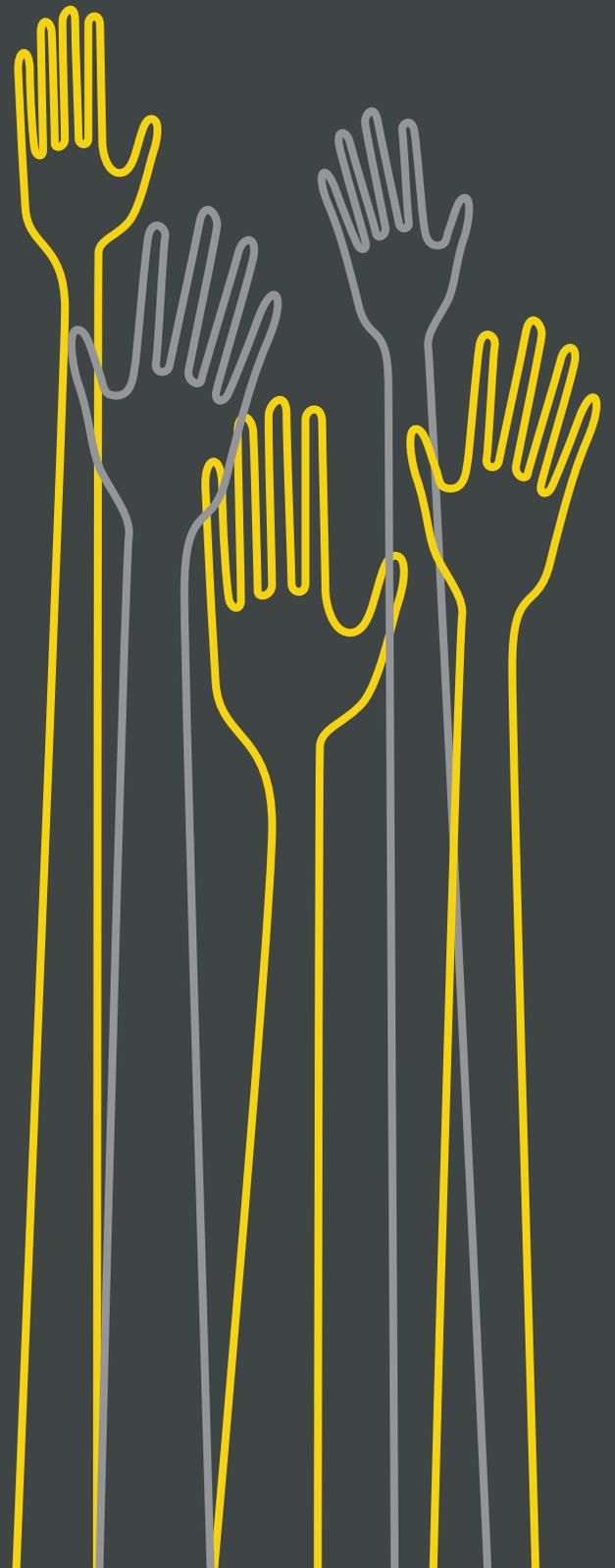


The Resource Guide for Churches

VOLUNTEERS: **HOW TO GET** **THEM AND** **KEEP THEM**



A resource provided by



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VOLUNTEERS: HOW TO GET THEM AND KEEP THEM

You can't run a successful church without volunteers. Most churches rely on volunteers to serve as ushers, greeters, Sunday school teachers, and the list goes on. Unfortunately, if you ask any church leadership team to list their biggest challenges, odds are they'll place recruiting and managing volunteers near the top of the list.

It's an interesting dilemma. You know your congregation sincerely values philanthropy and giving because you see it in their weekly financial gifts. But how can you motivate your congregation to show their support, not just by giving money, but also by giving time?

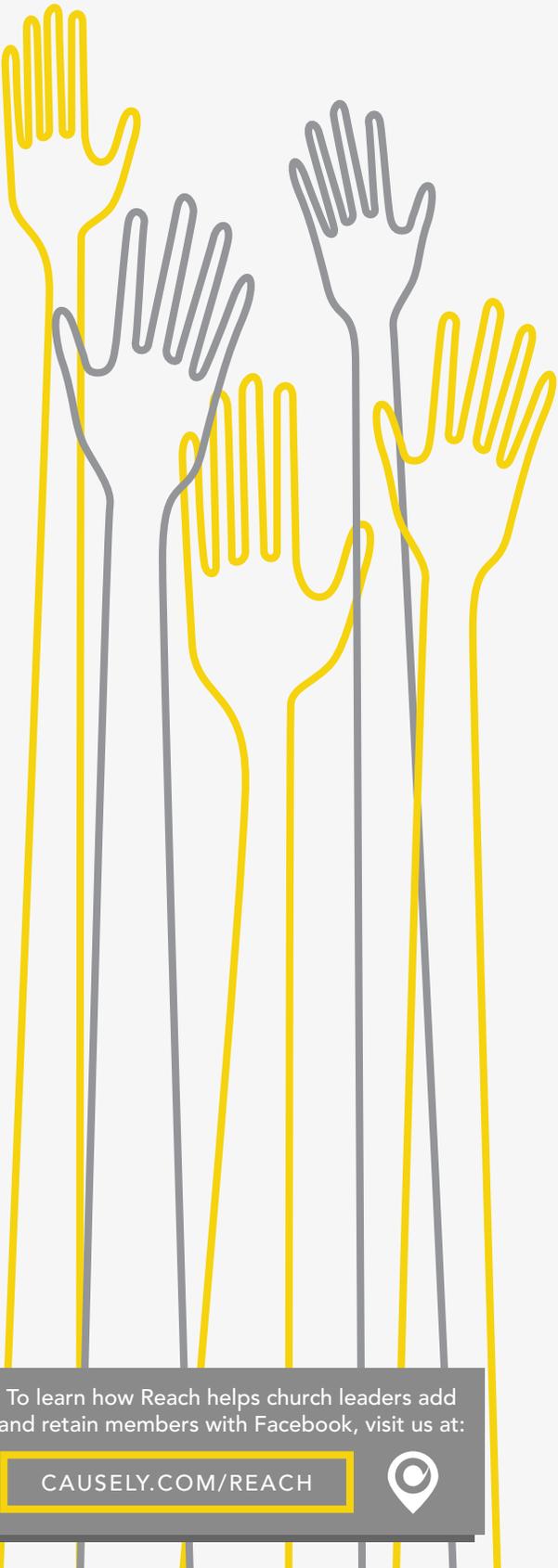
My first job out of college was as a volunteer coordinator for a large faith-based nonprofit. In that role, I managed volunteers to support two large emergency shelters, several transition housing communities, and a drug and alcohol recovery program. The volunteers provided a total of 95,000 hours of service annually. I also launched an intern program that supported our organization and helped transition unemployed single mothers back into the paid workforce.

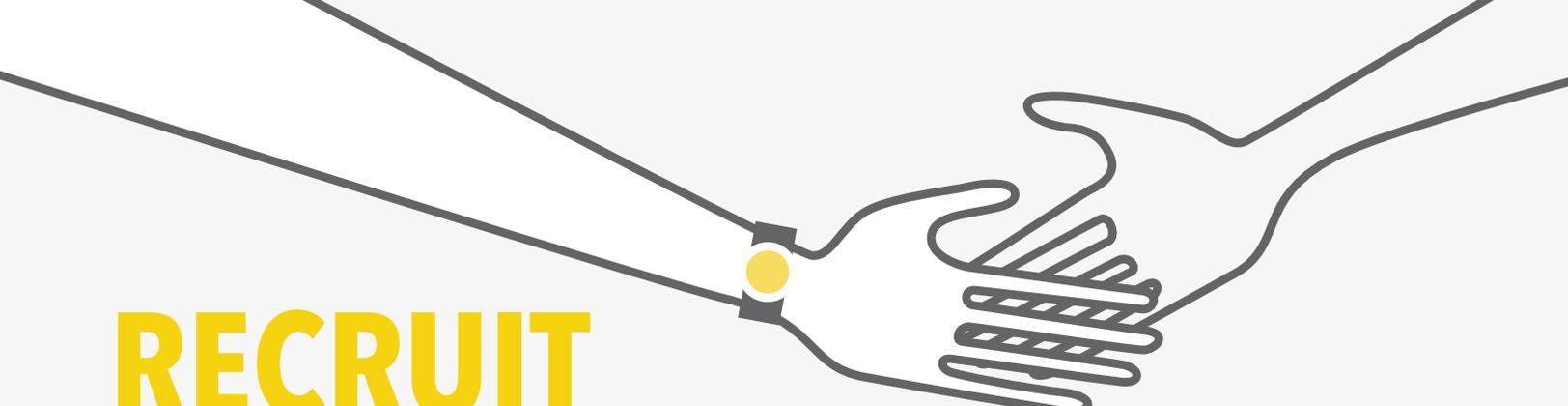
I know those accomplishments look nice on paper, but in reality it wasn't always pretty in person. It meant learning how to be flexible because things often didn't go as planned, and digging deep to find energy and enthusiasm when our volunteers were all out of it. But it was a rewarding opportunity, and it gave me a deep appreciation for those who give their time in service of others. I also gained practical insight into what it takes to recruit and manage volunteers, and I'm going to share it with you.

By the end of this eBook, you'll be an expert on recruiting, managing, and motivating volunteers. In turn, your volunteers will become the energy center of your community.

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RECRUIT EARLY, OFTEN, AND INDIVIDUALLY

“Alone we can
do so little;
together we can
do so much.”

~ Helen Keller

Start early. When should you begin requesting the help of your church community? As soon as they join the congregation! New members of your church may be delighted to receive a concrete “assignment” that helps them get to know other members. In the period right after joining a church, members are usually at their most enthusiastic. Anything new is exciting and refreshing. Don’t overlook opportunities to harness this enthusiasm and willingness to get involved. Catch them early before the novelty and enthusiasm fades.

Tie work to impact and church vision. People are far more apt to volunteer their time when they feel they’re making a real difference. Don’t simply ask for volunteers. Explain why your volunteer request is important. Talk about the impact the volunteers will make. The more specific you can be, the better.

For instance, do you need volunteers to help count and package pills for your mission teams’ upcoming trip? Asking people to count pills isn’t apt to inspire them to give an hour of their time. Showing photos from past mission trips with real people accepting the much-needed medicine puts a human face on your request. Letting the team know how the pills will combat illness makes a seemingly tedious job suddenly important.

Also tie their volunteer jobs to the larger vision of your organization. How does their hour of volunteering benefit the church’s greater mission?

Connect with people individually to ask for their help. When you make a general announcement or send out an e-mail blast to the whole congregation, it’s easy for people to assume someone else will step up. Especially if your congregation is large, people will look around and think, “I’m sure they’ll get plenty of volunteers.” But when you ask a church member one-to-one, he or she will feel valued and honored. Personal conversations greatly improve your odds of hearing, “Sure, I’d love to volunteer!” They also give your volunteers the gift of feeling like they matter; they’re important, and they’re more than just another face in the crowd.

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“Volunteers don’t necessarily have the time, they have the heart.”

~ Elizabeth Andrew

Set a term period for the commitment. Volunteer positions should have a set term period associated with them. You can always offer a term renewal if the volunteer and leader want one. Term periods make it easier for volunteers to step up for the job. They also protect everyone in the process by providing a way to let someone out of a role if it turns out not to be a good fit.

Make recruiting a team effort. The job of volunteer recruiting doesn’t need to be (and shouldn’t be) carried out only by those on the church’s payroll. Don’t hesitate to enlist help from your lay leadership team, greeters, and small group leaders. Each person you ask to help recruit will have a different core group of friends and acquaintances who may be more receptive to agreeing to help someone they know well. The bigger your recruiting team, the more potential volunteers you’ll be able to approach.

Use digital tools to recruit volunteers. Your church probably has a website. But if you don’t update it regularly, people won’t bother looking at it. If your website has become stagnant, take steps to change that. Update it regularly with news and announcements, photos, blog posts, etc. Publicize the website and mention it often so your congregation gets in the habit of visiting it.

Then, use your website to solicit volunteer help. Just don’t post a vague request. Use powerful stories, statistics, and photos to underscore why your volunteer request is important and urgent. Similarly, use your social media profiles to recruit volunteers. Digital recruiting will help you reach different group of church members, so use it often.

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ENGAGE YOUR VOLUNTEERS SO THEY DON'T BURN OUT

Be an inspiring leader. Leadership is about rallying your team around an exciting vision, then getting out of their way so they can accomplish great things. When communicating with volunteers, be passionate, engaging, energetic, enthusiastic, and upbeat. Aim to make your enthusiasm infectious so it spreads amongst your volunteers.

Keep volunteers informed through effective communication. A lack of information is frustrating and demoralizing, especially when someone is rearranging his or her schedule to volunteer. Lackluster communication makes volunteers feel they're not needed or valued. They understandably begin to think, "The church leaders who asked me to volunteer can't be bothered with keeping me informed, so this volunteer gig must not be very important. Why am I wasting my precious time?"

Match volunteers with jobs that fit their passions and talents. This is key! Volunteers who love and are good at the job they're doing won't consider it a job. Plus they will be far more likely to stick with it and excel in the role. How do you know where volunteers will be most effective? Ask them to describe their strengths and interests. You can also identify their strengths using assessment tools like the Strengths Finder.

Identify what motivates each of your volunteers. Volunteers aren't paid in currency. They're paid in feelings. So figure out which feelings your volunteers want. Is it pleasure from praise and recognition? Place them in high-visibility roles. Is it accomplishment from an opportunity to learn new things? Place them in roles in which they'll be mentored and challenged. Is it the warm fuzzies? Place them in roles in which they'll help people who are struggling or less fortunate.

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Unsure of what motivates specific volunteers? Maybe consider motivation from a generational perspective. These links will take you to specific tips to get your volunteers excited.

[GENERATION X](#)

[BABY BOOMERS](#)

[MILLENNIALS](#)

[GENERATION Y](#)

Create positions for specific strengths and gifts. If you recognize that members of your congregation have exceptional talents or unique skills but don't have official positions to fit, create one! Don't let your church community gifts go to waste when they can be used to serve others.

Be set up and ready for your volunteers. If you're leading volunteers, make sure you're ready for their help when they show up. Sometimes this is half the battle, especially when it comes to overseeing special projects and mobilizing big groups of volunteers (planning for vacation bible school or setting up for the community fall carnival, for example.) There's no greater frustration for a volunteer than showing up ready to work and discovering there's nothing to do.

Train your volunteers. Another thing that's extremely frustrating for volunteers is when they show up to do a job and are thrust into the proverbial fire, with no idea what they're doing. Volunteers step up because they want to help. They don't want to fail, disappoint, make mistakes, or waste time and effort. Don't set volunteers up for failure. Set them up for success by providing thorough training before you hand them the job.

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RETAIN YOUR VOLUNTEERS BY SHOWING THEM THEY'RE VALUED

What does each volunteer need to feel appreciated? Every volunteer is different and appreciates different forms of recognition. We talked about this earlier in regards to job placement.

Spend time getting to know your volunteers, and you'll probably be able to zero in pretty quickly on what makes them tick, so to speak. Praise, being entrusted with additional responsibilities, receiving public accolades, or being recognized with small, thoughtful gestures. Whatever it is they crave, find ways to provide it.

Appreciate them, appreciate them, and appreciate them.

'Nuff said. You can never over-appreciate or over-thank your valuable volunteer army. Your kind gestures need not be elaborate, expensive, or time consuming. A sincere thank you note or card, a batch of fresh-baked cookies, a rose cut from your garden ... these things have a big impact. Hold official volunteer appreciation events monthly or quarterly to keep the momentum and positivity going.

Keep the communication flowing. Once you find volunteers it's just the beginning, not the end. Don't place people in roles and let them drift out to sea alone. Check in with them frequently and encourage them to contact you with any questions or concerns they encounter.

Ensure your volunteers are enjoying their work. Regular communication also serves another purpose. By checking in with them from time to time on a one-on-one basis, you can gauge how they're doing. Saying hello in the hall is nice, but it's not sufficient. Always make sure volunteers know your door is open.

Empower them. Volunteers show up because they want to help and make a difference. Allow them to do that in their unique style. Don't assign monotonous, tedious jobs to your volunteers without also giving them more challenging or enjoyable work to keep them engaged. When do people become burnt out? When they do the same thing over and over with little variation or appreciation.



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“Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it.”

~William Arthur Ward

Remind them their impact is huge. Whenever you meet with your volunteers, make sure to reinforce the value of what they're doing and remind them of the bigger picture. Also make an effort to show and tell them the value of their contributions in more detail during your volunteer appreciation events or presentations.

Volunteers give their time because their hearts move them to help make their church, community, and the world better. Make sure you connect them to the right role, keep them informed, and show them your appreciation for their gift of time. If you do these things well, your volunteers will be the heart and energy of your church.



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