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INDUSTRY TRENDS
SUSTAINABLE VOLUNTEERS

Sustainable Volunteers

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Too much work, not enough people to do it. Does this dilemma have you doing everything as a volunteer? Suddenly you find yourself frustrated and resentful because you've spent too much time away from the office or family? Are you no longer enjoying your volunteer job? People are the engine at any association. As your association grows you need to recruit the right people to be in the right seats at the right time. Here are five things you should be more of to develop a sustainable volunteer base.

Be Honest

First off, be honest! Yes, take the time to know what tasks need to be done. Understand which tasks are larger and therefore in need of a bit more time and expertise. Then determine which tasks are smaller and can be done by an ad hoc or one time volunteer. Starting with a clear job description of duties will increase the likelihood of both the organization and volunteer having a rewarding experience. This strategy will also help when you go back and ask a volunteer to work on another project.

Be Generous

Be generous! It is easy as a passionate volunteer to get so excited about all aspects of the vision of the organization that you innocently want to do it all. If you find yourself saying, "I'll do that," then make that a red flag to pause as a leader. Change your words to "I'll find the right person to do that." Then be generous about giving away tasks. Know that some volunteers want to share a skill others want to learn a skill. Make the right match and be generous giving tasks away. This sustains your chapter years after you grow out of your position.

Be a Learning Center

Next, be a learning center for volunteers who want to learn. As you set your chapter's culture on volunteering you also must set the tone as a learning environment. Make your members excited to participate in events and meetings so they know it's like going back to school. Remember some of those early days of school? You were excited about all the possibilities. Create that in your association or chapter.

Be Asking

Most importantly, be asking! Learn tips on how to ask in ways that will get to yes! On a recent webinar less than half the audience had asked five people to volunteer. If that seems like a lot of people to you, then get out of your comfort zone. Set a personal goal of how many people you will ask. Then here are two tips on asking. First make asking personal. Match people based on their strengths. Tell them how they bring something to the table that is valuable and will move your association forward. Second, don't ask a question with a yes or no answer. Ask it this way, "John I know you are strong in social media and our chapter is dedicated to getting its' message out in this way. Would you be willing to work on the social media committee or on the newsletter committee?" This gives him options and gets you a better chance at a yes!

Be Grateful

Lastly, when building your sustainable volunteers be grateful! There are literally thousands of places people can volunteer and time is more precious than ever. Find ways to thank your people in the way they want to be thanked all during the year. Yes, awards galas are nice, but people want to feel valued in the moment they contribute.

Sustainable chapters grow year over year because of sustainable and passionate volunteers. Make sure that you don't burn yourself out. Be honest, generous, learning, asking and grateful and I know your chapter will make a difference to each leader, the community and around the world.

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