

## Seven Secrets of Volunteer Management Success

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As a member of the Boomers & Babies Learning Community, I've had the good fortune of working with a lot of wonderful volunteers. They've served on our Board, volunteered in classrooms, led enrichment activities, organized diaper and clothes drives, assisted with facilities maintenance, and participated in a host of other activities. They've increased our ability to serve children and families by their direct contributions and by supporting our staff.

In years past, folks volunteered out of a sense of duty. It was expected that they'd help their neighbors and give back to their communities. While the spirit of giving is still alive and well, there are a few wrinkles that have been added to it. Today's volunteers also want:

- To feel good about themselves
- To leverage their skills & experiences and acquire new ones
- To make new friends & build community
- To realize a sense of accomplishment or worth
- To support something that ignites their interests or passions



Far from following tradition, they recognize that the world is full of choices. There are lots of place where they can spend their off-work hours, and lots of things that they can do. They'll tend to hang out at places where they feel useful and feel good.

Here are a few things that we do to attract and retain great volunteers:

1. **We engage staff in designing volunteer position descriptions.** They get to weigh in on where they'd like help, what commitments they'll need, and who they'd like to fill those shoes. This dialog ensures that we satisfy staff needs while enlisting their full support in the volunteer management program.
2. **We respect our volunteers' time, talents, experience, and interests.** We help them find the right positions and set high standards for achievement. We respect their schedules. We conduct ourselves in a professional manner so as not to waste their time or energy.
3. **We train volunteers for success.** We give them opportunities to deepen their understanding of our work and the people we serve. We provide emotional support when needed. *Success encourages repeat engagements and attracts like-minded folks!*
4. **We cultivate volunteers like donors and treat them like staff.** We know that they have many, many options for making contributions and genuinely appreciate their decision to support us. They are treasured partners who make our work possible. We welcome them as "family" and treat them like colleagues.

- i. They share their ideas and contribute to planning.
  - ii. They attend staff meetings, where applicable.
  - iii. We keep them informed of our agency's plans, progress, and events as well as any significant change in our operation
  - iv. We include their activities and achievements in our organizational reports, newsletters, and bulletin boards.
  - v. We remind them while we're all here. We provide evidence of the difference that we're making together. This is especially important for folks who voluntarily accept mundane assignments for the sake of the greater good. *We honor their generosity!*
  - vi. We talk about their assignments periodically to ensure that they align with their passions and know-how. We explore options for future service. *Volunteers who are excited about their work and commit significant time doing it tend to return for service year after year!*
5. **We pay attention to details.** We check and re-check to make sure that we spell their names correctly. We remember when they are supposed to come in to work and greet them with a warm welcome. We have a space for them to place their belongings. We notice their specific contributions.
  6. **We listen.** We share in their joys. We care about their issues and concerns. We take their feedback to heart and use it to improve the program.
  7. **We offer a personal touch.** We believe in the power of the handwritten note, the letter of commendation to an employer, the personal referral for a job or school admission, and the occasional unexpected treat. We believe that volunteers should be recognized in ways that are meaningful to them.

It takes some time and effort to recruit, screen, and place volunteers in our organization. When we find a great volunteer, we've served ourselves and our clientele a little slice of heaven. We're committed to our "seven secrets" to ensure that the great ones stay with us for a long, long time.