

Productive Volunteer Teams



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Working Well With Volunteers

Volunteers want to serve God, have fun, and do meaningful work.

They have about four hours per week available, sometimes more, sometimes less, and it should be optimized.

They need to know exactly what they are doing and how that fits into the Big Picture.

A good leadership metaphor for volunteers is “a fire in the fireplace”. An enthusiastic volunteer without structure can be like a fire without a fireplace, he/she creates a lot of smoke, and gets no results. However, if the organization is all fireplace (structure) and has no fire (passion, energy, prayer, Spirit) then it is just dull religion.

Thus, the key to working well with volunteers is “creating energy” (fire) and then “directing the energy” (fireplace).



ENERGY!!!

Creates Energy	Drains Energy
Team Prayer	Prayerless human effort
God is in this!	Where is God?
Times to pull back, just worship , be refreshed	Total emphasis on results, productivity, “slavery”
Having faith for specific big outcomes	Trudging along doing a routine of small things
Strong sense of identity, deep loyalty	Weak sense of identity, no loyalty
Every work session gets a good result of some sort	“Well that was a waste of time”
Unity	Discord
Teams, groups, fellowship	Isolation, working disconnected from the whole
Winner mentality	Approval mentality
Freedom, autonomy, and ownership	Bureaucratic over-regulation
Times of fun and celebration	Never getting to enjoy the ministry
Being appreciated	Being taken for granted
Being heard	Being ignored
Working in your gifting	Working way outside your gifting
Being trusted at your point of strength	Being distrusted where you can most contribute
Being coached at your points of weakness	Being left to flounder
Removal of every point of unnecessary complexity	Multiplication of complexity

You have to become a manager of ENERGY – of individuals, of teams, and of your entire church or Christian organizations. This is way more than mere “motivation”!

Energy comes from prayer, meaning, purpose, significance, relationships and unity.

How can you create a continual positive virtuous energy cycle of total enthusiasm?

How can you plug the energy holes? Stop the dream-stealers? Work with the Holy Spirit instead of against the Holy Spirit? Stop things going down the energy drain?

FOCUSED ENERGY

Volunteer energy must not only be created; it must also be directed like a laser beam. This is the difference between a bonfire and the fire in the boiler of a steam engine. The bonfire is undirected energy and just toast marshmallows. The fire in the boiler is harnessed to a purpose and drives the train to its destination. (We will talk about volunteer goal-setting later on).

Volunteers need to be able to put their energy to good use behind a clearly-defined objective that brings unity to the team.

The following chart will help you to understand how volunteer energy can be constructively channeled, and how sometimes it gets wasted and diffused.

Directs Energy	Diffuses Energy
Clear vision	Confusion, each does his or her own thing
Clear boundaries and areas of responsibility	Unclear boundaries, responsible for everything
Team members know each other's strengths and are allowed to call on them when needed	They "throw the ball to the wrong person" or drop it entirely.
Good job descriptions and fair timelines	Chaotic impulsive, just do this now! Zig-zags
Most big tasks should only take one month	Being overwhelmed by a multi-year task
Metaphors, parables, and stories that focus energy	Goals that are not connected with emotions
Checking in on specific achievements	General unfair criticism
Many short sprints towards a single big goal	Long undefined tasks with no end in sight
Readily available manuals and guidance on "how-to"	Unsure of how to do the task well
Best practice examples, and stories and legends	No idea of what success looks like so standards are low.
Training in the necessary theory and theology of that very specific area.	Lack of a theoretical framework, error, heresy, mistakes.
Connections to those who can help & resource	Don't know where to turn to help when they get stuck
Tasks are broken down and carefully prioritized to fit the time available each month (16 hours plus or minus)	Tasks are done in emotional order of when people feel like it, and the big stuff never happens because no one has the time.
Freedom to connect across the church / organization for anything you need, when you need it.	Gatekeepers, bureaucrats and dream-stealers create silos and refuse permission.



Volunteer Ministry Teams

Koinonia (fellowship) is a metaphor of people rowing a boat together. A ministry team is a coordinated group of people who are all pulling together in the same direction for the same God-glorifying purpose.



Principles For Great Volunteer Teams!

Teams should have a clear sense of how they are serving God and the Big Picture.

Teams should also have a clear idea of what they are doing "right now" and how it should be done.

Teams should know exactly what a "Win" looks like. Use best practice examples to demonstrate this.

Teams should know their boundaries and their lines of accountability and resources.

Fairness is treating everyone differently.

The structure of the team depends on the task assigned. There is no single "right structure".



Trust each other's strengths. Coach each other's weaknesses.

It is Ok to disagree and to have some tension.

Forming – Norming – Storming – Performing (the sequence most teams go through).

Teams are groups of ADULTS and should have adult-to-adult conversations in a totally professional manner.

Teams help Christians to discover who they are and what their gifts are.

Stay committed to one another in love.

The people are always more important than the cause. The people are more important than the task.

God achieves the result. We are just faithful and obedient.



Teams of volunteers do not want to waste precious time, so they must be very clear about the task and take a small constructive step forward at every meeting.

Taking the time to intelligently assign and schedule the tasks of individual team members can help develop a sense of realism when they say "that is 20 hours work, I can't do that this week!" which stops the "dumping" of tasks on volunteers that leads to burn-out.

No individual team member should be on so many teams/tasks that they become completely overloaded and thus "drop the ball" on the teams that they are supposed to be part of.

It is totally OK for teams to dissolve once the mission is complete.

Ministry teams are not ongoing committees.

Ministry teams may have to obey rules but generally do not invent rules. They are not bureaucrats and do not have a mission to exercise power over others.



Teams serve God and teams serve people. Teams do not serve objectives or to-do lists which are just means to an end.

Volunteer ministry teams are not like teams at work, and they have short memories and need to focus on more immediate goals.

Do not overload teams with paperwork.

Teams should be large enough to get the job done with some "margin" for people who have life crises or just cannot keep up for some reason.

Teams should be small enough to enable meetings and good communication. It should not be impossible to find a time to meet.

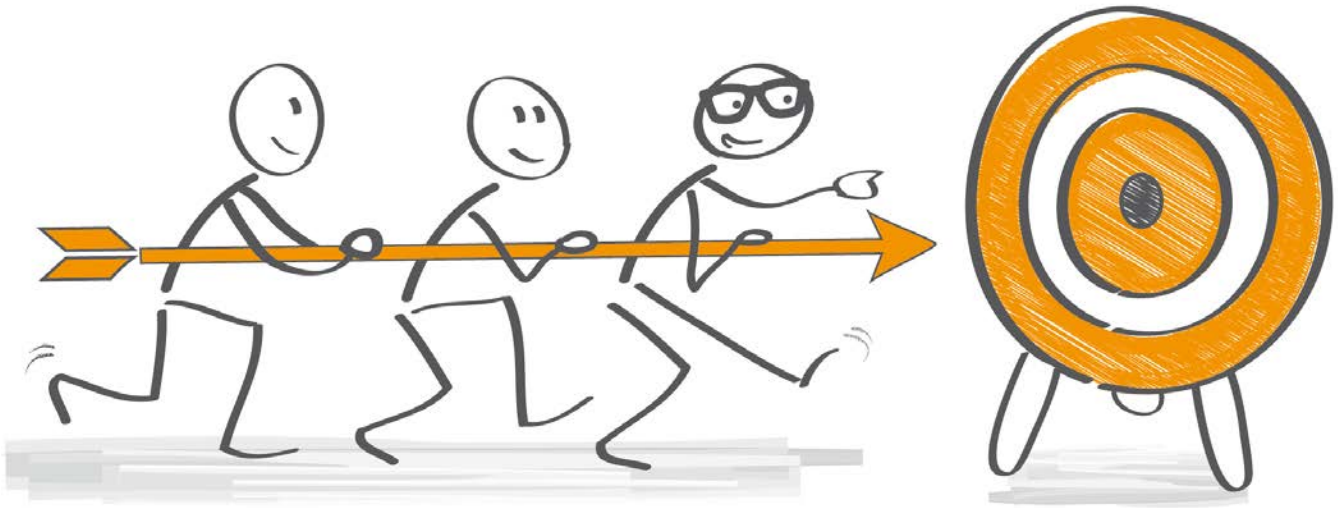


There should be notes taken and tasks assigned to specific people at every ministry team meeting and the notes should be kept in an accessible location e.g. Google Docs.

Meet as often as you need to ensure really good communication and motivation.

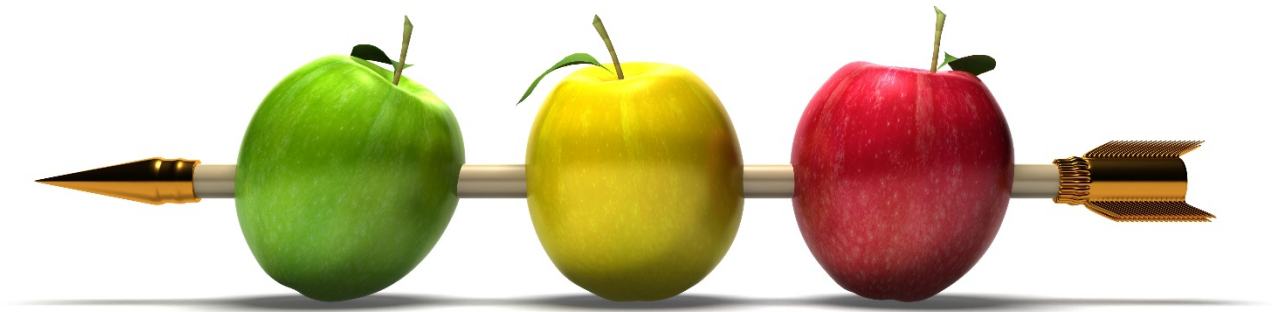
Do not rely on emails, texts and so on to replace meetings. That diffuses energy after a while.

Teams should be able to move horizontally, quickly, to get information and help from other ministry teams without going via a ministry gatekeeper.



How To Create Well-Defined Objectives For Volunteers

A well-defined objective simply focuses energy so that a task can be promptly completed. This worksheet just gives a number of different ways of creating good objectives. You can mix and match them as required.



SWOT Analysis: Is it A Sane and Viable Plan or Idea?

STRENGTHS – What are the strengths of the team with respect to the plan/idea? How can you build on these strengths?

WEAKNESSES – What are the weaknesses of the team with respect to the plan/idea? How can you fix the weakness?

OPPORTUNITIES – How will the plan/ idea create good opportunities for the team/ministry? How can you exploit the opportunity?

THREATS – What are the external threats that could totally sink the plan/idea? (e.g. legal/ copyright) How can you remove the threat?



LOGISTICS

Who – personnel

What – resources

When – timelines

Where – location, premises, etc.

Why – reasons and motivations

How – methods, breakdown the task into steps, get a clear vision of how it will be achieved.

How Much – costs and revenues (if any)



DEPENDENCIES

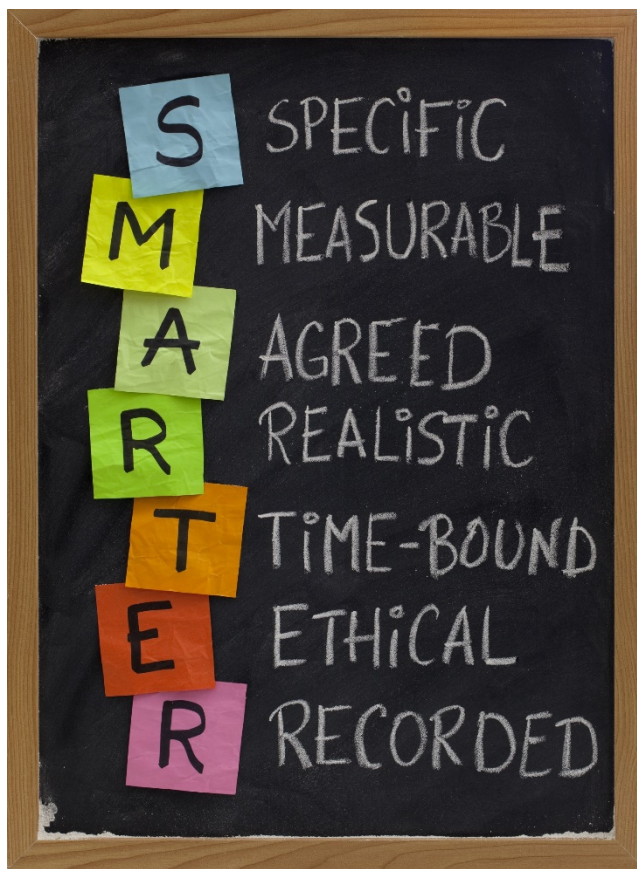
What is needed FIRST before we can take this next step?
What other steps then depend on this step?

Once you have your logistics worked out you then need to put them in chronological order of when they should be completed, and when they will need certain resources. You need to do this very early on in order to avoid total confusion.

For instance, you might need obtain permission to use a room before you can use that room. Or you might need to recruit a clarinet player before you can have the jazz band.

You need to list all the dependencies and make sure they are "ticked off" and assigned so no vital steps are left out or done way too late (e.g. booking a conference center). Also, your task might be a dependency for another team. So, the brochure production team might need to get the advertising for the musical done before the youth group can take the brochures home and invite their friends.

This is where structure is important so that the right-hand can know what the left hand is doing and so that no single team (e.g. brochure production) gets "avalanched".



Specific – be specific about the goals and objectives we want to accomplish

Measurable – “love everyone” is not measurable, “visit 5 people in hospital this month” is measurable.

Agreed – Do the volunteers have both cognitive and emotional ownership and “buy-in”? Is there general agreement and preservation of energy?

Realistic – within the capacity of the team/church/organization?

Relevant – how does it fit into the larger goals of the church / organization?

Time-Bound – when do you want it done? Can volunteers do it in 4 hours per week?

Ethical – does the goal have integrity? Is it honest, biblical and loving?

Recorded – is the goal written down and readily accessible to the entire team?



CLEAR TO ALL

How can the objective be communicated so that it is clearly understood by all team members?

In writing (even briefly, the weakest ink is stronger than the strongest memory)

Use illustrations / metaphors and best-practice examples

Answer questions of clarification.

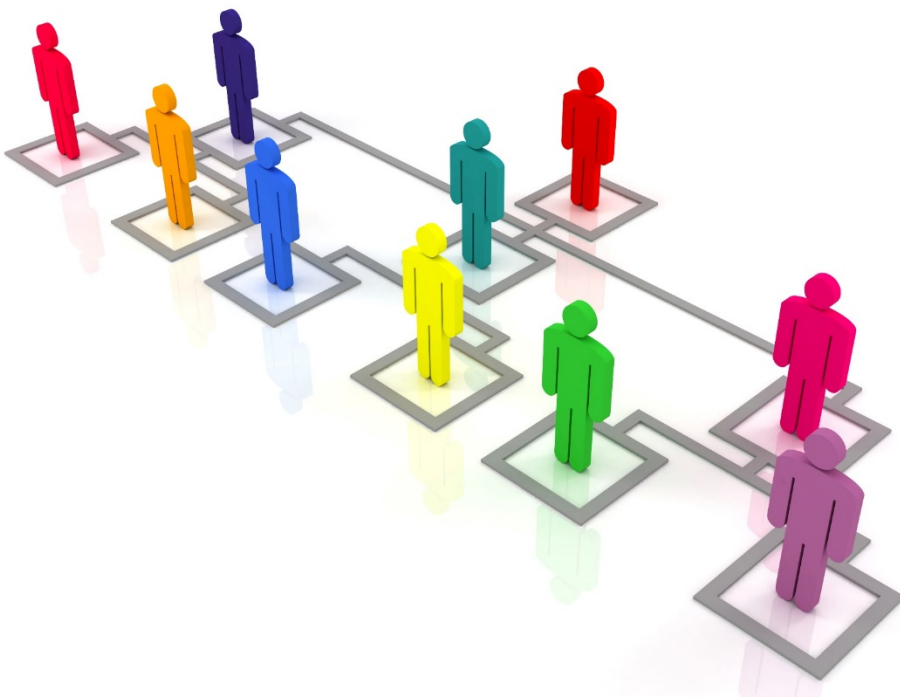
Dark/Light technique "we are doing X, however we are not doing Y"

Answer questions of "How To" in order to make sure everyone knows how to complete their goals.



Structures, Sprints and Conversion Funnels

Organization helps us to consciously participate in the sovereign plans and purposes of God as a group, and to faithfully fulfill His calling on our church or organization.



Structure

How people are organized into teams and departments to maximize the mission and goals of an organization for the glory of God.

Structures in the Kingdom are ONLY there to preserve and facilitate the work of the Holy Spirit and are not “sacred” in themselves. They can be dismantled or altered once the task is achieved.

Structure needs to exist so that people know who their leader/s are and where to get resources and how to operate appropriately through the channels of communication.

Beyond that, structure is not terribly important and is not a magic wand. I have seen great Episcopal churches, Baptist churches, Presbyterian, Calvary Chapel (pastor-driven only) and Brethren (no pastor) churches.

Absence of structure is actually worse than too much structure.

Volunteers need a lot of structure because they cannot be expected to goof around trying to figure the church/organization out. They need a map that says “You Are Here” and if you need X “you can find it there”.



Job Descriptions

Are an essential part of structure. Each team and each individual who has a major role to play should have a clear job description which can be quite brief.

It can be as short as “play the drums during worship”, or much longer such as, “Use Quickbooks to track sales and inventory and donations and prepare a monthly P&L for the pastor and church board”.

About 70% of church volunteers are “conventional” in life outlook and appreciate having a short clear job description so that they feel secure in their volunteer role.



Sprints

Short-term tasks (often one month) that give precise focus to the activity of a volunteer ministry team.

Volunteers need to be able to walk into a room, look at a whiteboard and know exactly which tasks they are working on that day.

Something like “evangelize the world” does not cut it. However, “proof-read new tract, get it signed off on, then take new tract to printer and get 500 copies made” is something volunteers can understand and work on.

Sprints are created by chunking big goals down into small achievable steps; each of these small achievable steps should take one month or less. There should be around three sprint objectives a month. More than three gets overwhelming.

Sprints can be discussed by the relevant ministry teams, and should be set by the team or at least there should be feedback from the team members.



A Conversion Funnel

Is a well-designed process which take a large group of people, through a planned series of steps, in order to get them to take a particular course of action such as: receiving Christ, signing up for a course, baptism, joining a life group, going to church camp, or attending a spiritual retreat.

A common series of steps is: Awareness, Interest, Desire, and Action

Let's look at a possible conversion funnel for after the "Tweens musical". You have all these parents in the room and some of the school friends of the Tweens as well. So, after the musical there should be:

A brief evangelistic appeal and time for rededication with handouts such as tracts, a New Testament and an invitation for baptism, those who respond are then taken into a separate room.

Then in the main room, the pastor stands up and says: "That was great, our Tweens have a lot of fun as they learn about God, our church is a place of belonging and we would love your kids to join our Tweens group. If you are interested we have a Tweens sign-up going on today and the ushers will hand you a form you can fill in and take home for your parents to sign."

So, think through how to connect the dots of the event so that results actually happen, in a natural Christian way, without being manipulative or pushy.



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