

**Leading
Volunteers
Into the Future**

**Developed by the Lodge Leadership Committee
of the Grand Lodge of Nebraska**

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Introduction

Leading volunteers of a volunteer organization is very different from leading a business in the private sector or military or first responders. A few of the fundamental differences are that volunteer based organizations labor for a cause as opposed to profit, they offer their time and energy to assist an organization in its mission and goals, want to make an impact to their community by giving their skills and experiences, have been personally affected by what the organization does, and want to network and/or meet new people. Volunteers want to do work that is interesting to them and which provides positive emotions such as pride, belonging, and giving back.

While there are similarities between leading volunteers of a nonprofit and leading a for-profit organization, it is important to consider the special nature of nonprofits when applying theories and principles of effective leadership to organizations in the nonprofit or social sector. It is not uncommon for volunteers to become uninspired or consumed by other issues in their life that reduces or limits their ability to give of themselves and their resources. It is up to an organization to engage volunteers enough to retain them. Effective leadership can help an organization to keep volunteers engaged and motivated.

Volunteer leadership presents some unique challenges for individuals who take on the task of leading people who are doing work because they choose to do so by giving of their spare time and without pay. Volunteers cannot be asked or told to do work they do not want to do, they will not do well with negative feedback, and would have no reason to stay if their emotional commitment ceases to exist. Volunteers have needs of affiliation, achievement, recognition, and power that need to be recognized by leadership. Every volunteer does not have the same needs, so each needs to be treated differently.

This publication is intended to provide information to apply when looking for volunteers, desired attributes of volunteers, what volunteers are looking for, leading volunteers, and when necessary dismissing volunteers.

Finding and Enrolling Volunteers

Finding and enrolling volunteers is a process that needs constant attention and a lot of effort by leaders to find the real volunteers that are volunteering because they want to and not to have a title of some type by their name.

- **Ask**

Just about everyone in Masonry is a volunteer and as such is an existing volunteer. Involve your newly raised Mason, especially if he is not on the Officer Line or already involved on other Committees. Find out what his strengths are and build from there. They may be a fit for the task or committee at hand.

People like being asked to volunteer. Announce why and when your organization needs volunteer help, but invite your best leads personally.

- **Build a Team**

Recruit individuals who want to be a part of your team and not just to fill a position. Work with other Masons to create a list of individuals that they feel would work best for the task at hand, and then ask them to volunteer.

Include your new members and team them up with existing members to build relationships.

Start recruiting volunteers as early as possible. If you ask an individual to volunteer and they say no, do not take that as a rejection. Their schedule may not permit or they may feel that it is not a position they will enjoy. Stay engaged with those who initially said no and periodically speak with them about what is going on and how you think they could be of value to your effort. Volunteers will sign on at different phases of their schedule and their life circumstances.

- **Inform**

Defining the volunteer's roles and responsibilities is vital to enrolling as well as retaining any volunteer. If they are not doing what they signed up for, they will either underperform or walk away from the effort.

Volunteer Attributes

No one volunteer has all of the tools and skills, but when enrolling a volunteer, the more of the following attributes he has, the more value he may provide to the task for which he was sought. The items listed below are not all inclusive but are meant to be a starting point of what to consider when looking for volunteers to work a task.

- **Energy**

Probably the number one thing you can bring to a task is energy. Being enthusiastic about a cause can be contagious and spread to others and possibly motivate others to be involved in the task.

- **Imagination and Creativeness**

Having an imagination and being creative about a task can make a difference and is important to the success of any task.

- **Reliability**

Making a commitment as a volunteer is important and critical to the success of task completion-make sure you can follow through. We know as with all things in life, “stuff” happens, so stay open and honest and communicate with whomever is responsible for the task and let them know you have to move on.

- **Selfless**

This is what volunteering is all about. Giving your time to a task you believe in is critical to task completion.

- **Passionate**

Passion about a task is when ones effort is going to have the biggest impact. When passions are aligned, the most uninteresting tasks can be brought into a whole new light. Passion is just as infectious as energy, and not every volunteer role is “on the frontlines” of the cause being supported. But, without volunteers in the background, sometimes doing the thankless, unglamorous jobs, the whole organization would collapse.

- **Communication Skills**

Good and positive communication skills, both face-to-face and written, are vital to a volunteer’s contributions to the task by defining, tracking, working, and completing a task. Without communication skills by volunteers and the task leader, valuable time would be wasted, and frustration could surface that would impair task completion and potentially result in the task collapsing.

- **Time Management**

It is important to search for volunteers that have demonstrated that they have the ability to plan their time and organize their tasks, enabling them to get more work done in less time.

- **Team Player**

Last but not least, and probably the most important, is being a team player, which is essential to volunteering. The world is very rarely changed by just one person; instead it is the collective efforts of a group of committed volunteers, working together that makes the difference. Stay friendly, respect all opinions, and be compassionate, and positive results will be the end result.

Good team players find ways to stay passionate, be themselves, stay positive, and offer their skills and time to a task that results in a successful effort.

What Volunteers Want

Every volunteer is unique and has different reasons for volunteering. One size does not fit all when it comes to what volunteers want. Some will want more information and guidance than others while others will want an opportunity to learn, so be prepared to be flexible. While not all inclusive, following are items that numerous surveys and studies have identified that volunteers are seeking.

- **Volunteers Want You to Be Prepared For Them**

Do not bring a volunteer in until everything is worked out from what the task is, what is needed to work the task, and give the volunteer something to do immediately.

- **Volunteers Want To Feel Welcomed**

Make the volunteer feel he is important. Introduce the other volunteers working the task and have the other volunteers outline their involvement. Do not let the new volunteer feel uncomfortable for a minute. Show that your organization is warm, friendly, helpful, and happy to have the new volunteer as a team member.

- **Volunteers Want Good Training**

Even if the task assigned is a simple one, take the time to explain it, demonstrate it, and mentor the volunteer. If needed, get the volunteer the necessary training. If necessary, provide a buddy, another volunteer who is experienced, to help the new one.

When training new volunteers, be sure to use adult learning techniques, such as group involvement. Volunteers do not want to be lectured to. They want to participate in the training. Include in your training clear expectations for your volunteers.

- **Volunteers Want To Know How Much Time the Task Will Require**

Everyone is busier than ever, and many volunteers may only have time for short term assignments.

Decide how much time your task will require and include that when you meet with potential volunteers. Will it take six hours a week? Does it need to be done on a weekend? Does it involve travel? Is there any expense that is not reimbursed?

- **Volunteers Want To Be Appreciated**

If your volunteers are doing a good job, tell them frequently that they are doing a good job.

Although you will want to come up with some creative ways to formally say thank you, do not overlook the power of a simple gesture such as taking a group of volunteers to lunch, giving out gift cards, or mailing a handwritten thank you note.

- **Volunteers Want and Need Good Open Communications**

Regular communication is motivation for volunteers, while the lack of it is one of the chief reasons volunteers become dissatisfied. Volunteers like to have a particular person who looks after them.

Bring volunteers up-to-date on progress toward your goals and encourage them to provide suggestions about how the task can be done even better. Let your volunteers know how they are making a difference with periodic feedback.

- **Volunteers Want to Be Socially Connected**

Volunteering is a great way for many people to socialize, so provide that opportunity. If you think a couple of volunteers would get along and work well together, provide that opportunity by assigning them to a particular task together.

- **Volunteers Want to be Educated**

It is likely if a volunteer volunteers for a task, they probably have a healthy curiosity and willingness to try new things and/or learn new things. Provide that opportunity. Turning your volunteer task into an educational experience could be highly valued by potential volunteers, and could result in new volunteers as your volunteers tell others about what experience they had working with you.

Leading Volunteers

Create a relationship with new and old volunteers that will make them want to come back. When managing volunteers, treat them as if they are an employee of your organization. Manage them with respect, provide feedback and empower them to have a rewarding experience. Provide as much detail as possible so the volunteer knows what they are signing up for.

The following are thoughts to assist volunteer leaders in their quest to motivate and lead volunteers:

- **Define Volunteer Roles and Responsibilities**

Not only is this important in the enrollment process, but it is vital if volunteers are to remain engaged and be productive. Communication is paramount as the task progresses because the volunteer should have a clear understanding of the tasks for which they are responsible and the goals to which they should attain.

- **Listen To and Communicate With Volunteers**

As the task progresses, it can become difficult to maintain vital two-way communication with volunteers. A group email is neither engaging nor effective in soliciting input from front-line members. Get to know your volunteers and allow time for more personalized contact and forums where feedback can be shared.

Make an effort to understand what each of them is hoping to gain from volunteering their time.

Ensure they have the opportunity to see the impact of their work.

If they are looking to learn a new skill or utilize a unique skill they have, try to allow for that opportunity.

- **Form Relationships**

Forming a healthy relationship is a key and impetus to achieving success. Sometimes more emphasis is placed on getting the work done than on knowing their volunteers.

Creating a personal connection with volunteers builds strong relationships and makes the achievement of goals quicker.

- **Ensure Volunteers Are Committed**

All too often, out of a dire need for help, both committed and less committed volunteers are recruited. Leaders need to be sure of the commitment of their volunteers as well as monitor the volunteer's commitment. They should determine their decision on assigned responsibilities and roles and verify that the right volunteer is in each role.

It is never too late to train volunteers on the responsibility associated with a specific role and optimize their performance.

- **Restate the Objectives and Roles**

The absence of clarity can cause volunteers to become unsuccessful in their role. It is the job of leadership to keep them on track. In times of change, the morale of volunteers may be at the ebb and they may be less inspired to match expectations. They may lose touch with the expectation of the organization and potentially push your nonprofit away from its mission.

In order for volunteers to be effective in carrying out their duties and responsibilities, a leader needs to remind them about the function of their assigned role and the organization's objectives frequently.

Volunteers are likely to work harder when they clearly know the role they have to play.

- **Reward and Recognize**

Volunteers, despite not expecting any payment, will be motivated to contribute more if their efforts are appreciated. Recognition can help them feel like an integral part and key players in the growth of the organization. It gives them a sense of accomplishment.

Reward by giving volunteers praise and recognition for each of their contributions in person and in public.

Some caution is necessary because, if an under achiever is given recognition, he will be of the opinion that he is doing what he needs to be doing and continue under performing. Additionally recognizing or rewarding an under achiever will often dishearten an achiever, and the achiever will wonder why someone putting forth less effort than he is getting recognized, and can lose interest and leave the task.

Dismissal of Volunteers

Dismissal of a volunteer is not a pleasant responsibility but it is sometimes required. Some of the reasons for dismissal most likely would be a result of the following obvious and less severe reasons.

- **Obvious Reasons**

- Theft
- Does not show up frequently
- Starts conflict among other volunteers
- Refuses to perform tasks
- Cannot perform tasks

- **Less Severe Reasons**

- Shows up late
- Has a hard time accepting authority
- Lacks motivation
- Physical or mental disability

Dismissing a volunteer is never a pleasant task, but with an orderly process to follow, it is a lot easier. After giving the volunteer opportunities to overcome their shortfalls and when the time comes that you need to dismiss the volunteer, the following should be considered in the dismissal process.

- It is always a good idea to have documentation to advise the dismissed volunteer of why he is being dismissed, and will also serve well to assist when speaking with the dismissed volunteer.
- Find a private place to meet in person. It would be advisable to have a third party present to document the interaction, in case something goes wrong.
- Be specific and get straight to the point. You do not want the volunteer to leave the meeting wondering where they went wrong. This is the most painful part of the process, but being honest and direct will benefit both parties in the long run.
- Now the volunteer may be upset. There is a good chance he will be going through the stages of denial, anger, bargaining, and depression right before your eyes. He may ask if there is anything he can do to change your mind. No matter how hard they pull on your heart strings, remember to stay firm in your decision - there are reasons why you chose to let them go.
- Lighten the blow a little. Tell them you are sorry things did not work out, and you wish them the best in the future. Never attack their character or personality, as this will reflect poorly on you.
- Since this is a lodge member and you don't want to lose them, try directing him to a more compatible assignment or suggesting other areas where he could contribute.
- It is always best to let the rest of the task volunteers know of the decision you made.

Conclusion

Having a clear direction of the project or task ahead and finding and enrolling new and existing lodge members with attributes that fit the task are the first steps towards completing your goal.

Then maximize your chances for volunteer task success by: providing an agenda; encouraging open communications; providing appropriate education; and setting time requirements and expectations. Combine this with feedback and recognition along the way, and your volunteers should be committed to the task and to the project team, thereby maximizing the prospects of task success.

Knowing how and when to utilize your team of new and existing Masons will help with growth, retention and energy to pursue the continued strength of your Lodge.