

BANISH THOSE REQUITMENT WOES

Rewritten, by Penny Gruver, from an article in the May/June, 2002 Children's Ministry Magazine

Some mistakes that are made in recruiting for our Children's Ministry programs are not too costly, but others have a way of expanding and getting downright scary! We will examine some of the more common pitfalls and look at ways we can approach it differently...

1. The Painless Position

Research shows that most volunteers are willing to serve about **3 hours a week**. In *Volunteer Management*, Rick Lynch and Steve McCurley point to the trend of volunteers opting for short terms of service. With that date in mind, many well intentioned leaders design positions accordingly, trying to make the positions more attractive for prospective volunteers.

For example: Five volunteers short of the desired 30 volunteers, the children's ministry director reasons that because she has trouble recruiting the necessary volunteers each week, she will ease the load by scheduling the existing volunteers to serve **only ONCE every four weeks**. This solution and others like it are typically welcomed, as they provide **TEMPORARY** relief, **HOWEVER**, manipulating the position actually creates a monster of a recruiting environment for several reasons.

First: by opting for the "painless position," you quadruple your recruiting problem and ***your recruitment pool still has not grown.***

Second: requiring less commitment tends to diminish the position itself, making it difficult to see the "once-every-four-weeks" as nothing by a babysitting job. This has the side effect of chasing away passionate volunteers who were hoping to change lives, but don't want to do it with a limited commitment.

Third: there will be a portion of volunteers who will interpret this 3 hour block as their entire service to the church, potentially creating a human resources drain.

Fourth: by easing up the requirement you have placed a burden on the kids of trying to adapt to a new teacher each week and lose the constancy and intimacy that comes from a deeper commitment.

THE SOLUTION TO NUMBER 1

So how do we solve this common problem of the "Painless Position?" First we must realize that creating easy jobs is never the long-term solution. ***IF YOU ASK FOR A NOBLE COMMITMENT, YOU WILL GET A NOBLE COMMITMENT; IF YOU ASK FOR A MEDIOCRE COMMITMENT, YOU WILL RECEIVE IN KIND.***

Begin by asking for fewer volunteers with greater commitment. Strangely, setting the standard higher creates higher interest. This is the recruitment strategy of the USMC, who, when standing in front of high school student bodies says, *"I am not talking to every person in this room, but to the one person who has what it takes to be a Marine."* In 1860, this advertisement for the Pony Express makes the same point: *"WANTED – Young fellows not over 18. Must be an expert rider willing to face death daily. Orphans preferred."* Well, while this is a pretty dramatic and funny comparison, you get the point...the Pony Express had NO shortage of riders. It is perfectly acceptable to raise the bar for your volunteers.

2. The Desperation Dilemma

Volunteers who are recruited through emotional appeals, or those old devils, shame and guilt, never stay long. Similarly, arm-twisting tactics not only are undignified, but you can bet those volunteers will be gone soon too. Faced with the lack of volunteer teachers/staff folks may resort to similar tactics by saying, *"If we don't get some teachers we will have to shut down the Sunday school."* Another method is to parade the children in front of the adult congregation and have them plead for help. Now desperation methods do work...they almost always bring a few new prospects in. Desperation and manipulation have a big price tag in that once this method is used – many times it becomes the technique of choice. These tactics keep the real issues from ever being addressed, not to mention the unhealthy approaches used. These methods draw heavily from our leadership credibility bank, rendering future recruitment attempts dull.

THE SOLUTION TO NUMBER 2

How do we solve the Desperation Dilemma? Resolve **NEVER** to use those messages in the first place. Realize that they bring only short term relief at best. In addition, adopt a long-term approach that anticipates recruitment needs long before they arise. Planning regular meetings with your teachers will help. Recruiting is a year round process, and we should be prepared to select and to train volunteers through out the year. Finally, we need to recognize that desperation appeals may be symptomatic of deeper problems. The Law of Prosperity states that there is never a lack in anything – ***so we do not NEED anyone. We have opportunities for Spiritual growth and invite you to join our team.***

3. Fishing With the Wrong Bait

While desperation methods deaden prospective volunteer's sensitivity, other messages scarcely get a bite. Here is an old story about some boys who went fishing...

An experienced angler sees the boys and asks, "Whatcha fishing with?" "Peanut butter," they respond. "Catch anything?" "Not a bite." The man walks a little farther and sees two older boys fishing. He asks, "Whatcha fishing with?" "Pizza." "Pizza, why pizza?" "Well," the boy says, "we like pizza, so we thought the fish ought to like it. Right?" "Catch anything?" "Not a bite."

When we approach volunteers, we often use "bait" that we understand and enjoy, but it does not contain a message that our prospective volunteers can relate to or enjoy. A sincere approach that used humor, creativity and fun, that also focuses on the ADULTS you are trying to connect with, is most effective.

THE SOLUTION TO NUMBER 3

To attract the type of volunteer that we want on our teams, we should be able to list the benefits of service to our children. I have found one of the most effective tools is to invite a long time passionate volunteer to share his or her experiences and the highlights of being involved. In Matthew 4:19, Jesus says, *"...come with me and I will make you fishers of men..."* He was using language that the people who were listening understood.

4. The “Workers Wanted” Message

The following are two typical examples of the “workers wanted” school of recruitment:

- ◆ “Looking for a place to use your talents? We are looking for people interested in writing, drama,
choir, orchestra, praise band, children’s music, ushers, dance, communion, props & costumes,
multimedia, deaf ministry and kitchen help.”
- ◆ “PLEA FOR HELP! We need people to make copies of tapes for the message each Sunday.”

Perhaps the most bothersome type of “workers wanted” ads is the one which depicts an exciting ministry as a boring duty:

- ◆ “Four people needed to tutor. Big brother needed immediately. Need VBS helpers. Third grade teacher needed.”

Task oriented ads like this appear in organizational newsletters and church bulletins by the hundreds. The authors of such ads have good intentions, but fail to realize the implications this type of message has. The WAY we present our recruitment message speaks volumes about our ministry. Imagine you are a potential volunteer reading the following ad:

- ◆ “Two nursery helpers wanted.”

Write a list of thoughts or internal responses you would or actually do have when you read that ad. Personally, I would never glance at the ad, because I would never imagine it was speaking to me. If we don’t see ourselves as a “helper,” we don’t connect. The “workers wanted” message inherently denies the possibility that the ministry would be interesting or compelling in the slightest way.

THE SOLUTION TO NUMBER 4

The “workers wanted” tactic can be corrected. Simply determine never to recruit to a **task**, and instead recruit to a **ministry**. Take a look at the recruitment messages in your center. Do they attempt to recruit to a task or do they describe a compelling ministry opportunity? Rather than writing, “**Four Tutors Wanted**,” you might say something like, “**If you can read this, you could make a dramatic difference in the life of a child who is struggling with their reading.**” The second message calls the people to the **VISION** and **POSSIBILITY** of the ministry. It also paints a picture of how a “**YES**” response will impact the volunteer’s life.

Remember these points:

- ◆ Sincerity
- ◆ Humor
- ◆ Creativity
- ◆ Vision

Have fun bringing together the volunteer staff of your dreams.

The Search Is On: Recruiting Team Members

From: "Care & Feeding of Volunteers" by Barbara Bolton and other sources

One of the most important things to remember in recruiting is to **always come from a place of ABUNDANCE!** We don't **NEED** teachers (there is no lack)we have **amazing opportunities for experiencing love, joy and spiritual growth.**

Before you present the opportunities be prayed up, have your desires well thought out and identified and decide how you want your Sunday school to be structured. We first create it in mind then we take the steps we are guided to take to bring it into manifestation.

6 Step Recruitment Strategy

1. Gather Names

Prepare a list of names of people who are "suspects." They are not yet prospects, they are simply individuals whom you have identified as someone who might consider a teaching ministry. Enlist help to compile your list from the Ministers, Staff and Board of Trustees.

Get the congregation involved: Share your mission and vision statement and encourage them to join you in prayer. Send out a survey to discover what is important to the parents. Post your Volunteer Opportunity List & Sign up sheet at your Welcome Table.

◆ Identifying Potential Team Members:

- Set your intention through prayer.
- Get recommendations from your minister or other church leaders.
- Notice who the adults are who already have some rapport with young people.
- Look for those who are aware of and working on their own inner journey.
- Look for people who have the wisdom and grace and authority that only comes with maturity.
- Listen for people who value and care about young people and children.
- Look for people who will value the training and experience they will receive as teachers.
- Look for single people who might welcome the relationships they will build in class.
- Are there couples who might want to do a class together.
- Look for people who might be looking for a challenge.
- Notice who has lots of energy and enthusiasm.

2. Make An Initial Contact

Inviting people to consider being part of the teaching ministry is so important that it must be with an individual, face-to-face contact.

Call to make an appointment for a fifteen-minute conversation. Make it as convenient as possible for the "suspect."

Begin on time with prayer. Explain that you are inviting the person to an informal meeting related to the teaching ministry. Be clear that you are not asking for a commitment for involvement, only a commitment to attend an informal meeting. Have two possible dates so that each person may select the most convenient time.

3. Plan and Conduct Informal Meetings

People who agree to attend an informational meeting are no longer suspects. They become prospects! Pray for each one individually. Ask Spirit to help them recognize their gifts and their willingness to share them. Tips for the meeting:

- ◆ Begin and end meetings on time.
- ◆ Prepare printed materials well in advance.
- ◆ Arrange the meeting area so that those attending will feel comfortable and be encouraged to participate in questioning and discussion.
- ◆ Share information about the following:
 1. Specific ministry opportunities
 2. Requirements
 3. Job descriptions
 4. Available support
 5. Plan for equipping success
 6. Importance of relying on prayer when making decision
- ◆ Provide opportunity for questions and discussions
- ◆ Determine a time when contact will be made for decision about involvement. Allow about seven to ten days before the next contact.
- ◆ Encourage prospects to call with questions and concerns during this time.

4. Ask for Commitment

Make follow-up contacts as planned. Expect that some will respond with enthusiasm and be ready to make a commitment to become part of the team. Know that some will have additional questions.

If the prospect declines involvement thank them for their consideration and allow them to move on.

Those who volunteer to become part of the teaching ministry need to be asked to complete an information form (not an application form, see example enclosed here.)

5. Provide Initial Training

Volunteers will need information about the ages they will be teaching. They will need to be aware of behavior management techniques. Lesson planning skills will be important. Some prospects may offer reasons or stumbling blocks to their affirmative response.

- ◆ **I'm to busy.** (Share support and resources that will help to lessen time needed. Resist the temptation to say, "It really won't take much time." Preparation DOES take time.)
- ◆ **I have too many other responsibilities.** (Encourage the individual to evaluate us of time. Ask which responsibilities use that person's gifts most effectively. Consider ways to share some of the responsibilities.)
- ◆ **I've never taught before. I don't know how.** (Discuss opportunities for equipping. Discuss team teaching. Teach with an experienced teacher. Describe resources and available support.)
- ◆ **I'm retired and want to be free to travel.** (Consider planning travel so that not too many weekends are involved. Explore a mid-week ministry. Ask about a support ministry with flexible scheduling.)

Understanding of ways people learn, how to use curriculum, and a number of specific teaching methods will need to be developed.

- ◆ Assess specific needs of your volunteers.
- ◆ Plan for a variety of training experiences.
- ◆ Some individual training will be needed.
- ◆ Teaching teams can be trained together.

Some topics can be helpful to all volunteers involved in the teaching ministry. The goal for training or teacher enrichment is to equip volunteers to be successful.

6. Plan for Observation

Observation of experienced teachers is a valuable training tool. Volunteers who have never been involved in teaching may wish to observe classes of a variety of age levels to help determine the age/grade groups most appropriate for them.

Teaching alongside an experienced teacher in a team setting will provide effective on-the-job training. The new recruit may gradually assume responsibility for a portion of the teaching session until assuming full responsibility seems quite comfortable. More experienced teachers will be encouraged and stretched as they assume a mentoring role.

Be available to volunteers for evaluation, encouragement, and expressions of successes as well as needs.

Continuous evaluation is essential to ensure growth of volunteers as well as meaningful learning experiences for students. Plan for regular times of evaluation as well as being available for conversations as the need arises.