



with the youth. The ministry is failing and kids are quitting church, but at least the program can continue if this person says “yes”! No one else is willing to even try.

Throughout my career as a youth ministry professional, working on summer camps, weekly church programs, and large annual events, I have discovered how difficult it can be to get people to commit to a volunteer position. So many people—often the best and most talented—are tired. They have had bad experiences in the past with volunteer work. They have felt undervalued, unappreciated, taken for granted. They have been treated as though they were expendable or have been given jobs that didn’t match their skills or talents. “I’m fed up,” they say, shaking their heads. So much of the success of any type of ministry depends on a motivated and happy volunteer workforce. Why do so many leaders fail to utilize volunteers properly, and what can we do to make the most of this important resource?

In *This Way to Youth Ministry*, author Duffy Robbins (2004) expands on a study carried out by Strommen, Jones, and Rahn, who examined 2,500 youth workers to establish the top “six perils that can sink a career.” They are as follows:

1. Feelings of personal inadequacy
2. Strained family relationships
3. A growing loss of confidence
4. Feeling unqualified for the job
5. Disorganization in one’s work habits
6. Burnout

To overcome these obstacles and find a youth volunteer who will serve past the standard 12- to 24-month stint and be your “die-hard” warrior is no easy task. Yet there are at least four areas that, if addressed, can help you recruit, retain, and refine them. All of these require a continual self-evaluation of your leadership and of the kind of volunteer you seek. I’ve arranged the principles in a particular order, but there is no particular sequence to be followed in addressing them.

## **MOTIVE**

*Motive: (noun) a reason for doing something, esp. one that is hidden or not obvious.*

Moses spent forty years in the wilderness, tending sheep, in order to examine his motives and prepare himself for service. Most volunteers would be fortunate to have forty days to reflect on a youth position in the church, and they are often unsure of what they’re actually getting themselves into. As a leader, you need to be clear on what you’re looking for. Do you want a volunteer leader who will help shape the direction and vision of the ministry he or she is involved in, or are you looking for pairs of hands to assist with menial tasks like stacking the chairs, clearing out the warehouse, and scrubbing the fungus from the camping equipment? You may be looking for 52 weeks of excellent programming, while your volunteer may be aiming to recreate a sense of community and meaning among the young people of your church. There has to be a deep understanding between you and your volunteer about what both of you expect from the position. What motivates an individual to service is not the same for each person or position—nor should it be. Each position, if examined carefully, has its own unique set of challenges. If these are not articulated clearly, a volunteer’s motive can easily be squashed and as a result, the sustainability of the volunteer will drop drastically. In your process of selection, you must seek out ways to identify the motive for service. When appropriate and possible, you should ensure that you share

examples for each stage, demonstrating failure and showing what a new level of success might look like. Everybody fails, yet we rarely address failure in a healthy manner, showing how to learn from mistakes and move on. The leader needs to establish what the volunteer sees as success and what makes him or her feel validated. Does he or she live for affirmation? If so, from whom or what? Has he or she ever led out in any capacity before? How does he or she deal with difficult challenges?

Healthy leaders are not afraid of success and relish finding others to work around them with the same motive. Your leadership culture will alter the motives of all your volunteers. Your motives must be transparent, even if theirs are not. Your motives must have space for growth and expansion, even if theirs do not. Your motives must involve looking at your volunteers and know-





selection process, they naturally became carpenters or fishermen. When Jesus chose his volunteers, he saw the potential within each one. Each had the choice to follow and succeed. Interestingly, Jesus invested in three men in particular and held them accountable. He showed mercy and at times declared justice—all the while developing them to be leaders for the current generation.

Volunteers serve Christ, and they need to see Him through us as leaders. At the end of the day, we need to be the leaders with whom we would be honored to serve.

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