The Volunteer Shift

Workshop Notes · From filling slots to developing leaders

THE BIG IDEA

Churches must move from treating people as volunteers who check a box to developing leaders who carry the mission of the church.

WHY PEOPLE VOLUNTEER

People don't volunteer for the reasons we usually think. Circle or star the ones you've seen most:

- ☐ 1. Contribute to a cause they believe in
- ☐ 2. Learn and grow (sharpen a craft, master a skill)
- ☐ 3. Ownership and voice — they can actually lead change
- ☐ 4. Desire for change — they want to make something better
- ☐ 5. Fun and enjoyment — "This is my happy place."
- ☐ 6. Community — real relationships still form here

One example I've seen in my church:

Strongest predictor of volunteering:
A personal invitation from someone they respect — to do something specific, for a defined time.

WHY VOLUNTEERS LEAVE

If we understand why people leave, we can stop the quiet exodus. Check any that feel familiar:

- ☐ Underutilized (e.g. the CEO who only brings cupcakes)
- ☐ Physical environment made the work harder than needed
- ☐ Atmosphere felt impersonal, tense, or cold
- ☐ Suggestion was ignored — no response
- ☐ "Insiders" never really let them in (cliques)
- ☐ Didn't know how to say "this isn't a good fit" — so they disappeared
- ☐ Staff treated them as an interruption rather than help
- ☐ Reality of the role didn't match what was promised

One reason I've seen (or experienced) that caused someone to leave:

The Volunteer Shift

From managing volunteers to releasing leaders

THE PRACTICAL PATHWAY — EIGHT PRACTICES

1. LOOK	See the potential. Pay attention to their lives. Look with spiritual eyes. Focus 80% of your time on the top 20%.
2. SPEAK	Call out the giftings you see. When you name a gift, people often grow into it.
3. ASK	Personal invitation changes everything. Stage announcements rarely work.
4. INVOLVE	Invite them into the journey. Involvement → ownership → motivation → action → momentum → change.
5. SERVE	Serve alongside them. Trust is built faster when you lead by serving.
6. DIRECT	Lead in your own voice. Progressive release: I do → we do → you do.
7. GROW	Stay a learner. Ask for feedback. Model the culture you want.
8. PRAY	Pray continually for wisdom, eyes to see potential, and the right people.

WHO TO INVEST IN MOST

Faithful (they show up) · Reliable (they do what they say)
Available (they have capacity now) · Teachable (they respond to feedback)

WHAT VOLUNTEERS LOOK FOR IN A LEADER

- **Clear vision** — Tell them where you're going and why it matters (the "why behind the what").
- **Good training** — Equip them so they don't feel set up to fail.
- **Passion** — They borrow your emotional energy. Passion is contagious—so is apathy.
- **Encouragement** — Overdo it. Handwritten notes. Thank them in front of someone else.
- **Steady attitude** — Be the calm in the storm. "It's okay—we'll figure this out."

MY 30-DAY COMMITMENT

In the next 30 days I will:

- ☐ Personally invite _____ people instead of making another announcement
- ☐ Reassign or better utilize someone whose gifts are being underused: _____
- ☐ Spend intentional time developing these high-potential leaders:

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

One other shift I want to make:

_____

_____

"The shift begins with how you see the people sitting in your seats every Sunday."

— Debbie Tonn