

# holding on to your 'KEEPER' VOLUNTEERS

BY KURT JOHNSTON AND KATIE EDWARDS

If you're tired of turnover among your adult leaders—or you're looking for ways to keep them happy long-term—use these ideas to transform your regular volunteer meetings (from the new Group Publishing resource *Go Team! 101 Ideas to Energize Youth Ministry Volunteers*)

Treat your adult volunteers well, and they're likely to hang around a long, long time. That's a profound truth that's taken us many years to learn well. And that's why we've spent a lot of time thinking of new ways to turbo-charge our regular touch-base and training gatherings. We've found that a little creative spice in our regular meetings makes them more fun for our volunteers, and they walk away feeling encouraged and cared for. Here's a sampling of what we've tried.

**1. Create a theme.** A theme helps set the tone for your time together, and it gives a cool feeling to your meeting. It also communicates time and effort on your part, which your volunteers translate as encouragement and care. For an example of one of our themed meetings, complete with decoration ideas, see the "Breakfast Bash Meeting Theme" on page 95.

**2. Enjoy a meal together.** Everyone loves food! There's no better way than sharing a meal to build a "friendship web" among your adult leaders—the dinner table is a great place to share life with them.

**3. Plan a specific training topic.** Whether you're a rookie or a seasoned veteran, ongoing ministry training is a necessity. Take time to train your volunteers. Everyone can benefit from simple reminders and new tricks of the trade. Here are just a few training topics you might want to cover:



## CHURCH VOLUNTEER CENTRAL

Group Publishing's new online resource for all things related to recruiting, training, and keeping your adult leaders is called Church Volunteer Central. CVC is a membership association, and it'll help you maintain effective, long-term relationships with your volunteers.

Membership entitles you to online resources from top ministry experts—including articles and tips on volunteering, customizable forms and documents, online training, background checks, an online staff manager, networking, and more. You can also talk to a volunteer expert over the phone, who'll guide you with any volunteer management issues you have. You also get discounts on services and products vital to managing your volunteer program, and a monthly e-newsletter packed with tips.<sup>1</sup>

To find out more, go to [www.churchvolunteercentral.com](http://www.churchvolunteercentral.com) or call 1-800-447-1070.



»» • The values of your ministry

- The purpose and vision of your ministry
- How to discipline in love
- How to lead someone into a relationship with Christ
- How to be a better listener

**4. Facilitate connections among volunteers.** Whether you have two or 22 volunteers, get them connected with one another. Each volunteer has something unique to contribute to your ministry. Instead of lecturing them about your training topic, give them something to chew on, then form pairs or trios and have them talk to each other using discussion questions based on the topic. The more they talk with each other, the more connected they'll feel.

**5. Include games, giveaways, and fun.** Laughter, fun, and free stuff can transform the atmosphere in a volunteer meeting. Play your favorite youth ministry games, create a themed game, or do a huge raffle or giveaway.

**6. Spend time in worship.** A great way to make a meeting more than a meeting is to provide an opportunity for praise and worship. Volunteers often miss out on the adult corporate worship times due to their commitment to ministry. Start the meeting or wrap it up with a short time of worship.

**7. Share faith stories.** A great way to encourage your volunteers is to ask different volunteers at every meeting to tell stories of what God is doing in their hearts and in their ministries.

**8. Invite a guest speaker.** Bring in a guest speaker to encourage your volunteers. They probably love to be encouraged by you, but why not bring in an outside source to love on your leaders? For example, ask your senior pastor or your worship pastor to share a devotion. Or bring in a youth pastor from another

church or a visiting missionary to share with your team.

**9. Screen a video.** Show a funny or inspirational video clip. Partner the clip with training, a Bible study, or a ministry pep talk. Or show one just for fun to make your volunteers laugh!<sup>9</sup>

**10. Lead a Bible study.** Most meetings start with prayer, but why not start it out with a short Bible study that relates to the theme or training time? Ask one of your volunteers to prepare a

## VOLUNTEER AFFIRMATION IDEAS

### SPECIAL DELIVERY

**Supplies Needed:** a yummy snack; a plate, wrapper, or other container

**Cost:** under \$5 per person

Around 3 p.m. most people start getting a little restless at work. Show up at your volunteer's workplace with a milkshake, a smoothie, a huge candy bar, or a plate of chocolate chip cookies. Write a quick note of encouragement on the cup, wrapper, or plate, and leave it at the front desk. Or deliver it right to your friend! It's a guaranteed midday revival. Your leaders will love it!

### RANDOM POSTCARDS

**Supplies Needed:** postcard, postage

**Cost:** under \$1 per person

Postcards are everywhere! Pick up a variety of goofy postcards to send to your volunteers.<sup>2</sup> You can find them at a gift shop, the grocery store, or a gas station, or pick some up when you're traveling. It doesn't matter where they're from; in fact, the

## BREAKFAST BASH MEETING THEME

10-minute lesson and share it with the team.

**11. Go on a field trip.** At your next meeting, surprise your volunteer leaders by taking them on a field trip. When they arrive, have a couple of cars waiting to take them bowling, to an ice cream shop, or to a cool restaurant. You may want to take them somewhere that relates to the theme of the night. For example, if your theme is Let's Go to the Movies, have cars waiting to take them to a new release.

**12. Commission them.** When new volunteers join your ministry team, commission them for ministry. Take time in your next meeting to gather around them and pray for their work with students.

**13. "You saw it here first!"** Introduce new vision and direction to your volunteers before anyone else hears it or sees it. Seek their feedback—they'll know that their opinion is valued.

**14. Give awards.** Take a few moments in your volunteer meetings to highlight volunteers who've gone the extra mile. Recognize the big things and the little things. We give away several overachiever awards as a traditional part of every team meeting. ■



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**DECORATIONS**—Cozy blankets, pillows, bean-bag chairs, and cartoons playing on a TV.  
**FOOD**—Pancakes, waffles, French toast, cold cereal and milk, bagels, toast, toaster pastries, muffins, and doughnuts.

**GAME IDEAS**—Saturday morning cartoon trivia—create a cartoon trivia game that spans all decades. Or breakfast cereal character trivia—put pictures of 10 different breakfast cereal "mascots" on a sheet of paper, and have volunteers try to guess who's who.

**WORSHIP**—Take a morning "prayer walk." This is a cool activity for your volunteers to do together and a great way to get them interacting during a meeting. Or pray as a volunteer team for your ministry. Or create prayer stations for your team to rotate through. Or walk through your youth room or your church campus, and pray for students who are going to come through your doors. Or walk through your local community, and pray in areas where students hang out.

**FIELD TRIP**—Have your meeting at a local doughnut shop. Ask the manager if you could have exclusive use of the shop after hours for one evening.

**EXTRAS**—Have people come dressed in their pajamas. Or give everyone a half-dozen doughnuts to take home. Or give out mini boxes of Frosted Flakes cereal with a note attached saying "You're GR-R-REAT!"

- 1 Group Publishing will be hosting a Volunteer Management Summit on May 5-7, 2004 at our headquarters in Loveland, CO. CVC members receive a \$25 discount. For more information, please contact Janelle Walsh at 800-635-0404 ext. 4177, or check out the Web site at [www.grouppublishing.com/Summit\\_Experiences](http://www.grouppublishing.com/Summit_Experiences).
- 2 group's editors are very proud of their 3-year-old toddler—MinistryandMedia.com—our massive online resource that offers hundreds of searchable biblical discussion starters for video clips, songs (both Christian and mainstream), breaking news stories, and first-run films. If you need topical ideas for your training times that tie into film clips, go to [www.MinistryandMedia.com](http://www.MinistryandMedia.com) and sign up.
- 3 If you want to make sure you're "legal" when you show a film clip in your ministry, your church can obtain a "public performance" license from the Motion Picture Licensing Corporation for a small fee. Just visit [www.mplc.com](http://www.mplc.com) or call 1-800-462-8855 for more information.
- 4 Enlist the help of friends and family to find postcards. If you know people who are traveling, have them pick up a few for you!

stranger they are the better! Postcards are also easy to keep in your car, your office, your backpack, or your briefcase. The next time you have to wait at the dentist office or while picking up your kids from school, use that time to write postcards. It's an easy encouragement tool that you can always keep handy.

For example, find a postcard with a really peaceful scene on it, such as a lake, a sunset, or a quiet beach. Start the postcard with Psalm 62:5-6: "Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken." Finish the postcard with an encouraging note: "I hope you find rest in the Lord today. Take time out to meet with him. Rest, rest, rest in him! Have a great week!"

## SINGING TELEGRAM

**Supplies Needed:** none

**Cost:** free

Have students show up on the front door of your volunteer's house and deliver a special "singing telegram." This is perfect for

birthdays, anniversaries, or any celebration, but it's also a fun way to surprise your volunteer for no reason at all. You may want to write a fun jingle that students can easily memorize so you can use the same song each time. Or find out your volunteer's favorite band, and have students sing a medley of cover songs!

### For example:

- Remember that '80s hit "She Works Hard for the Money"? Sing a spoof of it with these words: "You work hard for no money/Yeah, hard for no money!/ You work hard for no money/So we want to treat you right!"

- Use familiar nursery-song melodies, such as "Old MacDonald," "This Old Man," or "The Farmer In the Dell," and write new lyrics. For example, students could sing this to the tune of "The Farmer in the Dell": "A big thank you to you/a big thank you to you/a big thank you to (person's name)/a big thank you to you!"

- Find out from a volunteer's spouse or friend what that person's favorite song or music is. Then simply write a goofy spoof of that song!