

# THE INSIDE >>> TRACK

## KEYS TO FINDING AND TRAINING VOLUNTEERS

Dave Gallagher

Finding and training volunteers is a high priority at the church where I serve as senior pastor. In fact, the city where our church is located calls itself “the volunteer capital of the world” because there are so many retired folks living in northwest Phoenix. As a result, we have learned some important keys to finding and training volunteers.

Too many times in past ministries I’ve seen church leaders effectively grab someone in the hallway and push them into a class or group that needed help. Ministry should be a joyful act of service to God, but that approach steals the joy. We have found it much better to use systematic approach, beginning with prayer and leading to happy volunteers joyfully serving the Lord.

**Begin with team prayer.** Anything done for God begins in prayer. God seems to use teams of people collectively to accomplish his will. We try to gather those involved in the ministry together as a team, and ask God for wisdom and guidance. It’s hard to imagine any endeavor in the church being successful without prayer.

**Know your people.** If we’re sensitive to the needs and spiritual gifts of a potential volunteer, they are more open to serving. We ask everyone to fill out a profile that tells where and how they have served in the past, and where they might have interest in serving in the future. This information is all put in our computer for quick access. We offer classes in discovering your spiritual gifts and use profiles in those classes. We take a picture of each person who attends our pastor’s Inquirer’s class. The pictures are kept in large notebooks easily accessible to leaders so someone trying to find a volunteer may look up a potential volunteer and match a face with the spiritual gifts and interest profile.

**Be prepared.** We train our people to know where and who to go to for approval *before* asking someone to volunteer. Volunteers want to know what the expectations are. Ministry descriptions are helpful tools and background checks are crucial. Church Volunteer Central has a very simple way of doing background checks, and this is especially important if you’re looking for people to serve in early childhood, elementary, or youth ministries. What an embarrassment it would be for me if I asked someone to volunteer only to find out that they were not qualified, or there was some issue that would prevent them from volunteering in that particular area of ministry.

**Don’t be afraid to ask.** The old saying tells us “timing is everything.” When and how a person is asked to serve is critical. But don’t let that paralyze you into inaction; there does come a time when you should ask the person if they would be willing to prayerfully consider serving. James 4:2 is an encouragement to me in finding volunteers: “You want something but don’t get it . . . You do not have, because you do not ask God” (NIV).

My wife and I were at dinner with two other couples recently and we began talking about preparing meals. I knew that one lady had an amazing gift of cooking; she loved to cook and yet was not using that ministry gift. I grinned and asked why she wasn’t working in the church kitchen. Her reply was simple: “No one has ever asked me.”

**Be patient and flexible:** Remember that God is sovereign and he will provide. Our job is to search prayerfully and carefully for the volunteers that God will provide. Perhaps we all have that “quick fix” mentality, but finding the right people takes time. Usually it does more harm than good to grab someone and twist their arm to volunteer, only to lose them a few months later because they’re frustrated. Find the balance between waiting on God to lead and procrastinating. The challenge is that of actively finding and training the needed volunteers at God’s perfect time.

*David Gallagher ( [drdavog1@cox.net](mailto:drdavog1@cox.net) ) is the senior pastor of Palm West Community Church in Sun City West, Arizona ( [palmwestchurch.org](http://palmwestchurch.org) ), a church designed specifically to reach people over age 50. Gallagher is the author of *Senior Adult Ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Group)* and *Healing Takes Time* (Liturgical Press, fall 2005).*

**Copyright © 2005, Group Publishing, Inc. All Rights Reserved.**