

Community Engagement Chat: Fixing Burnout – Taking Care of Loyal Volunteers

The complexities of volunteer engagement; in particular the issue of burnout among regular volunteers is an issue of concern to every organization that depends on volunteer engagement. Beyond the initial excitement that inspires people to act, the group talked about the signs and symptoms of burnout and prevention and intervention strategies.

Signs and Symptoms

- Cynicism
- Anger
- Frustration
- Sadness
- Exhaustion
- Isolation
- Outward expression of being overwhelmed, disappointed or just plain tired.

Taking burnout seriously is important for any manager that oversees volunteers. Emotional intelligence is key as well as the ability to actively identify signs of burnout and intervening when necessary. Even better, implementing prevention strategies can decrease stress for the manager and the volunteers too. Conducting ongoing check-ins are key: this might include personal phone calls, written cards to say hello and express gratitude, hosting parties and events to build camaraderie, organizing coffee talks with small groups for more intimate interactions, and regular emails to maintain ongoing connection. The importance of these interactions should not be undervalued – volunteer feedback is an invaluable tool for shaping and enhancing the overall volunteer experience.

The best-case scenario is that volunteers are excited to be there!

Here are a few strategies:

- Express genuine appreciation
- Incorporate morale boosters such as prizes, awards and recognition
- Create a fun and supportive environment
- Encourage inter-generational events and recruitment strategies
- Build in clear roles and expectations and create balance in duties
- Provide guidelines for volunteers and enforce general rules of conduct
- Build in support systems
- Provide training and ongoing support
- Be flexible to accommodate busy schedules
- Highlight the broader impact – share data and success stories on social media, newsletters, annual reports, etc.
- Brainstorm *with* volunteers to identify how to meet their needs
- Last but not least: Celebrate Success!

Quick Wins

- Coffee coupons from a local brewer
- Post a fun picture
- Movie passes
- Local concert tickets
- Encourage volunteers to 'Bring a friend'