

6 REASONS YOU'RE LOSING HIGH CAPACITY VOLUNTEERS

MARCH 28, 2014 IN [LEADERSHIP](#), [LIFE](#), [MISSION](#), [SPIRITUAL GROWTH](#), [STRATEGY](#) WITH [18 COMMENTS](#)

My guess is you could use a few more high capacity volunteers.

You know—the kind of volunteer who:

Can attract other capable leaders

Doesn't drop balls

Loves a challenge

Constantly overperforms

I mean, who doesn't want more of *those* people on their team?

But today in many churches, and in many not-for-profits, staff leaders are wondering where the high capacity leaders have gone.

The paradox is they're probably in your organization. They might be attending, and some are helping to fund it.

But so many aren't serving, and even if they step up, far too many high capacity people walk away way too soon.

Why?

6 Reasons You're Losing High Capacity Volunteers

I know this is a bit of a tough post. But you need to know I've made every single of of these mistakes over my time in leadership.

So if your response to reading this is "oh no"...just know that if you make some changes you'll find yourself in a very different (and better) place.

There are at least 6 reasons high capacity volunteers never join a team or leave it early.

1. The challenge isn't big enough

It's really quite simple. People with significant leadership gifting respond best to significant challenges.

Under challenge them and they won't stay engaged for long.

So many church staff and non-profit staff I talk to are worried about giving their volunteers too much responsibility. Newsflash: that might be exactly why you don't have enough high capacity volunteers (not to mention a thousand other problems on your team.)

People with significant gifts respond best to significant challenges.

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2. Your vision, mission and strategy are fuzzy

People want to serve a cause bigger than themselves. And actually, that's what the church (and most non-profits) are all about: causes bigger than ourselves.

But often our mission, vision and strategy are fuzzy.

Mission is the what.

Vision is the why.

Strategy is the how.

Even if they're written on a piece of paper most people functionally can't tell you what they are.

That's a tragedy. The motivation for volunteers IS the vision. It's the *why* behind the what.

And—get this—the church has the best vision and mission on planet earth. So why on earth do we hide it?

Quite seriously, helping people discover the God who created them and the Saviour is the most rewarding work volunteers will do in their lives, regardless of what they get paid to do their day jobs.

3. You're disorganized

Few things are more demotivating than giving up your time as a volunteer only to discover the staff person responsible didn't set you up to succeed.

The tools they need to do the job are missing or incomplete. The rest of the team is late.

Or maybe—worse—they're not even 100% sure what they are supposed to do or how they are supposed to do it.

You can always find people who will put up with disorganization, but many more will simply give up.

And high capacity people will make a beeline for the door.

Few things are more demotivating to a high capacity volunteer than a disorganized staff person.

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4. You let people off the hook too easily

I know I know.

They're *volunteers*. And you can't hold a volunteer accountable can you?

Wrong. You most certainly can. And should. For everyone's sake.

If a volunteer is late, it's really no different than if a staff member is late. Sure, you want to address it kindly, but you need to address it.

Again, few things are more disheartening for a motivated volunteer than if they did their homework and showed up early only to find that others didn't, and then, to top it all off, have a staff person excuse the behaviour of the people who didn't pull their weight with lines like "it's okay, we're just glad you're here".

The high capacity leader dies a thousand deaths every time he or she hears a staff person utter those words. And then, almost 100% of the time, the organized, highly motivated exactly-the-kind-of-leader-you-were-hoping-to-keep will leave, and the slackers will stay.

The high capacity volunteer dies a thousand deaths when a staff member excuses someone's laziness.

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5. You're not giving them enough personal attention

Another big challenge for church leaders and non-profit staff is the innate desire most of us feel to treat all people 'equally'.

You don't want to play favourites, so everyone should be treated the same.

Again, wrong.

The church should *always* be a loving organization. But certain people require more of your time and attention.

Unless you're intentional, you'll end up spending most of your time with your most problematic people and the least amount of time with your highest performing people.

Flip that.

Cut ties with the low performers and spend most of your time walking alongside and developing your best leaders.

And before you think that's completely unfair, just know your entire team will thank you for it because you'll end up with a strong team.

By the way, Jesus did this too. He had crowds of disciples, but then a group of 72, an inner group of 12, an inner circle of 3 and placed his greatest investment in 1 (Peter).

6. You don't have enough other high capacity volunteers around them

It's never fun to lead alone.

As soon as you find a high capacity volunteer, your next step should be to recruit more and move others alongside them.

Nurture this team. Build into them. Take them for lunch. Take them with you when you travel. Do life with them (again, I think Jesus modeled this pattern).

Sadly, many leaders don't do this, and high capacity leaders once again walk away, demotivated.

Those are 6 reasons I see in the church and organizations around me.

What do you see?

What have you experienced?

Leave a comment!

