

# THE VOLUNTEER EFFECT



How Your Church  
Can Find, Train,  
and Keep Volunteers  
Who Make a Difference

Jason Young and Jonathan Malm



**BakerBooks**

*a division of Baker Publishing Group*  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

© 2020 by Jason Young and Jonathan Malm

Published by Baker Books  
a division of Baker Publishing Group  
PO Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287  
www.bakerbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Young, Jason, 1978– author. | Malm, Jonathan, author.

Title: The volunteer effect : how your church can find, train, and keep volunteers who make a difference / Jason Young and Jonathan Malm.

Description: Grand Rapids, Michigan : Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2020.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020005181 | ISBN 9781540900418 (paperback)

Subjects: LCSH: Voluntarism—Religious aspects—Christianity. | Church management.

Classification: LCC BR115.V64 Y68 2020 | DDC 254/.6—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2020005181>

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from THE MESSAGE, copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002 by Eugene H. Peterson. Used by permission of NavPress. All rights reserved. Represented by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

Scripture quotations labeled ESV are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. ESV Text Edition: 2016

Scripture quotations labeled NLT are from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007, 2013, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

The authors are represented by the literary agency of The Blythe Daniel Agency, Inc.

20 21 22 23 24 25 26 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



Jason Young and Jonathan Malm, *The Volunteer Effect*  
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2020. Used by permission.

*For those who led us when we first volunteered,  
Sam Davis and Jeff Mumme*

# CONTENTS

Foreword by Jenni Catron	9
Acknowledgments	13
Introduction	15

## **PART 1: FIND 21**

1. Invite Volunteers to a Mission 25
2. Invite Personally 39
3. Create Low-Risk Entry Points 57

## **PART 2: KEEP 75**

4. Help Volunteers Belong 81
5. Create Clear, Meaningful Wins 99
6. Create a Culture That Evokes Pride 117
7. Pass the Fire 131
8. Produce Their Highlight Reel 147

## **PART 3: MOTIVATE 161**

9. Have a Plan 165
10. Protect Volunteers from Obstacles 183
11. Remember They're God's Volunteers 205

## 8 Contents

Appendixes: Sample Training Materials	219
A. Guest Services Training Checklists	221
B. Connections Team Process	227
C. Worship Team Vision Sheet	235
Notes	239

## FOREWORD

“I get to be a part of this!” I distinctly remember the feeling I had as a new volunteer at the church my husband and I were helping to plant. While I was juggling an insane schedule with my job and navigating life as a newlywed, I couldn’t wait to be a part of this church. I felt belonging, significance, and purpose.

After a few years that enthusiasm for volunteering led to me joining the team in a staff capacity. I was even more eager to bring my passion and gifts with full-time energy. It didn’t take long, however, for me to realize the enormous challenge it is to lead an organization mostly comprising volunteers. The leadership required of me and my team was like nothing I’d experienced before, even in the fast-moving corporate business culture.

Leadership in a business environment had its own unique challenges, but by and large the people on my team were committed to being there, if for no other reason than to ensure their compensation. While compensation alone isn’t enough to keep people engaged, it does hold sway. Contrast that with leading primarily volunteers in my new church context, where we were competing with the demands of careers and family activities: I quickly realized an entirely new set of tools was going to be necessary to embrace leadership in this environment.

Now, as I work with churches and organizations across the country, one of the repeated challenges I encounter is the volunteer dilemma. Here are the problems I see:

Volunteers seem to have more demands on their time than ever.

Volunteers have difficulty committing at the level organizations need them.

Volunteers are inconsistent and communicate poorly.

Volunteers don't always understand the importance of their role.

Leaders have lost touch with what a volunteer's world looks like.

Leaders underestimate what volunteers are capable of doing.

Leaders don't give appropriate time and attention to developing their volunteers.

Leaders see volunteers as a means to getting work done rather than seeing that leaders are positioned to help volunteers unleash their gifts.

The sentiment I hear from many leaders suggests that we have a volunteer issue in today's culture. And while there might be some truth to that, in my opinion, we don't have a volunteer issue as much as we have a leadership issue. It's all about our perspectives as leaders. Are we creating environments that motivate, engage, and deploy volunteers to use their gifts? Do we create cultures where they feel purpose and belonging?

Every person who leads volunteers needs this book Jason and Jonathan have written. Volunteers are the lifeblood of our ministries and organizations, yet we're living on life support because we have anemic volunteer systems.

As churches continue to wrestle with the realities of less frequent attendance, engagement and involvement beyond Sunday

morning attendance are critical to creating thriving communities of faith. Churches are uniquely positioned to create a place of belonging, significance, and purpose—exactly what I experienced. But to do so requires some important perspective shifts and an intentional commitment to embrace “the volunteer effect.”

Jason and Jonathan are not just theorists. They are practitioners who have lived this out in the churches where they have worked and volunteered themselves. They understand the unique challenges and dynamics, but they’ve refused to accept excuses like “volunteers just won’t” or “we can’t ask too much.” Instead they have done the hard work—navigating mistakes and exploring successes to provide a resource that will equip you to experience the significance of seeing volunteers thriving and engaged.

You’ve picked up the right book, and you have the best guides to help you along the way. I hope you’ll not just read this book but will study it. I encourage your entire staff to read it together and identify those areas where growth or perspective change is needed. I hope this will become a textbook that you refer to frequently. And most importantly, I hope this book will be the catalyst for achieving your organization’s mission. The volunteer effect can have an enormous impact!

Jenni Catron

Founder of The 4Sight Group and author of  
*The 4 Dimensions of Extraordinary Leadership*



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*Jason would like to thank . . .*

Johnny Hunt, Chris Green, and Andy Stanley. You deeply trusted me to lead a lot of volunteers.

Greta Smith, Sam Jones, Alex Cottingham, Ashley Borland, Cory Lebovitz, and Mackenzie Ziegler. You created a fun staff environment and built remarkable volunteer experiences.

Chandler Saunders, Morgan Kennedy, and Evan Knox. You arrived as interns and made a difference in giving attention to volunteers.

Michael Robertson. You are my friend and led the way as a volunteer for other volunteers.

Every volunteer at FBC Woodstock, Life.Church, Buckhead Church, and North Point Ministries. You showed me what caring for others should look like.

Lance Martin. You are my closest friend and bring humor and creativity to the table.

Joe and Tracey Young. You help others, and seeing that modeled by my parents inspires me to do the same.

Stacy Young. Your support for me is more than anyone will ever know.

*Jonathan would like to thank . . .*

Ismael Cabrales. Thanks for trusting me and allowing me to work out some of the material in this book with Pearl Street's VIP team.

Josh Engler. You've demonstrated a love for volunteers that's inspiring. You've also shown that you can keep a big picture on ministry even when Sunday relentlessly keeps coming.

Daniel Villarreal. Thank you for the countless leadership conversations we've had and for bringing me into the heart behind what makes Grace Avenue Church such a great place.

Paul Zepeda. I loved working with you for the short time we got to. You had some great ideas for volunteer leadership, and I loved getting to be part of it.

Carolina Malm. You have such great insight into leadership. You always surprise me.

My volunteer teams at The Summit Church, Fellowship Church, Grace Avenue Church, and Pearl Street Church. I've learned so much alongside you.

# INTRODUCTION

The text was unexpected.

---

Hey Tim, I'm really sorry to say this, but I'm going to have to step out of volunteering for a while.

*Are you kidding me?!* Ashley was the one volunteer who seemed to really get things. She did things efficiently and with excellence. Plus, everyone on her team looked up to her.

This was the blow that made Tim want to give up on this whole volunteer thing for good.

Nevertheless, he went through the motions. A conference he'd attended a few months ago suggested that he send a survey to the volunteers who had decided to stop serving. So he tried to steady the frustrated energy in his fingers before he typed back.

---

I'm sorry to hear that, Ashley. We've loved having you on the team. Would you mind filling out this quick survey to let us know what your experience was like? I want to make serving a valuable experience for those involved.

He hit *Send*.

Tim wasn't expecting Ashley to fill out the survey. No one else had. And if he was being brutally honest, he was okay with that. He didn't really want to know.

*Oh well, time to find someone to replace her.*

You see, Tim loved ministry. When Lemuel Church had invited him to be on staff as a volunteer coordinator a few years before, he'd jumped at the opportunity—even though it meant a big pay cut.

The only fly floating in the ministry ointment was having to deal with volunteers. Tim loved the people at his church, but it seemed as soon as he asked them for anything, things got difficult. He had three main problems: he couldn't get enough volunteers, they didn't do a great job, or they suddenly asked to stop volunteering.

He'd read the books and attended the conferences, but there always seemed to be a disconnect between the information he consumed and its application to his ministry. In fact, it was starting to taint his view of the people at his church. Tim began to think of his congregation as lazy, entitled consumers. He knew that his developing view was wrong, but how could he change his perspective when the facts seemed to support the story?

Two weeks passed and he'd nearly forgotten about Ashley. So he was confused when an email came into his inbox: Volunteer Exit Survey Response.

He muttered to himself, "What's this?"

He opened the email and saw it was from Ashley. She had actually filled out the survey, and it was comprehensive. It looked like she had taken the full two weeks to gather her thoughts. Tim felt a bit guilty, because it was clear Ashley had given the survey more attention than he had.

As Tim read through her response, it was clear that Ashley's experience volunteering at Lemuel Church had been filled with frustration. She wasn't being mean in her feedback, but she also wasn't beating around the bush. By the time he read the last word, he was feeling a strange mixture of emotions. On one hand, he felt beat up. On the other hand, her honesty was refreshing. This was

the first time he'd heard many of these things, and he was finally making some connections to comments from other volunteers who had left his team.

Tim grabbed his phone and scrolled through his text messages. He found Ashley's name and began to type.

---

Ashley, I just read through your survey responses. I had no idea this was what you were experiencing on my team. I'm so sorry this happened.

---

I know you're a busy person. But I was wondering if you might grab coffee with me here at the church in the next week. I'd love to talk to you more about this. I don't want other people to experience what you did.

Tim sat back in his chair, gazing at the ceiling. The wheels in his head were whirring, processing all the things he'd just read. He couldn't shake the weird sensation that this email was both the best and worst thing that had happened to him lately.

His phone vibrated, shaking him from his introspection. Ashley had responded.

---

I'm free Thursday. Let's do this.

-----

Volunteers are the lifeblood of churches and nonprofits. The mission is too great and the amount of work too overwhelming for a few people to do it on their own. At the same time, though, many of us feel like Tim did. Volunteers can feel less like an opportunity and more like a necessary evil.

Have you experienced the same feelings and struggles as our friend Tim? Maybe you constantly wrestle with questions like these:

- How do I get more volunteers? It seems there are never enough willing to serve.

- Why do my volunteers fizzle out so often? I keep losing team members, or if I keep them, they seem unmotivated.
- Why don't my volunteers *get it*? For me, ministry is obvious. But for my team, it seems like I'm constantly creating new policies and checklists so they do their jobs right.

We have a hunch that you wrestle with these questions, because everyone who leads volunteers deals with these issues. Whether you work at a big or small church . . . Whether you're in the church world or nonprofit sector . . . Whether you are paid staff or a volunteer who leads other volunteers . . . Nearly every leader struggles with how to get, keep, and train volunteers.

We hope you've never reached the level of hopelessness that Tim experienced. But if you have, let this book be your fresh start. There *is* hope.

We wrote *The Volunteer Effect* for the following people:

- Pastors and church staff
- Team leaders, paid or volunteer, both inside and outside the church
- Business leaders (the only difference between staff and volunteers is that paycheck)
- Volunteers who want to take more of a leadership role in their teams
- Anyone who anticipates leading volunteers in the future

If you find yourself in any of those categories, this book is for you. Most of our stories will be from the church team leader's perspective, because that's where we devote most of our time. We both consult with churches regularly. We also work with Fortune 500 businesses, international missions organizations, and small volunteer teams in creative, guest services, and pastoral roles.

We believe these practical and easy-to-use ideas will help you not only make great decisions but also create momentum on your

teams. We have seen church leaders get clarity on their volunteer on-boarding, training, and long-term strategy. We've also seen leaders learn how to handle difficult volunteers and discover how leading volunteers can be fun, rewarding, and life-giving to everyone on the team. Ultimately, we've seen volunteer teams thrive, and we are confident that your team can experience the same success.

As you read through this book, you might discover sweeping changes you need to make in the way you deal with volunteers or staff members. More likely, though, you'll see small tweaks you can implement to alter your approach toward volunteers. We encourage you to not overlook the small things. Tiny changes over a year's worth of weeks can amount to huge organizational shifts. And each small change will dramatically impact the lives of those you lead, yielding big results.

Grab a highlighter and notebook. Mark up this book, take comprehensive notes, and jot down action steps—even if they're small. You're going to start seeing the immense power that an army of well-trained and motivated volunteers can bring to your church or organization.

# FIND

Tim arrived at the church coffee shop early to check his emails, but he quickly fell into the habit of scrolling through social media. He didn't see Ashley as she walked up to the table where he was sitting. She leaned down and said, "Tim?" Tim fumbled with his phone, slightly startled.

"Ashley! Thanks so much for meeting me!"

*Man, this is awkward,* Tim thought. He was doing his best at small talk while they waited in line to order their drinks. *Do I just start asking her right now? How do you even start a conversation like this? And I don't want to get into something deep right before the barista asks us if we want extra foam.*

Fortunately, neither of them wanted anything fancy; they placed orders for black coffee and got them immediately. Taking their drinks back to the table, Tim realized something.

"You're dressed nicely, Ashley. I just realized you're probably coming from work."

"Sure am," she replied.

"What do you do?"

Tim had seen Ashley nearly every weekend for the last year, but their conversations never escaped the boundaries of Sunday morning.



Ashley laughed and responded, “I actually run a company. We make applications for banks.” She paused. “Well, I guess my team makes them. I don’t really do that anymore. Lately my whole job is systems and managing people. It’s a small company, but there are a lot of moving pieces.”

Before he even knew what he was saying, Tim blurted out, “But don’t you have kids? Aren’t you married?”

Realizing how fifties-gender-stereotype that sounded, he amended. “I’m sorry. That’s not what I mean. I’m just wondering, how do you find time to do it all?”

A smile crinkled around Ashley’s eyes. “No problem. My husband’s awesome and my parents help a ton. It always feels like we’re barely keeping our heads above water. Somehow we make it work, though.”

“How did you even make time to volunteer in the first place?”

“Well, people have more time than they think. It’s about priorities. If I offered you a trip to Cancun next week, do you think you’d be able to go?”

Tim knew this was a hypothetical exercise, but his inner child couldn’t help but hope she was actually offering. The truth was, he hadn’t had a proper vacation in years.

“Yeah, I think I could do that. I could probably ignore some emails or remove stuff from my to-do list. For Cancun, I’d make it work.”

“Exactly!” Ashley said. “If something’s exciting enough, we can always move things around to make room. Most of us are just victims of Parkinson’s Law.”

“Parkinson’s?”

“Yeah! Parkinson wrote a book back in the fifties about time management. The premise was basically this: if we give ourselves two weeks for a task, even if it only needs two hours, the task will get more complex and take longer. Since a normal workweek is forty hours, we make our to-do list take forty hours. But if you had a vacation planned next week, you could probably *actually*

fit two weeks' worth of stuff into one week—assuming meetings don't take all your time, of course.

"I'm constantly looking for ways to do less and delegate," Ashley continued, "so when Pastor Mike invited me to join the team a while back, it felt like Cancun to me. I'd wanted to do that ever since my husband and I first attended.

"On the first Sunday we visited, we were both nervous. We had a new baby and didn't know what to expect. But a greeter put us at ease. Neither of us had grown up in church. We also didn't know how well baby Jeremy would do in the service. But when the greeter saw us coming, I could tell he was so excited we were there. I remember Jeremy even smiled at him. He made us feel like everything would be okay.

"When Pastor Mike invited me to join the greeting team, I was excited to help others experience what I did," she finished.

"That's incredible," Tim said. "I had no idea you had such a passion for greeting. And if I remember right, you were on that team before I even took over the volunteers. Pastor Mike had invited you before I came on board, right?"

"That's right," she said. "I was maybe a year into launching the company. We'd just gotten a new contract. I wasn't sure I could commit. But Pastor Mike told me to try it out, give it two or three times. There wasn't much risk.

"In those three weeks, I realized I *could* make it happen. It was a stretch at first, but I believed in the mission enough. I wanted to be part of that."

The conversation continued along those lines until an alarm rang out in Ashley's pocket.

Grabbing her phone, she said, "I'm so sorry, Tim. I actually have to go. I don't think we got very far in what we were planning on talking about, did we?"

"Where did the time go?" Tim had gotten rather lost in the conversation and forgotten he too had a meeting in ten minutes. "I'm just grateful you took time to chat with me. You've already been

so helpful. Is there any chance we could meet together again or hop on a call? I know you probably don't have margin to volunteer again, but I would love to hear where we lost you."

Ashley paused, considering. "I tell you what. Why don't you come by my office tomorrow? I'm a bit more flexible with my schedule when I'm at the office; I can show you around and answer any questions you have then."

"That sounds perfect. I'll see you there."

Tim grabbed his stuff and walked down the halls toward the conference room. He made the meeting in time but had nothing helpful to add to the conversation. He was too busy making notes in his notebook, trying to remember everything he'd just heard Ashley say during their meeting.

# 1

## Invite Volunteers to a Mission

In our talks with churches around the world, we consistently hear that getting volunteers is one of the most difficult challenges leaders experience. In order to make a service happen, it takes tons of people to perform music, operate technology, guide guests, care for kids, protect against potential attacks, and so on. Even a small church deals with many needs, needs that all require volunteers to meet them. When you take into account that there are fifty-two weeks each year, often with multiple services each weekend, those are some serious numbers. Don't even get us started on those Memorial Day or Labor Day weekends when it seems like every single volunteer is on vacation. As much as any church doesn't want to think of people as mere numbers, filling the volunteer roster makes it hard to think of them as anything *but* numbers.

From a guest-welcoming perspective, it's daunting. Most first-time guests decide whether to come back within the first few minutes of their visit. That means the majority of visitors have made up their minds completely based on their interactions with volunteers and fellow attenders. They've decided before the "professionals"

even get on stage to play the music, preach a message, or emcee the announcements.

We can hear you thinking now: *You're telling us you need a huge number of volunteers and they actually need to be good?! Let's just call the whole thing off.*

Because of this tension between quantity and quality, there are conversations happening in churches throughout the world about replacing people with technology. In the production booth, it's possible to use MIDI and timecode to link projection screens with lights and lyrics. You could essentially eliminate two volunteer positions with a skillful use of technology. Or in kids' ministry, you can use QR codes and tablets to let parents register their own kids and get rid of two or three positions there. We don't blame church leaders for thinking this way, because it feels like it would solve one of the biggest pain points most leaders experience. At the same time, though, there's something about human interaction that technology can never replace.

The human element means so much because it carries empathy. A person can read a moment of tension or discouragement, and with a subtle change of tone or facial expression can alleviate those feelings. Or in a service where the lights were programmed to flash during a certain song, a personal touch can read the atmosphere of the room and realize that might not be the thing that would best support the moment.

Technology can and should be used intentionally to increase efficiency and quality, but it can't replace what skillful volunteers bring to the equation. Here's the tension in which we write this book: volunteers are necessary. And you need a bunch of them.

The good news is that people actually *do* want to volunteer. To paraphrase something Andy Stanley says all the time: Most people have felt taken advantage of and abused in their lives. So they walk around proclaiming, "Nobody will ever use me like that again!" Yet, when they come to Christ, there's this huge change that happens inside them. They go from "nobody will ever use me again" to

“God, please use me!” When the Holy Spirit comes into a life and transforms it, there’s an innate desire to be used for God’s purposes.

## Conflicts

The problem is, there are other conflicting desires and circumstances. Maybe a potential volunteer is busy with kids and barely has energy for anything beyond family life. Or the only time they can connect with their friends is on a Sunday morning, so they don’t want to risk giving that up. Or maybe they’ve been used and taken for granted in a church context, and they’re afraid that might happen again. Work, family, relationships, insecurity, and past experiences are all battling their desire to serve God through volunteering. That’s why the volunteer role you’re inviting them to must be compelling. It has to be compelling enough to overcome those obstacles.

Is the mission of your volunteer team compelling enough to do that? To be honest, most volunteer roles at a church aren’t very compelling:

- Cleaning the bathrooms? *Nah, I clean enough bathrooms at my own house.*
- Parking cars? *No thanks. It’s cold outside, and parking lots are uninspiring places.*
- Opening the door for someone? *Psssh! This generation’s already lazy enough without us contributing to it.*
- Taking care of babies? *That’s not even the number one or number two thing I’d like to do with my Sunday.*
- Running lyrics during worship? *People can just look them up on their phones.*

While a potential volunteer may not verbalize these things, they can feel that way. Why would they give up a bit of their freedom for those things? The role must feel more compelling.

So often, that's the simple, painful truth of the matter. As leaders, we fail to give people a vision for why they should volunteer. People want to feel used by God, and we're asking them to clean toilets. It doesn't translate, even when it's for a church. In the mind of a potential volunteer, the connection between **serve God** and **clean toilets** isn't clear. It's a leader's job to establish that link for the volunteer.

### JONATHAN

As an author and entrepreneur, I help churches around the world with creative expression, leadership, and crafting welcoming environments. That's my full-time ministry. At the same time, though, I love remaining connected to a local church. I love *my* church. So whenever I find a need, I volunteer and jump right in.

Right now, that means I'm in a welcome-team role. My first Sunday serving was Easter Sunday, in a huge downtown theater our church rented to accommodate all the guests who would show up. That service was an easy sell, because I knew tons of people who hadn't stepped foot in a church (or theater holding church services) for a whole year. This was perhaps our one chance to present the gospel to them. Anything I could do to help facilitate that? I was on board.

The next week, though, we were back at our regular campus. The Easter high wore off and it was back to Sunday as usual. That morning, the team needed me in the most boring spot: the connection table. I wasn't out in the queue where people wait to get into the next service (our building size makes this a necessity). I also wasn't in the VIP room where first-time guests go to meet the pastor and learn more about the church. I was stationed in the spot set up to answer questions about events or other announcements that were made in the service. Since it was after Easter, the church wasn't really doing anything that needed announcing. The whole staff was recovering from the "Easter hangover."

During the first half of my time serving that Sunday morning, I basically stood in the corner hoping someone would come up to me and need my help. Of course, no one did. After a few minutes, traffic died down and the lobby was mostly empty because the next service had started. I have to admit, thoughts crept in trying to convince me I was wasting my time. I felt like I was giving up my time for nothing. But I also knew this role was more significant than it appeared at face value. My extroverted, ministry-focused side woke up, and I made a decision. I was going to actively welcome people instead of just waiting for people to come to me.

When the service let out, I had a chance. There was a woman standing around in the lobby, obviously waiting for something. I went up to her and asked if I could help her find something.

“I’m looking for the pastor,” she said to me.

“He’s usually out here by now; I’m sure he’ll be out soon. Is there anything I can help you with?”

“I was here a year ago. My husband and I had been trying to get pregnant for a while, and we had pretty much given up hope. We had decided that next week we were going to start the adoption process, and the pastor prayed for us.”

I could see she was holding a chubby baby on her hip.

“I wanted to say thanks and let him know what happened that next week. On Tuesday, I was feeling weird, so on a whim I decided to take a pregnancy test.” Then nodding down to her baby, she said, “This is the result of that test.”

I celebrated with her and at that moment, our pastor came out. I was able to introduce her to him and let her retell the story. (I wasn’t going to steal her thunder and tell it for her.)

As I walked away, I realized the significance of what I was able to do. She looked ready to leave because the pastor was taking longer than usual to get out to the lobby. I not only acknowledged her when she felt out of place, but I was also able to connect her to our pastor and celebrate a life-altering moment in her life. I wasn’t the focus of that moment, but I facilitated it.



That's the true significance of the welcome-team role at my church. It isn't to high-five, smile, or open the door for people. It isn't even *really* to answer questions people have. It's to help outsiders start feeling like insiders. (And that term *outsider* should break your heart, because we want everyone to be insiders.)

When I remember that purpose, I come alive. I'm begging my team leader to schedule me each Sunday because I want to be part of that. I'm inviting friends, pitching that opportunity. It's a compelling enough role to make me gladly give up other things in my life.

-----

That's one of the big keys to getting volunteers: invite volunteers to a mission, don't just recruit them to a role. Offer them a calling, not just a post. A feeling, not just a function.

We talk about feeling over function a lot in our book *The Come Back Effect*. There, we primarily apply it to guest services, but it also applies to every volunteer position in your organization. Each role in your church, when operating at its best, evokes an emotional response in your attendees:

- Good sound makes people feel relaxed or excited and comfortable with singing aloud.
- Seamless check-in for kids helps parents and children feel confident.
- The parking lot team helps attendees feel sure they're parking in the right place and cultivates a sense of belonging from the beginning of their visit.
- Ushers help people avoid the embarrassment of accidentally sitting in a reserved seat or having to wander around looking for an open spot.
- Facilities teams help people feel relaxed and safe when the environment is clean and smells good.

-----

One of the best things you can do when inviting new volunteers is to frame the invitation in terms of what they can help someone else feel. In fact, the role can almost be an afterthought of the invitation: “Do you want to help people feel anticipation for the service? Give them confidence and help them feel like they belong before they even get inside the building? That’s what we do in the parking lot.”

Yet so often, we ask people like this: “Do you want to help park cars in the parking lot?”

Notice how much more compelling the first ask is? Maybe you were almost ready to join our fictional parking lot team when you read the first invitation, and you were probably falling asleep by the end of the second. It’s because the first invitation tapped into your own motivations.

### **Stacey Windover**

**Former Children’s Pastor and Curriculum Writer**

Through my time working with volunteers, I’ve always focused on the *why*. Why are we doing what we’re doing?

In Kidmin, we partner with families. We work with moms and dads who normally spend twenty-four hours a day with their new baby. For one hour a week, they get to focus on each other and on Jesus while we care for their infant. That’s a powerful thing.

We also get to be another voice speaking into the child. We get to echo what their mom and dad are already saying. We’re kind of like the dentist who shows up to kindergarten classes, telling the kids to brush their teeth. Parents have been telling them that forever, but that outside voice makes all the difference. We get to help support parents through what we do.

## What Motivates a Volunteer to Join a Team?

JONATHAN

I rediscovered coffee in college. As a child, I'd mostly had coffee-flavored milk. It was basically the coffee version of chocolate milk. Other than that, though, I had no taste for the stuff. As I realized most of my opportunities to make new friends happened at coffee shops, I felt the burden to acquire the taste.

I went to a local coffee shop, determined to find the drink that would open this whole new world to me. Unfortunately, it was a hip shop, and as soon as I opened the door I felt like a complete outsider. I just *knew* I'd embarrass myself with my ignorance in ordering.

As I approached the counter, though, I got the warmest smile from the barista. She welcomed me and asked what I wanted.

"I'm not actually sure," I said hesitantly. "I'm new to coffee."

She considered for a moment, then put a conspiratorial look on her face. "Perfect," she said. "We'll get a chance to find out what you like."

She proceeded to ask me what sort of things I liked . . . sweet, milky, bitter . . . She explained the differences between things like cappuccinos and lattes. She educated me but never made me feel like I was an inconvenience. The barista relished the opportunity to bring me into her world.

She nailed the drink. I loved it. That started my lifelong quest into the obsession with coffee. And believe me, it's one intense obsession.

The barista made what felt like a stressful situation into a great experience. This is the memory I bring into my role as a member of my church's welcome team. I remember what that barista did for me, and I extend that same thing to those I welcome into our church.

-----

Everyone has experiences like that from their past. They either had a great experience like the coffee story, or they had a negative experience that they want to help other people avoid as much as possible. When you can tap into those stories, you tap into people's motivation for volunteering.

Some potential volunteers might have experienced worship services that were life-changing. Others have been to nurseries where their child came back to them dirty and tear-streaked. They might not consciously remember those experiences when they're approached with a volunteer opportunity, but those situations are part of what motivates them. Knowing this, you can tap into that motivation—showing someone how they can do for others what they wanted done for them.

Always approach the ask from the volunteer's perspective: "*Here's something you can do,*" not "*Here's something we need done.*" The goal is not to be manipulative. Instead, it's showing a potential volunteer why they're the person who needs to do it. We'll talk more about this personal element in the next chapter, but the individual motivation is key.

Some people are motivated more by the desire to connect with people. Others are more interested in systems or challenges. But no matter whether they have a people focus or a process focus, their focus is based on past experiences. They have a need to right wrongs in the world. They have a need to resolve tensions they've experienced.

In a church environment that feeling is especially strong, because there's a spiritual component. It goes beyond just the strong emotional element.

As churches, we have the most compelling mission in the world. We're the collective body of Jesus, accomplishing his purposes in the world. If we aren't inviting volunteers from that perspective, of course it will be difficult to get people to join the cause.

The problem is that it's so easy to forget, because each week we simply need numbers. Most of us who lead volunteers in a church

environment run five different ministries, all under-resourced and overstretched. At times, we're so worried with filling our Planning Center roster that we can't even remember why we're doing what we're doing. *Why do I need five people?* It doesn't matter to us. We just have to fill the roster, so we have to ask more people to join.

Do you relate to that feeling?

It's so important that you don't abandon the mission because of the urgency of the need. You have to remember and prioritize a compelling mission in the ask.

### Understanding Your Mission

Perhaps your church has a mission statement like *Reach in, reach out, reach up*. How does running the slides during worship accomplish that mission? Maybe you can force a connection. Slides are your way of reaching in and connecting with the people who attend. But if you're having to force the connection for yourself, it'll feel even more forced when you try to sell that vision to a potential volunteer. "If it's a mist in the pulpit, it'll be a fog in the pews."<sup>1</sup> What's unclear in our minds will be downright confusing in the minds of others.

Don't try to force the connection to the church's mission. Instead, have a mission that's specific for your ministry. What does your ministry do to support the vision of the church that's better than what any other ministry can do? Defining the ministry's mission will help you discover the true heart behind what you're inviting volunteers to support.

#### JASON

I went through this process when I first started working with Buckhead Church. You see, I was seminary trained, and I had

previously worked with churches that loved using religious terminology. I came in expressing the guest services mission in churchy terms, and lots of people had no idea what I was talking about. I realized we had a lot of people in our church who were either new believers or were still questioning. We needed a phrase that all of us could rally around no matter what our background.

Our overall mission since the beginning has been to “lead people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ.”

Guest services isn’t ideally equipped to accomplish that goal. But we can be a bridge to that goal. So we developed this mission for our team: Elevate the dignity of the guest.

If guests can get into the auditorium with no distractions, they can engage with the mission of the church. We get to lead people into a growing relationship with Jesus by elevating their dignity, removing barriers, and letting them focus on the church service.

-----

In the context of someone running slides, a well-trained slide operator can make it possible for people to sing along in the worship service. No other ministry can do that as well as the slide operator. The worship leader could call out each line of lyrics before he or she sings them, but that would be clunky. As much as we like to attribute the success of a worship service to the worship leader, the slide operator can have just as profound of an influence on whether or not the congregation sings along. If people don’t know the words, they can’t sing. And the slides are the key to making that happen.

If we were to invite volunteers for the slide operation role, we could frame it like this: “Do you want to be part of leading people to sing along during the worship—giving them a chance to respond to God through song? You should join the slide team.”

-----

**Danny Franks****Pastor of Guest Services at The Summit Church**

We reinforce the mission for Guest Services in several ways:

1. Cast a big vision at the beginning. Before someone knows what they will do, we want to make sure they understand *why* they are doing it.
2. Define the role as they get started. The team member should have a clear picture of our expectations and the resources we'll provide for the job.
3. Coach as they go. Offer counsel, correction, and encouragement to move the team member from good to better to best.
4. Rewind to the basics often. Martin Luther said, "To progress is always to begin again." We should never get over or get past the initial vision.

Know when it's time to part ways. Not every team member will be a lifer. If their passion is dead and shows no signs of reviving, help them to find a more fitting area of ministry.

An individual might not be able to sing beautifully or play an instrument. But if they have a heart for leading people into worship, operating slides might be the perfect opportunity.

A great side effect of repositioning the "slide operation" mission is that you open this ministry to more than just the obvious types of people. Traditionally, this is considered a technical role: you think more of gear lovers and techies. If you change your perspective, though, and realize that slide operation is actually an extension of worship leading, there are so many new potential types of people who could join your team. You could include people who are artistic and musical with their timing. You might

find out you need techies to set up the system, but when it comes to operation, people with very little technical experience could be your best asset. Again, we'll talk a bit more about this in the next chapter, but a properly conceptualized mission determines so much about the acquisition of the right volunteers.

You might be thinking, *It's easy for you both to say this. You're outside of my role, so you have an outside perspective. In reality, most of my week is spent treading water. I'm dreading the arrival of another Sunday and barely have enough energy to fill out my volunteer roster. How can I come up with a clear mission for my ministry?*

The key is perspective. It is possible to get perspective on your ministry and reveal the compelling mission inside it.

There are two great ways to accomplish this: (1) stepping away for a bit, or (2) getting outside perspectives.

We'd encourage you to do both of these things often, because there's a good chance vision will leak, as it so often does. Getting away from time to time and regaining perspective will be valuable for creating systems to get new volunteers. And tapping into your current volunteers to help you get perspective is a healthy practice to keep vision fresh.

**Stepping away.** If at all possible, take a day and step away from your responsibilities. Maybe you need to schedule two weeks in advance instead of one, and then take the next week—when you would have been planning—to renew your perspective. However you make it happen, leave your to-do list and scheduling system in the office or at home and go out to a coffee shop. Put your phone on Airplane Mode or Do Not Disturb, and write in a journal about the ministry. Ask yourself some probing questions to get to the core of why you do what you do as a ministry:

- What does our department/ministry do better than any other ministry to support the church's mission?
- When we're doing our job right, what do we help people feel?



- What do people feel before they encounter our ministry, and when things are going right, how do our actions change those feelings?
- What experiences have I had in my past that drew me to this ministry in the first place? What injustice or imbalance am I trying to right?

**Getting outside perspectives.** Keep a calendar of when new volunteers join your team. After a volunteer has served for ninety days, ask them those same questions you asked yourself when you stepped away. After about three months, they'll be able to identify the actual values of a church and specific departments within that church.

You might find out you *thought* kids' check-in was entirely about creating a safe environment, but your volunteers believe the importance of kids' check-in is to help parents feel welcomed. Maybe you *thought* the facilities team was about making a place clean, but your volunteer sees it as an opportunity to anticipate needs before a guest even knows what's coming—like offering breath mints in the bathrooms or tissues in the lobby.

Ask a volunteer what makes them come alive when it comes to their role, and let that inform the way you invite future volunteers.

To close this chapter, here are some great ministry-specific missions we've seen. Let them inspire you for coming up with your own mission that's compelling to volunteers:

- Guest services: Elevate the dignity of the guest.
- Children's ministry production: Helping create engaging environments where kids can understand God's big ideas.
- Student small-group leaders: Investing in students by showing up on their terms.