



Leadership Cultivation: Nurturing New Leaders

Volunteer leaders are the lifeblood of a successful alumni association. They serve the functional role of being a staff multiplier – they are on the ground, all over the world, with the potential to use their time, talents and treasure to represent the organization and advance its interests.

Volunteer leaders are like other leaders. So, many aspects of nurturing leaders are similar in any organization.

Identifying basic talent, competency and management ability of potential leaders is similar for volunteer-led organizations as it is for other organizations. *Training* people, *teaching* them and providing *mentoring* involve many of the same processes and skill sets. See

www.handsonnetwork.org/files/resources/BP_VolunteerRecruitment_2010_HON.pdf for recruiting volunteers. For recruiting volunteer leaders see:

www.handsonnetwork.org/files/resources/GI_DevelopingVolunteerLeaders_2010_HON.pdf.

But some aspects of nurturing volunteer leaders are not like nurturing other leaders.

How are volunteer organizations different? Your volunteers are not working for a paycheck. They are volunteers, not employees. So, if you treat your volunteers poorly, they can leave – and will. It is important to realize that your volunteers receive non-monetary compensation largely in the form of respect and gratitude. They receive additional compensation in the form of the training they receive – both for specific jobs and for leadership training – and the experience. For some, the contacts and networking may be compensation. Volunteers also receive gratification by feeling that they have done something important, and have done it well. This is why it is essential to say thank you – often and sincerely.

The most important words are “thank you”. Good leaders know how to thank and recognize people. Recognition of volunteers is of paramount importance in volunteer organizations because it can be the currency for volunteer motivation. For Nine Rules of Recognition, see

http://www.handsonnetwork.org/files/resources/The_Nine_Rules_of_Recognition.pdf.

- Give people real and meaningful jobs. Jobs that are within their capabilities. This means explaining why even drudge jobs are important to the organization. And thank them, especially for doing the thankless jobs.
- Train your people to do the jobs well. This is so that you have reason to thank them.
- Give your people opportunities to take on more challenging and difficult work. And thank them for taking on the added responsibility.
- Mentor them, support them and watch their back. This includes warning your people about potential obstacles, suggesting ways to deal with those obstacles, and sometimes using your own influence to smooth the way. This is so that the people you mentor can grow into these greater responsibilities, succeed at them, and want to take on even more.
- Give your people a voice. Giving people more responsibilities includes bringing them into the decision making process -- at a level appropriate to their skills – and taking their comments respectfully and seriously. Thank them for their comments, even if you don't adopt them.
- Bring them to meetings. Introduce them to organization leaders and the public when appropriate. This allows your people's value to be seen, appreciated, and acknowledged by others.

Manage Volunteer Burnout: Managing burnout starts from day one. Components include support, supervision, engagement and recognition. For more see http://www.handsonnetwork.org/files/resources/volunteer_burnout_.pdf.

Mentoring Caveats. Nurturing new leaders requires mentoring them. Here are some things to remember.

- The people you mentor will never be exactly like you. They will do things differently. You have to let them.
- People learn by making mistakes. Supervision and autonomy need to be balanced. Give people the opportunity to fail. Then help them fix mistakes, and teach them to learn from them.
- A well-mentored person will outgrow the job. The leaders you nurture will want to be leaders themselves. When the time comes, help them find another organization to lead or step aside.