

## 8 Tips on Volunteer Retention

Volunteers stay in an organization when they form psychological contracts with the organization. This happens in large measure if the person believes they are heard and changes happen. There are strategies to enhance the "feedback" environment in your volunteer program.

**Here are some tips.**

**Tip # 1: Practice active listening.**

This skill can be developed and requires quieting your mind and being able to paraphrase what the other person said before you respond. Ask the person to explain more fully, never dismiss ideas or comments out of hand.

**Tip # 2: Get away from the desk.**

Good managers of volunteer programs are rarely at a desk. They are out and about visiting with volunteers at the site. They are talking with staff about ways to improve the program and seeking new ways volunteers can be engaged. A good feedback environment is all about availability.

**Tip # 3: Know the informal leaders.**

Seek these folks out for their opinions and concerns. They will give you a well-rounded picture of what is happening in the program.

**Tip # 4: Welcome the bad news.**

Candor from people contributes to a healthy "feedback" environment. If you only listen to those who think the way you do, you run the risk of missing problems and it drives those problems underground. You cannot solve problems you do not know about. And remember to reward the person who tells you the truth, as painful as that might be.

**Tip # 5: Set a positive example for receiving criticism.**

Volunteer programs are a reflection of the manager of volunteers. That individual sets the standards for attitude and behavior. Show by example that you can receive criticism and will help the critic turn their idea into a solution. Soon everyone will be doing it the same way.

**Tip # 6: Never argue with a hostile or emotional person.**

Defer the discussion to later when the person is calm and able to discuss the situation in ways that can lead to solutions.

**Tip # 7: Do not reward the snide.**

Petty comments and cheap shots do not help build good communication or solve problems. Acknowledge the statement, but move on to the positive. Those inclined to be snide soon learn that their ideas get through much more readily when they are direct in communication, not sarcastic or petty.

**Tip # 8: Do reward the achievers.**

Acknowledge those that contribute, those that put in the long hours, do the petty as well as the important tasks. Volunteers thrive on recognition of their contributions. A simple thank you is a powerful tool when working with volunteers. Small thank you tokens are

strongly appreciated. A post event thank you note can help insure that the volunteer is ready to do it again and again.