

# **The Children's Ministry Guide To Recruiting & Managing Volunteers**

A Collection of Articles From The KidMin360 Blog • Written by Greg Baird



## Jesus' Solution To Your KidMin Recruiting Challenges

A lack of workers is nothing new. It was a challenge even in Jesus' day. It says this in Matthew 9:36:

*"When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."*



Sound like your children's ministry? The "crowds" for you might be the kids & parents in your ministry, "like sheep without a shepherd" because of the lack of help.

But there's hope. Jesus offered an answer – one which too often is ignored in favor of bulletin announcements, high-tech videos or plain old begging. Here's what He said:

*He said to his disciples, "The harvest is great, but the workers are few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields."*

There's nothing wrong with using practical "techniques" of recruiting (begging does NOT fall into that category). However, Jesus gave us the first and primary solution – ***"pray to the Lord"***.

Is prayer your "first option" when you need workers? It should be, for you and your team.

A great reminder comes from a quote that we've shared before here on the blog, and it goes like this:

*Prayer does not equip us for greater works – prayer is the greater work."* Oswald Chambers, My Utmost For His Highest

Everything about our ministry ought to flow from our relationship with God because it is God doing the work, not us. Recruiting included.



## 5 Keys To Effective Recruiting

1. **Know your needs based on your mission.** I can't tell you how many times I've been working with a leader who couldn't tell me, on the spot, exactly what their needs are. Based on what you are trying to accomplish, the program you're developing, etc., define what the roles are.

Creates ministry descriptions. Know how people will work together. Know what you need to fit the position you have.



2. **Create multiple positions to meet everyone's time, talent & preferences.** Somewhat opposite to #1, I will find a place for everyone who wants to serve. If they don't exactly fit a need, that's OK...I will create a role for them. Often times I've found that, once someone gets involved, they fall into one of the more defined roles I have. But if they don't at the beginning, that's not going to stop me from getting them on the team.
3. **"Build it and they will come!"** What is "it"? VISION! People follow vision, so while defining roles and understanding your needs is critical, you don't lead with that. **Lead with vision**, which means you need to have one, a compelling one, and you need to be able to clearly articulate it quickly. Can you? This is so important, in fact, that I actually advise leaders not to recruit to a big need, but rather invite others to a great vision.
4. **Build relationships first.** I use this little acronym to help me remember that the process is first about relationships, then about recruiting:
  - *R*elish the opportunity to lead
  - *E*stablish relationships for the sake of relationships, not recruiting
  - *L*earn about people – personalities, learning styles, etc. – & apply it to building relationships
  - *A*cept individuals as individuals, don't force them into a box
  - *T*alk first about vision, not position
  - *E*nlist people because you know them well enough to know they're heart

**Ask!!** The #1 barrier to recruiting is the failure to ask. Folks, if you want to get people on your team you've got to ask them to be on your team.

## 3 Questions To Ask About Your Recruiting Strategy

### Are we inviting to vision or to need?

When we define and recruit to a compelling vision, we attract people who want to be part of that vision. When we recruit simply to a need, we tend to get people who feel obligated to be there.

Which group would you rather have?

*Begging for volunteers is never an option!*

### Are we inviting or begging?

Ministry happens best through relationships. Recruiting happens best through relationships. When we have a relationship, we tend to share what's important to us, which leads to inviting others to join us. Sensing our enthusiasm, and through the trust built through our relationship, others are more likely to accept our invitation.



When someone joins our team because of our plea for help (begging), we abdicate much of our ability to require high standards, focus on the vision and maintain accountability. In essence, we abdicate much of our ability to lead that person effectively.

### Are we supporting or abandoning?

Do you know the single best method of recruiting, aside from praying? It's keeping the volunteers you already have. Too often I see children's ministry leaders recruit great volunteers, only to abandon them in their ministry.

Support the ones you have – encourage them, pray for them, resource them – and you're recruiting challenges will diminish significantly.

## 5 Ways To Maximize Your Best Recruiting Method

There are lots of ways to “recruit” new volunteers. But the absolute best recruiting method any of us has is this: *retain the volunteers you currently have*. And yet, so often we fail to do the things that will help us retain quality volunteers. We’ve all heard the jokes about volunteers disappearing down the black hole of children’s ministry, never to be seen again.



Why do we allow that to happen? Why do we allow volunteers to get away? I’m sure there are a number of reasons we could talk about, but here are 5 ways NOT to allow that to happen:

### **1. Keep sharing the clear and compelling vision.**

Just because they got excited about the vision when they came into the ministry doesn’t mean they will remain excited about it. Leaders need to keep the vision before the people on a regular basis – both through corporate and private communications.

### **2. Provide on-going equipping.**

We need to have systems in place that regularly check up and equip volunteers, ensuring they are aligned with the values of our ministry and not “making it up as they go.” Knowledge and understanding leads to confidence while lack of knowledge and understanding leads to insecurity...which will quickly lead to their departure.

### **3. Create ownership.**

Everyone wants to be part of something important. And it’s always better to be “part owner” than just a “team member”, right? So letting people have input, listening and valuing their opinions, implementing their ideas sometimes, etc., can all be used to help create ownership with your team. When you own something, it’s a lot harder to walk away from it.

### **4. Encourage and appreciate individuals.**

We’ve got to make it a practice to say thank you. The group events to say thanks are great, and the little trinkets on Valentine’s Day or Christmas or Easter are all great (keep doing that!). But in reality, a private conversation in the hallway, where you individually and specifically thank them for what they are doing, will probably go a lot further toward helping them feel good about everything they are voluntarily investing.

### **5. Give them greater responsibility.**

Almost all of your volunteers are capable of more than they were originally recruited for. And this should certainly be true because you are equipping and developing their leadership capacity. But if we don’t reward that ability and growth, we risk losing them to someone who will.

## 19 Ways To Improve Your Ministry Recruiting

1. **Start** making it more about vision – a big, compelling, well-defined, life-changing vision.
2. **Stop** making it about need – people won't buy-in to or commit long-term to great need.
3. **Start** identifying new places to find leaders. Have you recruited youth? College age? Seniors? What new group can you share your vision with?
4. **Stop** doing it alone. Equip other leaders (your core leaders, staff, other church staff, etc.) to recruit with you.
5. **Start** asking! It's one thing to make the need known...it's another to actually "make the ask".
6. **Stop** pigeon-holing people – have multiple opportunities available for the people you speak with.
7. **Start** being clear about available opportunities – specific functions, commitment time, etc.
8. **Stop** losing volunteers by limiting their freedom to be creative and bringing their own ideas to what they do.
9. **Start** creating systems to make volunteer assimilation easy, not difficult.
10. **Stop** relying on cattle calls or bulletin invitations.
11. **Start** asking personally.
12. **Stop** making excuses that no one is interested in hearing.
13. **Start** expressing appreciation to volunteers (personally, individually & corporately).
14. **Stop** abandoning volunteers once they begin serving.
15. **Start** being flexible with scheduling, training, subbing, etc.
16. **Stop** talking about all the challenges you face in your ministry.
17. **Start** telling stories about great things happening in the lives children, parents & volunteers.
18. **Stop** doing program beyond your capacity to build teams to meet the need.
19. **Start** doing what Jesus told us to do in Luke 10:2 ~



*"These were his instructions to them: "The harvest is great, but the workers are few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields."*



## 7 Random Tips RE: Recruiting

Every children's ministry leader know the "R" word, right?

RECRUITING! It's the greatest challenge in what we do. Unfortunately, many of us do it wrong. We beg instead of invite. Assign instead of place. Worst of all, we often hope instead of pray.

And we often drop the ball in some pretty significant areas. Here are a few ideas to help *us not* drop the ball:

1. **RE:late . . . don't just recruit.** Ministry happens best through relationships. To connect with someone for the sole purpose of recruiting somewhat cheapens the ministry aspect. So connect for the purpose of relationships, not just recruiting. When we do this, we not only open the door for the person to serve, but we also open the door for the person to be ministered to, for friendship, for leadership development and so much more.
2. **RE:think mass appeals.** The "stickiness" of mass appeal (think big push in the main service) is typically minimal. By that I mean that it's relatively easy to get a lot of people to fill out a card, but the follow through is usually not very good. Why? Perhaps it goes back to #1. I would rather my leaders spend time building relationships than creating a mass appeal campaign.
3. **RE:spond to questions.** One of the big reasons people don't serve is a false understanding of what is being required. They are intimidated by what they think they will be asked to do. Encouraging and responding to questions they might have is essential to clarifying expectations and having them make an informed decision about committing.

4. **RE:turn communication appropriately.** I know a family that offered to serve as a family (that's two adults and two youth!) at the Christmas services of their church. They filled out a form specifically asking for volunteers at Christmas...and got no response. They offered again at Easter – and got an email 4 days before Easter. Do you think they served at either service? No. And they probably won't offer again. If there is any indication a person is willing to serve, appropriate follow-up communication (via phone or in person, if possible) IS your priority.
5. **RE:design roles to meet gifts and abilities.** Most of us have “cookie cutter” ministry descriptions. These are great, but rarely do they match a person's gifts and abilities perfectly. I want a person serving in a role that maximizes their strengths. Their service will be more effective and I am more likely to keep them! So flex a little and be willing to redefine roles. (BTW...this means you have to have a method for finding out gifts and abilities in the screening process).
6. **RE:bel against “guilting” a person into serving or staying.** I trust that a person is walking with the Lord, and if they conclude that they are not sensing God's leading them to serve in children's ministry, or to stay in children's ministry, then heaven forbid I try and make them feel guilty in order to get them in or keep them. I will ask questions to find out why they won't commit or continue – often it's because of a misperception or an issue that can be solved – but I will never attempt to make them feel guilty.
7. **RE:move problem leaders.** Yes, it's OK to “fire” a volunteer! That's a separate post with much involved and obviously has to be done lovingly and appropriately. However, I include it here because it bothers me, as I work with churches around the country, to continually hear leaders whine about volunteers who are resistant to change, or gossips, or actively engaged in undermining the vision that's been adopted, or in some other way engaging in creating problems. If you have been given responsibility for Children's Ministry, then it is as much your responsibility to weed out problems as it is to bring in the harvest.
- **BONUS TIP - RE:enlist leaders.** The best method of recruiting is retaining the leaders you have. Pro-actively creating methods for equipping, solving problems, communicating effectively and re-enlisting volunteers is vital.

Let's be honest, “recruiting” is the big challenge in Children's Ministry, right? Everyone deals with it, and most of us struggle. Here are a few ideas that, believe it or not, I actually often see missing in the leaders' recruiting approach.

## 11 Ways To Retain Volunteers

If you've been leading in Children's Ministry for very long, you've probably figured out that one of your best ways to build your volunteer team is to keep the ones you've already got! Retaining volunteers is critical to continued health and growth in your ministry.

But sometimes it seems like we've got a revolving door with our volunteers, with many coming and going all the time. How do we stop that? In some cases, it's just going to happen, but in most cases, volunteers leave because there's some dissatisfaction – or lack of satisfaction, at best – with their involvement. Here are some ways we can to offset that and keep the volunteers we have:

**1. Make it matter.** We all are short on time. When we give our time, we want it to matter. The best way to do this with your volunteers is to focus on vision. Recruit them to vision. Talk vision constantly. Guide them toward fulfilling the vision of your ministry.

*“We've got to invite leaders to a big vision, not recruit them to a big need.”*

**2. Care about them.** This seems obvious, right? What I've experienced and observed, though, is that sometimes we care more about the role they play in our ministry than we care about them as individuals. We need to make sure we know them and care about them as individuals first.

**3. Create community.** Creating community can be a big part of caring for our volunteers. As we make sure they are connected, not only to us, but also to others within our ministry, we begin to create unique community with and for them. Creating shared experiences away from the church can play a huge part in creating community with our team. And when someone has shared experiences and feels community with a group of people, they are far less likely to leave.



**4. Give them breaks.** Everyone needs a break now and then. My approach to this is two-fold. First, design your volunteer commitments with a built in break. This might be having them take the summer off, or taking the 5th weekend off when a month has 5 weeks, but you can easily build breaks in to the commitment. Second, I strongly communicate flexibility. I create a system to managing times when volunteers need to be gone, and I communicate that I understand this is OK – life happens!

**5. Equip them.** There is really no better way to lose a volunteer than to place them in a role that they don't know how to do and leave them to figure it out. Design an equipping program that offers basic training/orientation and on-going training through various avenues (in person, online, email, etc.).

**6. Solve problems for them.** One of the best and quickest ways to gain influence (leadership) is to solve problems. It's also one of the best ways retain volunteers. You don't have to be the one who actually solves the problems, just be the one that makes sure the problem gets solved for your volunteers.

**7. Resource them.** One of my pet peeves is ministries that expect volunteers to a) create their own curriculum; b) pay for any supplies they need to do what we ask them to do, and/or c) not offer to reimburse them when they want to do something extra for their kids (within predefined guidelines). If a volunteer refuses reimbursement or insists on purchasing supplies, then great. But don't make buying stuff necessary to serving in your ministry – some people simply can't afford it and it won't be long before they walk.

**8. Appreciate them.** It's amazing how far a simple thank you will go! A simple note of appreciation can do wonders. A pat on the back in the hallway. A shout out in front of their team. A public recognition of over-and-above service. Appreciation goes a long, long way to retaining your team.

**9. Tell them stories.** About the parents who told you how much their child likes this volunteers class. About the child who never liked coming to church until they got into that volunteers class. About the teenager who serves alongside them and seems to really be engaging in their faith now. You get the idea – we love to hear how we are making a difference in people's lives. Listen for stories, have a method for collecting them, and be intentional about telling your volunteers what you are hearing. You might even ask parents to share their stories with their child's leaders.

**10. Invest in their personal growth.** One of our great privileges as children's ministry leaders is investing in the personal and spiritual growth of our team. They are there not just to serve, but to grow. When we take time to individually and collectively invest in their lives to help them grow, they appreciate it.

**11. Increase their responsibility.** Many times (but not all), volunteers need new challenges, especially those who are more inclined to be leaders. When leaders continue to do the same thing (especially if we've brought them in on a pretty basic level), they can get bored. Many people need new and greater challenges, so make sure you identify the ones who are stepping up as leaders and find ways to give them new and great responsibilities in your ministry.

## 5 Responsibilities Leaders Have Toward Volunteers

Leading in children's or family ministry is hard. It's complex & challenging. It's time consuming.

Leading volunteers is, perhaps, the most difficult form of leadership. Too often, in my own experience and in working with churches across the country, I see trying to lead their ministry without leading their volunteers. That might sound counter-intuitive, but it's true. Once the volunteer is in place, we seem too often to simply forget about them until there is a crisis.

That's a great way to lose volunteers. And it's simply not right.

I believe that, as leaders, our responsibilities for volunteers goes beyond simply enlisting them and putting them in to ministry. Our responsibility is to walk with them in the journey of faith and service.

### 5 Responsibilities Leaders Have Toward Volunteers:

#### 1. Know them personally.

*"Ministry happens best in the context of relationships."* Always has, always will. Whether this is parent to child, volunteer to child, staff to parent, or staff to volunteer, *ministry always works best in the context of relationship.*

Getting to know your volunteers is critical to successful ministry, and enables all of the following responsibilities to a far greater extent.

#### 2. Listen to them often.

Besides being the best way to get to know them, listening also is the first step in sharing the vision (see the next responsibility). And do you know that I've had more great ideas about my ministry from volunteers than anywhere else? These are the people in the trenches, seeing the reality of what's going on. They often have the best perspective of what will work and what won't, what is needed and what isn't.

#### 3. Align them with vision.

Vision is (or should be) what you and your ministry is all about. That vision must be aligned with the overall vision of the church, and then successfully transferred to your volunteers. If they are not actively engaged with the defined vision, then more than likely they are doing little more than (at best) teaching some great ideas and (at worst) simply babysitting.

#### **4. Equip them for serving.**

This is your primary responsibility as a church leader – equip people to do the work of ministry. (Ephesians 4:12)

#### **5. Engage them spiritually.**

This, of all the things listed here, is the area where I believe we fail the most. Leading in children's ministry in any capacity is a sacred responsibility. Yet how many of

us follow up on the spiritual lives of our volunteers? How often do we ask what they are learning, or how they are growing, or what they are struggling with?

This does not require personal discipleship of volunteers (although that would be great with some), but rather simply creating systems, having conversations, and engaging them in their spiritual journey. Not only is it our responsibility for the purpose of protecting the ministry we are called to lead, but it's our responsibility because they are as much a part of "our ministry" as the families we serve.

#### **Ideas for Fulfilling Responsibilities**

- Decide that these are priorities.
- Align your work habits with these responsibilities. This means you probably need to delegate things that others can do so you can focus on what only you can do (like these responsibilities).
- Create systems (it's ok...even if you think having a system "de-personalizes" some of this, it's better than not doing it at all.
- Equip other key leaders (whether staff or volunteers) to carry the load of these responsibilities so that they become part of your ministry culture.



## How To Manage Unhappy Volunteers

If you've been leading in Children's Ministry for more than a little while then you've been there – face to face with an unhappy volunteer. It's part of leading and it's inevitable.

In some case, the volunteer has every reason to be upset. Other times, you walk away shaking your head and the petty things people complain about. Either way, you have to deal with this volunteer. You do so (hopefully!) because of the love you have for them, but also because whether their complaint is valid or not, it can become a virus infecting other volunteers, parents and even the kids of your ministry.

So how do you manage unhappy volunteers?  
Here's a few ideas:

**1. Love them** – no matter what, receive them with love. You do not have to agree with them or concede to demands for change, but you do need to love them.

**2. Listen to them.** This may be what they are really seeking – just to be heard! But they may also have a very valid complaint (whether they are presenting it to you appropriately or not). So listen to what they are saying without beginning to formulate your answer or defense.

**3. Liberate them.** As the leader, it is part of my responsibility to be a problem-solver (in fact, that's one of the best ways to establish my leadership). So solve the problem...liberate them from their concerns. There are many ways to do this, including:

- **Removing the problem.** If their complaint is valid, provide a solution. This may mean getting more supplies or better curriculum. It may mean finding more volunteers or providing better training. It may mean creating a better check in system or addressing another problem volunteer. Solve the problem.
- **Reassigning the volunteer.** Often times an unhappy volunteer (especially a chronically unhappy volunteer) is the result of simply being in the wrong place or assigned the wrong responsibilities. Consider this and offer solutions that may include finding a better fit for the volunteer (one that matches their talents, gifts and abilities better).



- **Relieving them of their duties.** This is a last resort, but sometimes it is necessary. If a solution can't be found for the the unhappy volunteer's complaint, or if they are consistently negative in their attitude, then sometimes removing them (gracefully and lovingly, hopefully to a better ministry fit in another department) might be the best option.

**4. Learn from them.** Leaders learn from others. As frustrating as unhappy volunteers might be, I can learn from them. Assume that there is a better way to do things to avoid the problem in the future. What would that look like? How can I think differently about what they are complaining about? How can other key leaders be trained better as a result of the problem I am dealing with now? Learn all you can from every situation...you will use the knowledge sometime in the future – guaranteed!

**5. Love them.** Yes, this is on the list a second time. You are the leader. Regardless of the problem or how it is presented to you, it is your responsibility to engage them in a loving manner. It does not mean you have to be soft, or cannot be firm, but you must lead them appropriately, and that means that you love them...period.

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## Addition By Subtraction

Do you ever lose people from your ministry? Of course you do! It's a natural and common occurrence. Sometimes it's people we don't mind losing (be honest!) and sometimes we cringe when we learn of their departure.

Some people can be more of a bane than a blessing:

- Whiners and complainers
- Those who refuse to abide by basic guidelines
- Bitter and unhappy people
- Renegades pursuing their own agenda instead of sharing a united vision

You know who I'm talking about...you've got some names in mind right now.

Then there are some people who seem like the backbone of our ministry:

- Always encouraging
- Question things positively and appropriately
- Caring and supportive of those around them
- Initiators of things that expand our vision

Again, names are popping into your mind, aren't they?

It happens. But I've learned that if my ministry is aligned properly, and as a whole I and my team are seeking after God's will, then more often than not people leaving actually ends up being "addition by subtraction."

Here are a few things I've learned about people leaving my ministry:

### **1) I never try and talk someone out of leaving...ever.**

This can be hard when people you love and appreciate decide it's time to move on. I will have a conversation about the "why's" and, if there's an issue I can address will try and do so. However, if someone comes to me and says they feel God is leading them away, who am I to question? I have to trust that their relationship with God is such that they are correctly sensing His leading. If this is the case, I will thank and honor them, and then do everything I can to help them get reestablished in a new area of ministry.

I may cringe inwardly at the gap that is left in my ministry, but time after time I've seen God fill that gap in ways I could never imagine.

*Addition by subtraction.*



**2) Regardless of the stature of the person or the size of the position they fill, losing a negative, bitter or divisive volunteer (or staff!) is never a bad thing.**

Sometimes we change direction in our ministries and long-time volunteers can't seem to make the change. Sometimes people become bitter (or \_\_\_\_\_ – fill in the blank) because of life circumstances having nothing to do with ministry. Sometimes we offend individuals with our leadership style or through other issues.

It's always my responsibility as a leader to resolve issues that I can resolve, but when these people can't be satisfied, they tend to become very disruptive. Seeing them leave might leave a "huge" gap, but they take their bitterness, anger, or disruptive attitudes with them.

*Addition by subtraction.*

**3) As I develop leaders over a period of time, my goal should be to release them into greater ministry opportunity. Sometimes that means moving them into areas other than "my" area.**

Our job as leaders is to equip people to do the work of ministry *and* to develop leaders. Leaders naturally are capable (and desiring) of more as they grow. If I've got leaders who are bumping up against their leadership capacity lid, it's my job to find new opportunities for them to fulfill their leadership capabilities.

Sometimes that means sending them into other areas of the church, or moving them into a greater role within children's ministry – leaving a big gap where they currently serve. Trust God to fill that gap.

*Addition by subtraction.*

Losing leaders doesn't have to be a bad thing. If your heart is right and your ministry is "right" in God's eyes, then expect Him to refine and shape your ministry for greater good. Often times that means moving people on that are hurting or holding back your ministry, though sometimes we don't understand it at the time. Sometimes that means moving people on for the greater good of the Kingdom though it might seem to be a step back for our ministry. But if He's got something great in mind for the ministry He's moving them into, then chances are good He's got something great in mind for the ministry He's moving them from (yours!)

What I've learned is that addition by subtraction can be a very good equation for the health of my ministry.

## 7 Things We Need To Understand About Training Volunteers

As church leaders, one of our primary roles is to “equip volunteers to do the work of ministry” (Ephesians 4:12). In fact, I would argue that this is our job description! To do this, however, it’s important that we understand some key elements of the training & equipping process. Here are a few that come to mind:



### **1. Volunteers are not as passionate about ministry as we are.**

And that’s ok! We live and breath ministry. It’s our job that we focus on all week long. In some sense, weekend services are “game day” for us.

Not so much for our volunteers. They work just as hard, are consumed just as much and invest as passionately all week long – in something else.

So being trained for children’s ministry is secondary to them. And that’s ok.

### **2. Volunteers are as busy as we are.**

I’ve had the “it’s all about me” syndrome when it comes to having a busy schedule, and many ministry leaders I come across seem to have the same issue. We think we’re busier than anyone else. But we’re not. We might be busy, but so is everyone else. And – after 25 years in ministry – I can easily conclude that people are more busy than ever. And that’s not just with items on their calendar, but also things that consume their brain. Social and other forms of media take a mind-boggling amount of time to keep up with, and many people are completely consumed by them, making them feel that much more “busy”.

### **3. Volunteers will not accept training in the same way.**

Not everyone will attend your annual training event. Not everyone will read the newsletter you send out. Not everyone will “like” your Children’s Ministry Facebook page. Not everyone will want to sit down at coffee with you and their team to chat about the class.

We’re all different and accept information differently. That’s why we need to have many different avenues to deliver training.

### **4. Volunteers will not participate in training the same way.**

Confession: when I’m in a workshop and the trainer wants my table to play a silly game...I HATE it! I’m an introvert. I’ve learned to dive in and act the part, but I dread every second and can’t wait to sit back down and start filling in the blanks again. But I know that active learning is

the best way to learn for most people. So I appreciate it when a trainer offer a variety of teaching methods within the same session – and that’s what we do in **our own training** here at KidMin360.

When we’re doing training, our expectations of how people respond have to be realistic. That’s yet another reason why our ministries ought to be built on relationships. When we really know people, the way they respond won’t be as much of a surprise and, in fact, we’ll understand that maybe we are getting through even though they slipped out the back for that game portion of our training class.

### **5. Volunteers need a reason to engage with training.**

Busy people who aren’t living and breathing ministry have a lot of other options for their Saturday morning. If they give up time to come to a training event and aren’t engaged . . . well, good luck getting them to come to another one. Even though I don’t like the interactive learning part as much as others might, I know it’s important and I dislike even more someone who is up there droning on in a boring and unengaging manner. We’ve got to find what works with our team when it comes to engaging them appropriately with the content we need them to learn.

### **6. Volunteers like food and free stuff.**

I hesitated to add this to the list because, well, it kind of makes our volunteers seem shallow – but it’s true! Just like you and me, volunteers like to be fed and they like to be given stuff. The conclusion I’ve come to, however, is that it’s not really about the food. And it’s not really about the free stuff. It’s about our efforts to offer them something they enjoy and like. Plain and simple, people like to be pampered and appreciate it when someone in our role does that for them.

### **7. Volunteers want to be trained.**

In spite of all the challenges to actually getting them trained, I’ve learned that the vast majority actually do want to be trained! No one wants to fail, and if they are giving their time and effort to ministry, they do want to do it right – and they need to be trained in order for that to happen. If this is true, then make your training:

- Easy to access (offer it through multiple avenues)
- To the point – no single training should take long to complete
- Immediately applicable (go light on theory and heavy on practical application)
- Engaging – enjoyable to participate in
- Beneficial – feed them, give them gifts and offer practical tools to use this week in their ministry

## I Quit!

Mary walked up to me and said the most terrifying words a Children's Pastor can hear:

***I quit!"***

Being in my first ministry position, I had no idea what to say or do. I'm pretty sure I mumbled something like...

***OK...well good luck in the future."***

*What? Really, Greg? That's the best response I could come up with?*



I cringe as I think about that first experience! But we've all had it happen. Volunteers quit all the time.

Why is that? There's lot's of reasons, and I've found they generally fall in to 3 categories: **Legitimate, Lame & Leadership.**

***Legitimate reasons*** - these are life-circumstances that just happen, such as:

- moving out of the area
- illness (either there's or someone close)
- feeling called to serve in another area of the church

There are many very legitimate reasons for ending a volunteer commitment. I debrief as much as possible to be certain of why they are moving on, but if their reason is legitimate I don't try and talk them out of quitting. I trust them to know what's best for themselves, their family and their faith.

***Lame reasons*** – don't even get me started...but we all have heard some pretty ridiculous reasons for quitting, including:

- I can't get here 10 minutes earlier to be ready for the kids
- Parents never pick their kids up soon enough for me to get into service at the beginning
- It's too loud in Kids Church during the worship time
- I don't think Sunday School should be a place of laughter...where's the respect for God's house?

Yes, I've heard all of these and more, as I'm sure you have. After I force my eyes not to roll, I smile and gently try and cast a vision for ministry that leads these precious people to take their first step toward a real serving commitment. Sometimes it requires adjusting their commitment level, but lame excuses usually tell me that these volunteers don't "get it", and that's an issue that falls to me to fix. In some cases, it means that they volunteered out of obligation, guilt,

ignorance or some other reason that was not a good reason to volunteer. In these cases, if there really isn't a heart to serve, it's better to let them go.

**Leadership reasons** – I have found that most of the reasons that volunteers quit are because of my & my core leadership team's **lack of leadership**. This lack of leadership, resulting to a desire to quit, might show itself through:

- not continuing to cast a compelling vision
- not allowing the volunteer to have a voice in the ministry
- not communicating expectations (this might result in the volunteer being asked to do too much or too little, either of which leads to frustration)
- not equipping the volunteer to do the ministry required
- not solving problems in the area that the volunteer is serving (lack of resources, child problems, conflict among volunteers, etc.)
- not showing appreciation for what the volunteer contributes
- not keeping promises to the volunteer ("Hang in there, we'll have more volunteers within 2 weeks!" or "I know we said you would serve 1 year and it's been 14 months...but we really, *really* need you to stay! *Pleeeeeease!!!*" )
- not being available (or making another leader available) for the volunteer
- not keeping the ministry organized

These all have to do with my lack of leadership. When a volunteer quits because of one of these reasons, they usually don't articulate it as such. So, especially if it's a volunteer that has served for awhile, I ask questions. I know that most people will stay if their needs are met (assuming they volunteered for the right reasons). So I try and understand what needs are not being met. I will articulate my understanding of the problem (which they usually end up agreeing with) and I will ask them to stay as we fix the issue. Sometimes I will ask them to help me fix the issue (for example, if there's a lack of organization somewhere, I might ask them to help keep that area organized).

Be thankful when these leadership issues come to light. It's an opportunity to grow, to establish leadership, to vision cast...and to fix problems that are probably issues with more than one volunteer! And fixing the leadership problem is exactly what you need to do. It's also one of the best ways to keep your volunteers, because if we approach it this way, we will probably hear less people say those dreaded words...

***I quit!***

## 7 Ways To Help Volunteers Succeed

Children's Ministries depend on volunteers. That's the way it's supposed to be – the body of Christ carrying out the work of the ministry. As leaders in the church, it's our job to help them succeed. Here are 7 ways we can do that in children's ministry:



**1. Start by inviting them to a clear & compelling vision, not by recruiting them to a big need.**

**2. Take time to find a great fit for them,** considering their spiritual gifts, experience, abilities & passions.

**3. Provide orientation** (like where things are and what to do if something goes wrong) **and equipping** (like how to use the curriculum) **before they start.**

**4. Proactively connect them to other leaders in your ministry** (because, remember, ministry always happens best in the context of relationship!).

**5. Communicate well.** Keep them informed and let them know what's going on. A great way to lose volunteers quickly is to keep them in the dark or to make changes and not tell them. Personal, regular, systematic communication is essential. And remember – ensuring they get the message is *my responsibility* as much as theirs.

**6. Follow up regularly.** Are they feeling comfortable where they serve? Are they connecting well with their team? With the kids? Do they have everything they need? What are some of their ideas to make things better? You get the idea.

**7. Appreciate & care for them personally.** Make sure they're getting to worship service. Thank them with a personal note. Praise them in front of the kids or their spouse. Take them to coffee and see how they're doing personally & spiritually

Practice these 7 things and I promise, your volunteers will be far more likely to succeed!

