

Volunteer Recognition

PTG chapters depend on volunteers to get things done. Because people have many reasons for giving their time and energy to an organization, it is important to find out why they are involved. This will also help you thank them in appropriate ways. Every chapter has members that fall into one of the categories listed below. This variety is a strength and a challenge for chapter leaders.

Four Reasons Why People Work

1. Praise

These volunteers enjoy recognition for their talents and accomplishments. They like being thanked, given gifts, singled out for achievements. They probably find situations where there is little, no or exclusively negative feedback very frustrating. They enjoy a volunteer program where the results of their effort are readily seen by others, especially a supervisor or the volunteer coordinator, and where some sort of yearly recognition event occurs. They might work best in a volunteer position where talents already possessed can be used.

2. Affiliation

These volunteers like being part of an organization, a club, or a team. They enjoy opportunities to get together with others with similar beliefs, backgrounds and goals, and being associated with a well-known cause or group. They probably would not find working alone or for an obscure organization very satisfying. An affiliation-motivated volunteer works best in a volunteer position where social opportunities are part of the program, where they work on group projects, represent the organization to the public, or wear a badge, uniform, or even a t-shirt with the organization's logo.

3. Accomplishment

Accomplishment-motivated people enjoy seeing concrete evidence of their work; piles of finished paperwork, names checked off on a list, dozens of cookies baked, perhaps bags filled with groceries at a food bank. It's probably not a good idea to put these volunteers to work on a project where abstract goals are pursued or where achievements are very hard-won. Look for volunteer positions for them where they can either complete practical, tangible projects, or at least receive some sort of certificate of completion of stages of work.

4. Influence

These volunteers like persuading people to see or do things their way. Even if one doesn't always act as an official leader, he or she will enjoy showing people a better, easier way of accomplishing an objective. They probably don't want to be in a very insignificant position or to be the newcomer in an already close-knit or routine-bound group. Look for positions for these volunteers where they will help make decision (such as a board position), teach or train people, help with rehabilitation or tutoring, or campaign or raise money for a person, cause or organization.

(excerpted from "Four Typical Basic Motivators of Volunteers" by Nan Hawthorne from Volunteer Management Review, 12/19/01)

Thanking Volunteers

The best way to thank volunteers is to give them meaningful work and treat them like they have a real role in your chapter's success. Here are some other ideas--some simple, some not--for ways to recognize and thank chapter volunteers and leaders for their work.

- Thank you notes. They take just a little time, but mean a lot. A postcard with a handwritten note is inexpensive and quick. E-mail is even easier. Make it a habit after every meeting to thank those who made it a success.
- Unique wall certificates. Make them humorous and relate them to the project done by the volunteer.
- Publish the names and accomplishments of your volunteers in your newsletter and on your website.
- Social events where your special volunteers are the guests of honor.
- Give successful volunteers greater responsibility.
- Give less successful volunteers encouragement and the information and training needed to be successful on their next project.
- Institute a chapter volunteer recognition award and give it annually to an outstanding volunteer. Name the award after someone who has had a long history of chapter service.
- Give praise and recognition frequently, consistently, and publicly.