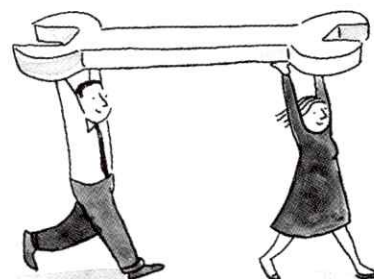


Workshop

Youth Appeal

How to Get and Keep Young People on Your Team



Look around your community and you may find a previously untapped source of ideas, inspiration and hard work. It's a potential resource that all communities share: the younger generation.

Whether or not you tap into it depends on your insight, boldness and hope in the future. Our youthful guest editors share their insights and experiences in the field. They offer insider tips on recruiting, attitudes, recognition and understanding—all from the point of view of youth. Learn from them and plug your community in to this amazing power source. ■

Workshop, a standing feature in *Volunteer Leadership*, offers how-to tips and valuable insights on selected topics. If you'd like to be a guest editor or want to suggest topics for future coverage, write to Volunteer Leadership Workshop, The Points of Light Foundation, 1737 H Street NW, Washington, DC 20006; telephone: 202-223-9186, extension 146; e-mail: janemch@aol.com

Change Your Attitude about Youth Volunteers

By Mark Quinones

There are some misconceptions that are so imbedded in our minds that we carry them around like the ugly luggage we received as a gift and never had the courage to get rid of. Now we are having conversations on topics that have been plaguing our nation such as racism and sexism and have the forums to move toward progressive social change. Yet, in the shuffle of dealing with our many "isms," there are some so camouflaged, so blanketed in our everyday interactions, we do not even note that they exist. One of these is youth oppression—the systematic mistreatment of young people because of their age. It is only recently that we as a population have begun to address the facets of youth oppression and how it manifests itself in our lives.

Negative attitudes and misconceptions about the world young people live in can lead to horrid experiences when youth and adults attempt to work in partnerships. Situations in which young people are volunteers are extremely delicate in nature for a number of reasons. Volunteers are not paid staff. For most, the reward of volunteering is the experience of doing something worthwhile. As an adult in this scenario, what can one do to ensure the young volunteer has as fulfilling an experience as an all-expenses paid trip to the Caribbean or something close enough to it?

■ First, we must recognize that we all have been hurt or stifled in some way when we were young, whether we realize it or not. We live

with a family, go to school, work, and as young people, are constantly placed in situations where adults have power over us, both legally and implicitly. Age-based laws and the manner in which adults wield power over young people instill a power dynamic in which youth's ideas, opinions and experiences are not valid unless an adult allows them to be. With this invalidation comes the ingrained concept that what a young person thinks and does is not important or responsible.

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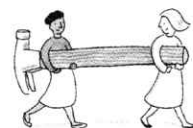
This attitude, which many of us learned when we were young, is then incorporated in subtle ways into our lives as adults. This misconception about young people can prove detrimental to the working environment adults and young people share.

■ Second, we must make a commitment to work with young people as partners. We must shy away from trying to "help" or "mentor" a young person. In general, helping and mentoring is not a bad thing. But in the context of working with a young volunteer, wanting to help or mentor, especially unasked, caters to the

concept that young people cannot work without adult guidance or need to be developed by an adult presence. It also makes the learning experience one way, in which the adult always provides for the young person and eliminates the opportunity for knowledge reciprocity and acknowledgment of the prior skills a young person may bring. There is no need to validate an adult's experience by invalidating a young person's. Before that young person walks through the door ready to work with you, you must be willing to collaborate rather than dictate.

■ Lastly, we must celebrate the successes of a young person. This does not mean to condescend to the level of "Oh, this is good work for someone of your age." Such misconceptions shrouded by compliments are a slow-working social poison. Celebrate success in a manner you would appreciate, a manner which is respectful and acknowledges that regardless of age, everyone is still engaged in the growing process.

We did not ask for these negative stereotypes that inhabit our society. Many of us are unaware of the ways we incorporate the stereotypes into daily life. Now that we are in a better position to address and perhaps conquer them, we can model our interactions with youth to mirror an ideal, based on respect and trust. This ideal should reverberate in our minds when a young person walks through the door to volunteer. ■



Mark Quinones is a Youth Engaged in Service Ambassador and works with the Massachusetts Youth Service Alliance.

Turn Young Volunteers into Leaders

By Jennileen Joseph

Youth volunteer activities need to be organized and lead by youth. The following points are building blocks for youth leadership to work in truly significant and honest ways in your organization:

- Understand where they're coming from. Reflecting often on where young people's lives are completely different from yours reminds you to keep thinking of effective ways to interact with and support them. Learned social behaviors and hopelessness are held together by a lack of resources. These factors are what keep youth from caring enough to dream big dreams about a better world. Many young people are not expected to go after their dreams, to make their lives how they want them, or to take themselves or their peers seriously.

- Build teams. Adults need to join forces. One adult cannot offer a group of youth all the assistance, support and care that they need. Adults need enough support, enough rest and a solid team that listens. Treat yourself with the same amount of attention that you give youth. You deserve that.

- Make time to build relationships. What we're doing always begins one on one. Tell youth about your life, dreams, biggest fears and listen to theirs. Asking young people how their lives are while running out the door to a meeting

does not show that you want to know them or their experiences. Friendships make working on a project together more satisfying. The decision to make time so friendship can develop will shine through in your actions.

Tell youth about your life, dreams, biggest fears and listen to theirs. Ask-ing how their lives are while running out the door does not show that you want to know them or their experiences.

- Listen to youth to get them thinking. Help youth find ideas that they want to materialize. Young people have ample dreams and ideas ready to pour out of them at any moment. Asking is a magical tool in these situations. "What would you change if you had the power?" "What can't you stand any longer about the community?" "How would you change the school system?" You have let them dream out loud simply by asking. This keeps young people secretly hoping inside, motivating the creation of many projects.

- Give as much information as you have and then some. Load it on! Pour it out! Youth need information

you have that they can't or don't get access to. This will give them a big-picture view that will enable them to target projects based on what they care about. Volunteering to start a soup kitchen doesn't help them unless they are informed about the current economy, the lack of jobs and the subsequent attacks on poor people and people of color. With that information, they can see how people end up needing soup kitchens and what function the kitchens serve. And they can keep thinking of more ways to combat the effects of classism and racism in today's society.

- Show yourself. Show your tired moments, your utter excitement. The more real you are, the more authentic their experience will feel, and the more they'll take their goals seriously.

- Step to the side. Young people are amazing organizers and thinkers. Step out of the way so they can fly. Adults often forget to encourage youth to figure projects out themselves and instead interject opinions and take charge.

- Cheer youth on. Remember they are good, powerful, dynamic and creative. Don't be put off by their fear, tough acts or their hopelessness. They need you to remember who they really are so they can remember, too.

- Remember you're good. You try hard and care a lot. There will be days when you feel like a screw-up adult. Let it slide off! You're doing amazing work!

Once these building blocks are in place you can assess what changes need to happen structurally for young people's leadership to be institutionalized within your organization. ■

Jennileen Joseph works with Youth on Board, a project of Youth Build, USA. Youth on Board works with organizations to get young people on boards of directors. Currently, she serves on the Massachusetts Youth Service Alliance Board of Directors and coordinates membership nationally for Youth on Board.

Recruiting Young Volunteers

By Sylvia Cornejo

As with all effective recruitment, recruiting youth volunteers requires the following: clear job descriptions, an enthusiastic presentation and a targeted approach according to your needs and the needs of your potential volunteers. When recruiting youth for volunteering, consider the following places: schools, youth organizations, and the general public.

Schools

As the number of schools incorporating a service component into the students' educational experience increases, more campuses are appointing a "community service coordinator." Whether this person is a staffer assigned this role or a teacher taking on the responsibility, if you can find such a coordinator your recruitment is made much easier.

However, if there's no formal community service component, you can make your initial contact with the school's principal, individual classroom teachers who might be interested in incorporating service into their curriculum, guidance counselors or librarians. Schools might also be tapped through the PTA or through existing extra-curricular clubs.

The important thing is to remember the advantages of recruiting youth volunteers through schools. Not only are there large numbers of students for you to draw from, but providing students with

the opportunity to volunteer can make school and learning more fun and meaningful for young people.

Youth Organizations

These groups often are looking for ways to engage their young people in meaningful experiences. Your chances of recruiting volunteers from these groups will depend on your ability to present a clear match between your project and the group you approach.

Common youth organizations include Girl and Boy Scouts, 4-H, etc. However, you can improve your chances of success by approaching other groups such as religious groups, sports teams, recreation centers, after-school clubs and special interest youth groups. Most of these organizations will have an adult as contact point.

General Public

Outside the realm of schools and clubs, there are many young people who are willing to volunteer their time and talents to worthwhile causes. Children, nieces, nephews, cousins, siblings and friends of current volunteers, staff and past and present service recipients are wonderful sources.

Remember to emphasize the benefits such as developing self-confidence, increasing a sense of responsibility, exposure to new situations and diverse people, career exploration and learning new skills. When it comes to recruiting for your specific program, you will naturally select techniques that best match each source of potential volunteers.

Publicity Counts

Here are some additional ways of spreading your message:

- Consider having a booth at local, school, and street fairs.

- Use eye-catching brochures, posters and flyers. Make these available to young people by displaying them in school cafeterias, video game arcades, record stores, playgrounds, etc.

- Bumper stickers and T-shirts convey a sense of excitement about the program. Have your volunteers wear the shirts at projects and when they do presentations for recruitment. Give out bumper stickers at these functions.

- A film-strip or picture board lets potential volunteers see what your program might look like. Take it with you when you meet with young people.

- Contact local radio and television stations. They might be willing to help with publicity. Public access television now offers you the opportunity to highlight your program and your need for youth volunteers.

- Local newspapers are a good place for displaying an ad requesting the help of youth volunteers. The paper might even have a column for volunteer opportunities.

- Announcements in movie theaters are sure to catch young people's eyes.

The single most important thing to remember is that the most effective recruitment is done by satisfied volunteers.

In addition, youth have a preference for announcements and ads in which young people deliver the message. So ask youth volunteers to help recruit their peers. Let them share their excitement for service! ■

Sylvia Cornejo is The Points of Light Foundation YES (Youth Engaged in Service) Ambassador at The Volunteer Center, United Way of San Diego County, California.

Cheers for Volunteers

By Ann Bailey

Teenagers love applause! We all are born with an innate desire to be praised. Almost everything we do revolves around gaining the respect and attention of those around us. Everyone longs for celebration of the accomplishments and praise for his or her extra efforts.

Volunteers, because they tend to be so self-sacrificing, often get lost in the shuffle of honor and praise. We forget to laud them with the gratitude they deserve. But like all of us, they crave recognition, even through simple gestures such as smiles and genuine thank-yous.

Why is celebration so important to young volunteers?

It reminds them they are important and appreciated, gives the organization a burst of team enthusiasm, recognizes the power of volunteers and introduces role models.

If we hope to engage our faithful volunteers in service through the golden years of our organizations, we must learn to celebrate their service in meaningful ways.

Of course there are always the traditional forms of celebration: hosting honorary banquets, giving company pins and certificates, sending press releases to the newspaper and pictures with the company president. These are all noble variations of applause, but I

challenge you to go above and beyond traditional celebrations.

Celebration Ideas

Here are some thoughts to help you, your organization or your school start your own treasure box of celebration ideas:

- Display photos of outstanding volunteers in a Volunteer Hall of Fame.
- Send greeting cards with 10 specific reasons you appreciate your individual volunteers.
- Let your star volunteer represent your company at public event.

Words of Praise

- You brightened my day
- How creative
- You're a real trooper
- Remarkable job
- That's incredible
- Way to go
- Excellent
- You're a winner
- I trust you
- You're a joy
- Marvelous
- I'm so proud
- You really made a difference
- I appreciate your unique talents
- Thanks

■ Give a limelight award to behind-the-scenes volunteers.

■ Pass around Starburst candies to thank volunteers for their bursts of enthusiasm.

■ Invite a distinguished volunteer to be the honorary chairperson for your next event.

■ Send a letter of recognition

to the volunteer's school or organization.

■ Brag on your volunteers wherever you go and share their success stories.

■ Begin a tradition of recognizing your community heroes.

■ Give donated gift certificates to your volunteer of the month.

■ Highlight super volunteers in a spotlight corner of your newsletter/annual report.

■ Invite a volunteer to be a part of your leadership team, honoring them for their expertise.

■ Create a celebration team to plan volunteer thank-you events.

■ Go out of your way to thank at least one volunteer every day.

■ Nominate your volunteers for national volunteer awards and scholarships.

■ Surprise your volunteers with lemonade and homemade cookies.

■ Ask the school principal to grant free admission for special volunteers to a school event.

■ Make a fun video of your volunteers and eat popcorn while you watch it together.

■ Have a victory wall for people to write/draw their big and little victories.

■ Keep a creative progress report on display to generate volunteer enthusiasm.

It's your turn now! Highlight your favorite celebration ideas, dream up a few of your own, and get on with the show. Put a volunteer celebration event on your calendar, get together with your peers to plan a meaningful thank you, and start hunting every day for creative and casual ways to praise those who make the world go 'round. ■

Ann Bailey is The Points of Light Foundation Youth Engaged in Service Ambassador at the Tennessee Commission on National and Community Service. She facilitates workshops and manages programs that challenge young people to make positive changes in their communities through volunteerism and leadership.