**How to Deal with High Maintenance Volunteers**

Volunteers are amazing people. However, as with any group of people, some volunteers can be a time-drain on your organization, requiring much more one-on-one attention than others donating their efforts. In a word: “high-maintenance.”

This may come in many forms, such as dropping in unexpectedly to see if there are volunteer opportunities or calling to confirm the date and time of their next volunteer date.

Let’s take a closer look at how to deal with volunteers who seem to require more of your time than others.

## **A Sticky Situation**

So how do you handle this type of volunteer? It goes without saying that time and staff are at a premium at most nonprofits, so hand-holding those individuals is counter-productive. On the other end of the spectrum is “firing” a volunteer, but that is a worst-case scenario, which could lead to some negative publicity for your organization in the process. The good news is that there are options in between that just might save the day. Below we offer our best advice to volunteer coordinators for managing high-maintenance volunteers.

## **Keeping Your Sanity**

Although the end result is the same, leading to lost time and frustration, there are actually various reasons why these “needy” volunteers may behave the way they do. Here are some questions to ask yourself to assess the situation and hopefully make it work better for everyone:

* **Did we give this volunteer proper orientation and training?** Although they are best practices, these crucial pieces sometimes get lost in the shuffle. For example, if Betty doesn’t completely understand the organization’s mission or her importance to it, she may not realize how critical it is to make the best use of staff time. Likewise, if Betty was thrown into a task with minimal training to begin with, she may be hesitant and unsure of herself, feeling the need to often interrupt and ask questions.
* **Is this the best task assignment for the individual?** People are drawn to volunteer at a nonprofit for various reasons. Perhaps Tom works with computers all day. Because of his expertise, the volunteer coordinator assigned him similar tasks without really giving him other options, when Tom really wanted a change of pace. Or maybe Mary was assigned to stuff envelopes and is totally bored with it. In either case, these volunteers may lack interest in the task at hand and this could make them more difficult to manage. Giving volunteers a choice of activities, on the other hand, should allow them to choose something they enjoy and keep them more engaged.
* **Does the volunteer simply want more social interaction?** Some individuals volunteer to get out of the house and have someone to visit with. If the task they are given involves sitting in a cubicle alone, chances are good that the volunteer will be looking for conversation. This doesn’t work well when the person targeted is the volunteer coordinator or another staff member. If this is the case, the solution may be as easy as simply pairing him or her with another volunteer to work on a project together.
* **Is our organization communicating effectively with volunteers?** As we mentioned earlier, perhaps you have volunteers “swinging by” to see if there is anything that needs done or touching base because they can’t remember the next time they are scheduled to come in. An answer here would be to implement a cloud-based volunteer management system, such as VolunteerHub. This type of tool allows volunteer coordinators to list opportunities so volunteers can choose activities they like best that fit into their schedule — and self-register from any internet-accessible computer, tablet, or phone. VolunteerHub also brings the power of automated confirmation and reminder emails and text messages. This eliminates calls or emails from those forgetful or disorganized well-meaning folks who may be checking in often with you on specifics.

High-maintenance volunteers don’t have to stay that way. Evaluate what’s really going on in each case. Many times it’s just that a volunteer’s expectation hasn’t been met in some way and a small change could make all the difference. Spending a little more time in training, learning more about motivation to volunteer, and/or automating registration and communication can save countless hours and headaches in the long-term.

*Thank you to VolunteerHub*