

## ***The Essential Qualities of a Volunteer***

by John M. Rinaldo

Anyone that is involved in church ministry knows the value of a good volunteer. We depend on volunteers to not only get the work done, but to make a lasting impact in our church, touching the lives of those that we are trying to serve. Directors, coordinators, and staff cannot do it alone.

We all need volunteers for a variety of roles. But do we know a good volunteer when we see one? What are the essential qualities that good volunteers inherently have? Can we articulate these qualities?

There is no one profile of a perfect volunteer. This article is a volunteer picture book. Flip through the qualities to see what good volunteers 'look' like. Then, when you see one, get to know them and invite them to be part of an organization that is living out God's mission.

### **Qualities of a volunteer**

#### *Loves God:*

This sounds so basic, but if they don't have a love for God, they don't have any business being involved in church ministry. This is a foundational must-have quality of a good volunteer. We need to be looking for people that have a passion-filled love for God that is evident and leaks (preferably gushes) out into the ministry they are involved in. Is there evidence of an ongoing prayer life and relationship with God? Someone who is grounded in their relationship with God can effectively lead our young people to understand the meaning of Christ centered discipleship.

#### *Love of people:*

In ministry, relationships are central. We cannot effectively serve God's people if we hate them. We have all seen that parish volunteer who is involved in every ministry, but seems to dislike everything about the people they serve. They are grumpy. They cannot truly connect with people in a way that is helpful and fruitful. If they don't love people, what makes you think they will have a positive impact in ministry? They should genuinely desire to connect on a deeper level with people.

#### *Character/Integrity:*

We do not need volunteers who are perfect and never sin. Only Jesus can fill that role. However, we do need volunteers that are struggling and challenging themselves to become as Christ-like as possible. They work hard to avoid sin and are willing to admit when they are wrong. Volunteers with character struggle to always do what is right. They may not always succeed, but at least they are trying to change to become better people.

#### *Relate-ability:*

The ability to build relationships and get to know people on a deep and personal level is a sign of a good volunteer. They try to move away from the surface kind of relationship and

are committed to lasting and enduring relationships. They remember names, ask good questions about people, go to the world of those they are ministering to (like competitive sports games), and encourage people with their words. They are always on the look out for the unconnected in ministry and they see the potential in those that they serve. All these things are signs that a volunteer makes relationships a priority.

*Teach-ability:*

A good volunteer is willing to learn and grow to become a better person and minister. If a volunteer is not willing to learn from you, others, and their experiences, they will not be able to help bring your ministry to a higher level. It is said that a good volunteer needs to know only three things: what they do know, what they don't know, and where to go to get the answers to what they don't know. These volunteers typically have a knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses, are aware of who they are, and know what areas they need to grow in. In a nutshell, good volunteers are life-long learners.

*Servant-hood:*

A good volunteer recognizes that ministry is all about serving others. They are willing to put their desires aside from time to time and get to work for the good of the ministry. Volunteers should have a desire to go the extra mile to serve the church like Jesus did. Jesus knelt down and washed the feet of his disciples on Holy Thursday. Is there evidence that a particular volunteer is willing to do the same?

*Balanced:*

Balance is key in ministry. It is easy for volunteers to give a ministry their entire effort for the sake of servant-hood. After all, the volunteer is serving God. It has to be good. A good volunteer is physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually balanced. If they are not, they will not be a healthy volunteer. Those that are unbalanced sometimes get involved in ministry with an unspoken and unconscious desire to be ministered to when they are being asked to be the minister. Volunteers that are unbalanced need to find a ministry where they can be served and should step away from volunteering for the time being.

*Committed:*

We have all seen volunteers that say they are going to show up to a ministry event and end up not being present. This can affect a ministry in poor ways. A good volunteer is committed to the ministry, those that they serve, and God. The last thing a ministry needs is a volunteer that says yes but does not follow through. A good volunteer is willing to take the initiative and be innovative, and fill the water jug on retreat when they recognize that it is empty.

*Positive attitude:*

An enthusiastic and positive attitude goes a long way in ministry. A positive attitude allows a ministry to get through the challenging times and is likely to attract people in to the ministry. A negative attitude turns people off to ministry and church.

Just as important as it is to make note of the essential qualities that make a good volunteer, we must read between the lines and make note the qualities that are not listed. Sometimes in ministry, especially youth ministry, we make being a musician an essential quality. Although musical talent can be very helpful, it is not essential that all volunteers have that ability. Being young or technically savvy are also not essential qualities of a volunteer.

Some may be surprised to see that knowledge of faith and theology are not an essential quality. An understanding of their faith and their own personal faith journey is important, but the knowledge theology and what the Church teaches can be taught much easier than the qualities listed above. There are many workshops, conferences and schools that teach on theology. There are not as many events that are able to adequately teach the essential qualities. Many of the essential qualities are inherent to who a person is, and cannot be easily taught.

It is difficult to find volunteers that have every one of the essential qualities. However, the more of these qualities a volunteer has, the better they will be equipped to serve your ministry and make a lasting impact.