

How to Keep Your Volunteers Happy, Helpful, and Engaged

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With volunteers doing the majority of the work in most genealogical societies, it is vitally important to keep these valuable people happy. Happy volunteers = Happy society.

Why Should We Care About Happiness:

- ✓ Happy volunteers are more productive
- ✓ Helps with volunteer recruitment
- ✓ Keeps your volunteers around longer

Finding Mr. or Ms. Right:

Know who you're looking for

Take a cue from the business world. Assess the job and the qualifications before seeking the person for the task.

- ✓ Determine what projects need to be done
- ✓ Have specific jobs with specific qualifications

How to ask for Mr. or Ms. Right

Groveling may seem easy, but it is rarely effective in the long term. Being honest and straightforward is the best approach.

- ✓ Mention the project and its goals
- ✓ Ask for specific tasks
- ✓ List the specific qualifications

Follow-up with people who have expressed an interest in volunteering. Few things leave a worse impression than asking for help and then not contacting the people who were willing to assist.

Match them to the right job

Talk with them before they begin work. Different people have different needs and different motivations. Volunteers will stay around longer and be more productive if they are matched to jobs that fit their motivations.

Help them succeed

A common mistake is failing to let the volunteers know exactly what they are supposed to do. This makes for frustrated volunteers and incomplete projects.

- ✓ Provide a clear, written job description
- ✓ Provide training
- ✓ Follow-up regularly and be available for answering questions and guidance

The Difficult Volunteer

- ✓ Consider the impact on other volunteers, the project, and the society
- ✓ Recognize the reason for the difficulty
 - The 5 Whys technique
- ✓ Is this person better suited for another area of the society?
- ✓ As a last resort, help the person move on to other opportunities.

Recognition:

Why your society should do it

Recognizing the efforts of your volunteers isn't a "nicety." It is *essential* for keeping volunteers happy and active!

How to do it

Different people have different motivations and, therefore, different desires for recognition. You gain the benefits of recognition when you give the *right* recognition.

Suggested reading and resources

1. [EnergizeInc.com](http://energizeinc.com). Especially their Hot Topic blog: <https://www.energizeinc.com/hot-topics-and-news>
2. Martin Zwilling, "[How to Increase Productivity by Employee Happiness](#)," *Forbes*, December 2, 2014. (Available on forbes.com)
3. MindTools, "[5 Whys: Getting to the Root of a Problem Quickly](#)." https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC_5W.htm
4. ServiceLeader.org. A project of the RGK Center for Philanthropy and Community Service at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs of the University of Texas at Austin. Provides information on all aspects of volunteerism.
5. Sue Hine, [Management4Volunteers blog](#).
6. Tony Schwartz, "[Why Appreciation Matters So Much](#)," *Harvard Business Review*, January 23, 2012. <https://hbr.org/2012/01/why-appreciation-matters-so-mu.html>
7. University of Warwick, "[New Study Shows We Work Harder When We Are Happy](#)."