

LEADERSHIP TODAY:
*Success tips for
leading volunteers*

A Hardy Smith Publication

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About this publication



Volunteers. They are the backbone of America's nonprofits, and can be crucial but perplexing. From recruiting them to retaining them, navigating volunteer waters is a constant learning process for nonprofit leaders.

In this Hardy Smith publication, "LEADERSHIP TODAY: Success tips for leading volunteers," I've included five articles I've written with the purpose of bringing insight to volunteer relationships so many of us manage. The research I've conducted over the years feeds into answering one primary question: *Why don't board members do what they're supposed to do?* Of course, board members are only one type of volunteer, and the tips you read here apply to any – from the hands-on day-to-day volunteer to the premier fundraiser and community leader.

I encourage you to read these five articles with an open mind and a willingness to adjust your way of thinking and management style to one that essentially puts the volunteer *first*. When you're able to make this essential shift, your organization benefits directly and volunteer leadership reveals its miraculous power.

Sincerely,
Hardy Smith

ARTICLE #1: Five tips for keeping your volunteers

Annually, the last week of April is dubbed "National Volunteer Appreciation Week," and it's always questionable whether the volunteers recognized one year will be around the next.

The Corporation for National and Community Service's annual survey on volunteering in America consistently reports that millions of people volunteer their time to worthwhile charitable and community causes.

However, the report also shows equally large numbers of people each year are giving up on their volunteer activities.

This creates a revolving door of volunteers, triggering a never-ending cycle of recruiting and training to replace those who have left. If you could increase your volunteer retention rate, how much time and money could you save?

Understanding the volunteer's perspective is critical if you want to reduce your rate of volunteer loss. Here are five tips that will help.



**Hardy's Collection of
Success Tips:**
Wisdom gained along the way

You get what you follow up on.

Understand what will determine your success this year.

Outline what you are going to do to achieve the success you want.

- 1. Realize people get involved for their reasons, and a good cause may not be enough to keep them.** Take time to understand why your volunteers signed up. What is their true purpose for wanting to participate with your organization? They are likely to have a need that relates more to a personal reason, and your organization or cause provides an opportunity for meeting that need. Are you fulfilling that need? If not, chances are high that you will lose these volunteers or members. I challenge you to test yourself to find out how well you know your board members or volunteers. Do you know anything about their families? Do you know when their birthdays are? Can you name their hobbies? Can you describe what they do for a living other than name their place of employment? The big challenge question for you is: Do you know what their personal reason for being involved with your group really is?
- 2. People want to feel connected.** Work to build personal relationships with your volunteers. If you don't know them, you'll lose them. Help to ensure relationships are being fostered between volunteers. Relationships develop connection to your organization and will keep your volunteers involved. Showing up to work with friends is a major motivator. Create opportunities that ensure the new person is made to feel a welcomed part of the organization. Consistent communications with volunteers will also help with your connection efforts.
- 3. Don't use "sink or swim" management techniques.** Often, organizations will put someone in a leadership role without providing guidance, background information, training or assistance from those previously serving in the same role. This common occurrence is a big contributor to frustration and increases chances of failure. People don't volunteer to be frustrated. They obviously don't sign up to see their efforts fail. This negative experience is another contributing factor for turnover. In addition to losing another volunteer, your organization also has allowed an important activity to not be successful by not stepping in to ensure the success of those in leadership roles. Loading up an eager performer who won't say no is a sure way to create burnout. It is easy to give tasks to a new volunteer who is willing to say yes. How many times do you see those shining stars flame out in a short period of time? Keep that performer around longer by working harder to get others involved instead of always turning to the easy "yes" person.
- 4. Take time to recognize your volunteers.** People want to be appreciated. Don't wait for your year-end awards. Be generous with praise and recognition. Make sure your volunteers know they aren't being taken for granted. A simple thank you that shows people their efforts are making a difference can have a huge impact on how they feel about the organization. The better they feel, the longer they will stay.

Success Tips
Wisdom gained along the way

PR = People and Profit.

You must sell benefits when recruiting volunteers or doing fundraising.

Making time to plan and organize is critical for any successful activity.

Act on these five tips and you will help to make sure the volunteers you are recognizing during your Volunteer Appreciation Week will still be contributing their valuable service in the future.

ARTICLE #2: Are you asking or telling your board members what to do?

"I said, "Take out the trash!"

Taking out the trash was a necessity, but I would have felt better about doing it if I had just been asked nicely.

I was innocently and intently watching television one day when my concentration was suddenly interrupted by a loud command from my wife. "I said, "Take out the trash!"

I was startled for two reasons. First, my normally good-natured wife rarely uses that tone of voice. Second, I couldn't recall any earlier notice that would have signaled the vital importance of this chore.

Success Tips

Wisdom gained along the way

Think ahead, anticipate and solve your problems in advance.

As a leader, don't just work hard – work smart.

Creating, maintaining and growing success is not an every-now-and-then commitment...it is an all-the-time commitment.

Since no such communication came to mind, I wanted to know if I'd missed a much more pleasant request prior to the one that was delivered so abruptly. "Did I miss a 'Honey, please take out the trash?'" I asked.

"No," she laughed, "I'm just in a hurry to get things done and I was afraid that you'd just put it off if I asked nicely, so I went straight to what would get your attention. Why waste time?" Why, indeed.

When I conducted my survey to determine why board members don't do what they're supposed to do, poor communication was identified as a top reason they don't perform as expected.

How are you communicating requests for needed action to your board members? Are you asking, or are you telling? They are, after all, volunteers. Communication that is perceived as a demand will not be received in a positive way, especially by those who are giving their time freely.

Showing politeness and respect will get much better results. "Please" and "Thank you" still work.

A blunt and more direct communication delivery might be simpler, but may be hurting you and, in fact, having the opposite effect of what you intend.

Positive communication is the basis for good relationships. If your communication style is creating a negative experience for your board members, what type of relationship are you building with those whose performance you are depending on?

Taking out the trash was a necessity, but I would have felt better about doing it if I had just been asked nicely!

ARTICLE #3: Preachers don't do weather

The twin 150-mile races that precede the Daytona 500 at Daytona International Speedway are incredible matchups. The grandstands are packed with NASCAR race fans who – along with a tremendous television audience – are electrified by the pair of unique action-packed qualifying races for the prestigious Daytona 500.

Assisting with pre-race ceremonies was one of my race day duties when I worked for International Speedway Corporation. One particular race morning stands out because of a lesson from Rev. Hal Marchman.

Hal was a fixture at the Speedway and delivered invocations prior to events for years.

The weather was growing ominous, and a usually sunny Florida morning was moving toward midnight black. It looked as if the day might be lost.

Someone on the pre-race stage turned to Rev. Marchman and jokingly suggested, "You gotta do something about this weather!" The quick-witted Hal responded, "Look, I'm in sales, not management."

Just as preachers don't do weather, board members of nonprofit organizations often don't do what their nonprofit wants them to do. Rev. Marchman's response provides a great message that I share in my work to help nonprofits answer the question, "Why don't board members do what they're supposed to do?"

To get a certain job done, you've got to go to the people who can accomplish the results you are looking for. Don't assume you know who that is.

My research on this topic and my experience with nonprofits show that not following this advice is an all too common mistake frequently repeated by too many organizations. Case in point: board members and the assumption that they will be effective fundraisers.

Some people feel uncomfortable asking others for money. Yet what do most nonprofits expect their board members to do?

The predictable frustration that occurs when assigned fundraising goals aren't met can be avoided.

When considering prospective board members, first, don't assume you know their ability for fundraising. More important, don't assume you know their willingness to be actively engaged with soliciting funds.

Instead, have a thorough screening process prior to contacting potential board prospects. Then, when you interview them, carefully communicate whatever will be expected. If you aren't convinced they can get the job done or if they aren't firmly committed to the task at hand, then they are just not a good fit, despite what you may have assumed.

If you want to change the weather, follow Rev. Marchman's advice and don't depend on a preacher. Go to a higher authority. If you want to have fundraisers on your board, don't take just anyone. Find those who are ready, willing and able to be fundraisers!

Success Tips *Wisdom gained along the way*

Part-time effort will get you part-time results.


Make every job important.

Don't delegate and forget.

ARTICLE #4: Don't delegate and forget

Delegating and forgetting is a recipe for disaster.

Volunteers who sign up for involvement in a nonprofit or an association are anticipating a positive experience.



Success Tips
Wisdom gained along the way

When following up with people you are supervising, ask specific questions to get specific answers.

Have a purpose in every activity you are involved in.

Success comes from performance.

When they don't find that gratification, they face frustration, and the organization faces volunteer and member retention issues.

Too often organization leaders assume that the person being given a responsibility understands the task at hand and has the ability to get it done successfully. In addition, they fail to follow up, compounding the problem.

Regardless of results, the volunteer's experience is almost certain to be frustrating.

There is, unfortunately, a consistent pattern of people who persevere, get the job done, and then quit because they felt abandoned.

Delegating and forgetting is a recipe for disaster. Engaging in this behavior risks both loss of the volunteer or member and failure of the activity.

Help to avoid potential negative results with these five delegation tips:

1. **Don't assume.** Have ongoing conversations so you have a comfort level that your volunteer understands the task, is committed to it, and carries it out.
2. **Get specific answers to specific questions** such as "What's the completion date?" "Who signed up?" "What sponsors have committed?" "How many tickets have been sold?" and "How much has been raised?"
3. **Don't accept non-specific answers** like "It's going well" and "Everything's fine."
4. **Be a good listener.** Pay attention to signals that indicate your volunteer is struggling.
5. **Follow up and get real-time evaluation.** Make needed adjustments so tasks remain on track for success.

Each subsequent communication provides the opportunity to recognize good effort. Positive reinforcement is a powerful motivator and goes a long way toward keeping volunteers and members engaged.

If you delegate and proactively follow up with them, you will help to ensure volunteers have a positive experience, and you will avoid unnecessarily adding to your retention issues.

ARTICLE #5: Is that board member difficult or different?

Has your organization had board members you consider to be difficult? "Make Difficult People Disappear" – a book written by speaker, colleague and friend Monica Wofford – started me thinking about board members who appear to be difficult. It occurred to me that there is quite a difference between the truly difficult and the merely different.

It's possible someone could be mislabeled as difficult just for not fitting the same cookie-cutter personality as other board members.

A difficult board member is a person who is disruptive, bullies others or attempts to dominate an organization. This individual's negative behavior affects participation by others and causes harm to a group's good work.

On the other hand, a board member who is different can contribute diverse thought. And is that a bad thing?

Personality diversity actually offers new approaches, opinions and experiences that can expand and benefit your board's critical thinking.

Just a little bit of effort on your part can turn perceived negativity into a world of new ideas.

For board members who present a personality challenge, try these eight suggestions:

1. **Set up getting-to-know-you time** to develop a better understanding of their perspectives.
2. **Recognize that people process information in different ways.** Examine your communication techniques to ensure you are communicating effectively.
3. **Consider that there may be issues outside the boardroom** that are influencing attitude and disposition.
4. **Communicate that their opinions and feedback are appreciated** and that they are adding value to board conversations.
5. **Improve facilitation skills** for yourself and your board chair to improve the handling of meeting participation.
6. **Consider the possibility that someone may not be fully informed.** Re-examine your new board member orientation and your procedures for introducing new ideas and projects to the board.
7. **Don't automatically assume you know others' reasoning for asking a certain question or taking a certain position.** Encourage further explanation. Take time to fully understand their viewpoints.
8. **Demonstrate patience and allow yourself to be more tolerant of various personality characteristics** before dismissing someone whose new perspectives could actually be a real asset.

Success Tips *Wisdom gained along the way*

Dreams without action are just daydreams. Make your dreams a reality!

You can't sit on past success and expect more to come.

Recognizing the difference between difficult and different can be a tremendous benefit for your organization. Follow these tips to help make the different board member a valuable part of your board.

Ready for more volunteer leadership tips?

On www.hardysmith.com, sign up for my e-newsletter and receive my free white paper, **"Why Don't Board Members Do What They're Supposed To Do?"** simply for signing up!

About the author: Hardy Smith

Hardy Smith's drive for facing challenges head-on – and transforming them with effective, creative solutions – was shaped through his years of work with one of America's most successful and popular sports, NASCAR. There, in several management and leadership roles, Hardy represented the NASCAR family of businesses through a variety of leadership activities. With these experiences, Hardy has translated the business models of some of America's most prominent corporate management teams into forward-thinking, practical and timely applications any volunteer- and member-based organization can and should adopt.

Hardy's dedication to serving associations, nonprofits and other volunteer-based organizations is reflected in his professional affiliations as well. He has held numerous local, state and national volunteer leadership positions, while his professional relationships have included ASAE – The Center for Association Leadership, FSAE – Florida Society of Association Executives, National Speakers Association, BoardSource, and Association of Fundraising Professionals.

Hardy's work on creating effective board member relationships has been featured in leading publications, such as BoardSource, GuideStar, Nonprofit Business Advisor, Nonprofit World and FSAE Source Magazine.

Today, Hardy Smith is living his calling by channeling his experiences and insight into maximizing the success of nonprofits, associations and other volunteer-based organizations around the country – work that has earned him recognition from [Florida's network of Small Business Development Centers](#). The group recently named Hardy Smith Consulting as one of its Small Business Success Stories.

Book Hardy Smith today to speak to your nonprofit and association leadership teams!

Call (386) 451-0652 or email Hardy at hardy@hardysmith.com.

Sign up today for more free tips for maximizing nonprofit and association success at www.hardysmith.com

