

# GO THE DISTANCE



- ▶ Encouraging & Energizing Volunteers
- ▶ Tools for Evaluating Volunteers
- ▶ Creating Accountability

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# 1 Expectations



## How to manage expectations in your volunteer ministry—yours and those of your volunteers and leaders.

Expectations are our assumptions about the future—how we anticipate things will go.

In a perfect world, expectations are based on clear communication and agreements. But in the absence of those, people base their expectations on assumptions, implications, and wishful thinking. And that's a recipe for disappointment.

You see, what a person expects from a situation becomes that person's definition of what's reasonable and fair. And if others fail to meet those expectations, well, they're not being reasonable. Or fair. And they're certainly being a disappointment.

This principle operates *even if people never actually articulate their expectations*—to themselves or others!

Expectations have the power to shade and interpret situations without ever making themselves known.

Here's an example...

Suppose you receive a letter saying you've won the grand prize in a contest you don't even remember entering. Your name was drawn out of a hat, and you're about to receive a check for a "substantial amount of money."

So you begin to plan what you'll do with the windfall. You'll give some to your church, some to your family, and with the rest maybe you can do some traveling. But where will you go? That depends on how large the check turns out to be. It's "substantial," but what does that mean?

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Will you be able to book a vacation at Disneyland? Or better yet, Australia. And if you're in Australia, why not do it right with a two-week guided tour? And a stop-over in Hawaii to rest up, of course...

When the check finally arrives and you tear open the envelope, you find a thousand dollars and your heart sinks in disappointment. Substantial? They call *this* "substantial"?

That's the power of expectations.

Had the check arrived without your knowing it was coming, you'd have been delighted. You would have celebrated because it far exceeded your expectations. You thought you'd only find bills in the day's mail; instead there was a *thousand dollars!*

But because of your high expectations, now the check you received seems like pocket change. It won't finance your dream vacation. It doesn't feel fair. That's the power of expectations.

And make no mistake about it: Both volunteers and volunteer leaders have expectations about volunteer roles.

## The Importance of Clear Expectations

Since we're expecting something from our volunteer experiences, let's be clear about those expectations.

Here's where all your hard work will pay off. Because you have provided ministry descriptions and careful placement and you have helped set realistic expectations in the minds of your volunteers, they know exactly what they'll be doing. They know who they'll report to. They know how they'll be evaluated.

Of course, if you've not done those things...well, it's not too late to do them. Without the clarity that comes with ministry descriptions, interviews, and careful placement, you'll struggle with unclear expectations regularly.

Clear expectations help both volunteers and volunteer leaders have a realistic view of how the future will unfold, how tasks will be accomplished, and what the outcomes will be.

Before we move too far along, let's share a quick word about expectations and volunteers. There are two general expectations that have proven to be true again and again in working with volunteers.

- **Volunteers want to do their best.**

It's rare to meet a person who signs up to help in a classroom or at the food pantry with the intention of doing less than excellent work. Volunteers sign on the dotted line with every intention of meeting and exceeding your expectations. Many things can get in the way of their delivering an excellent effort (we'll discuss a few later), but it's safe to assume the best about your volunteers and interact with them accordingly. Volunteers are typically enthused, inspired, and happy to be on the team.

- **When volunteers fail to meet our expectations, it's not always the volunteer's fault.**

As leaders, sometimes the problem is with us. We have failed to provide adequate information. We have assumed something that isn't true. We have not defined clearly what we expect.

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If the problem  
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If the problem lies with us, we can fix it. And if the problem lies with a volunteer, it's *also* our responsibility to proactively work to resolve it.

We may work directly with the volunteer or only with the person who supervises the volunteer, but we're likely to get involved. So let's talk about communicating clear expectations.

## The Necessity of Clear Communication

You've probably already established many clear expectations for volunteers.

But there are still things you will need to explain—and have explained to you. Remember that volunteers are your *partners* in ministry; they have many valuable lessons to teach you, too. Communication is a two-way street.

Clear communication helps everyone win.

Your ability to communicate clearly will help you in every aspect of handling expectations. Communicating clearly will help volunteers know what you

expect. Your skills as a listener will help volunteers let you know what *they* expect. Clear communication helps everyone win.

Owning and integrating these three truths into your approach with people will help you manage expectations.

### 1. Everything you do communicates.

You can't *not* communicate. Even silence communicates something.

Here's an example...

Let's say you have a disagreement with a friend. Later you call and leave a message saying you'd like a return call so you can discuss the issue further and reach an agreement.

If several days pass and you haven't heard anything, you may call and leave another message. Then if a few more days pass without a return call, you may become angry or worried.

Is your friend ignoring you? Is your friend so angry he can't tolerate the idea of speaking with you? Is your friendship over? Or is your friend unable to phone back because he's ill? Should you call hospitals or phone a mutual friend who can confirm your friend is still alive?

Notice: *Your friend is communicating with you even though he hasn't said a thing.* His silence is speaking—but you don't know what it means and may very well assume the worst.

You're communicating all the time—like it or not.

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Interpersonal communication includes both content and emotion. The tone of your voice and your body language speak loudly about what's really being said. If your emotion and content are inconsistent, then the message is apt to be scrambled.

And for some reason, scrambled messages *always* take on the most sinister, negative meaning possible. It's a phenomenon that defies the law of averages, like dropping buttered pieces of toast (they always somehow land butter side down!).

For example, suppose you congratulate a volunteer on a job well done. You say "Great job!" as you hurry past the volunteer in the church hallway. You look preoccupied and distracted (you're rushing to a meeting, so your mind is partially elsewhere), and you don't make eye contact. You don't give the volunteer time to respond. You deliver a "hit and run" affirmation that's sincere but half-hearted. The result is a dual message: "I'm pleased—but not really."

Because your body language wasn't consistent with your words, the volunteer has to choose: Does she believe the words or the actions?

I'm willing to bet she'll believe the actions.

It's easy to forget that we communicate in so many ways...

- Through touch—a tap on the shoulder or hug, a pat on the back or handshake. They all have strong meaning to both sender and receiver. When you touch, touch carefully and appropriately.
- Through visible movement—pointing a finger, winking, smiling, scowling, folding our arms. These communicate volumes without using a word and often speak "louder" than the words we use.

- Through words and other audible symbols—including speaking, crying, and laughing, or a combination of these. Even a snort can imply that you don't agree with what has just been said to you.
- Through written symbols—in words, graphs, or even pictures. It's easy to be misunderstood when you send letters or e-mails, so be cautious. A rule of thumb: If what you need to communicate is corrective or confrontational, don't write it. Meet face to face, or at least talk voice to voice. Words are so easy to misunderstand.

## 2. Speak the truth in love.

In Ephesians 4:15 we read:

*Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.*

That biblical admonition requires that we be both truthful and loving at the same time. It's a hard balance to maintain.

When we strike this balance, we speak directly and clearly and get to the point. We don't gloss over issues. We don't adopt the conflict resolution strategy too many volunteer managers embrace: They *ignore* a problematic volunteer, hoping he or she will simply go away.

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**Straight, clear communication is exceedingly rare in the world.**

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Speaking the truth in love requires us to take into account the words, feelings, and body language of the other person in the conversation. We must be present and caring even if we're unhappy. There's no room for blasting a volunteer for a mistake or using sarcasm in any way, shape, or form.

Speaking the truth in love demands that we be clear about what we want—our expectations—and that we hear the expectations of others.

This sort of straight, clear communication is exceedingly rare in the world and, sadly, in the church. But it's healthy and helpful. It spares volunteers

sleepless nights as they try to interpret what we want, hope for, or envision, based on our subtle insinuations.

When you speak the truth in love, so much can happen that's positive. It's worth learning this language of love.

### 3. Listening is communication, too.

Not sure who first observed this fact, but it's true. The world is full of good talkers but good listeners are so rare they're practically an endangered species.

It's been told the average talker speaks at a rate of about 175 words per minute, but the average listener can receive about 1,000 words per minute. Because of this tremendous gap, most people develop some very bad listening habits.

They let their attention drift to other things.

They assume they know where the talker is heading.

They use the time they're not paying attention to figure out how they'll respond—as soon as the talker stays quiet long enough to allow for a response.

But listening is more than just not talking.

It's like the story about a little boy who was in a music appreciation class. When he was asked to distinguish between *listening* and *hearing*, he replied, "Listening is wanting to hear." What a great definition! *That's* what listening is—"wanting to hear"!

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Listening is  
more than just  
not talking.

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We all say we want to hear, but it's not uncommon for us to miss the vast majority of what people say to us. Don't believe me? Outline the sermon you heard when you were last in church. How much of what your pastor said have you retained?

The challenge for us as leaders in volunteer ministry is to train ourselves to listen deeply. To hear not only what's on the surface but also to hear what is *beneath* the surface.

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Our goal is to listen for the heart of what's being communicated.

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Our goal is to listen for the heart of what's being communicated. This requires that we pay attention to the whole person. As Jim stands before us, we "hear" his life situation as he brings it to our relationship. We hear his actions, his body language, his subtle emotional cues, his voice quality, his voice volume, his eye contact patterns,

his unconscious gestures. When they're all on our radar screen, then we're really listening.

We can do it—listening is a set of skills, not a rare gift that God has given to only an anointed few. I don't deny that listening is a complex process that can break down at any number of points, and if that happens, our expectations can get lost in the muddle. But the need to communicate clearly remains, and not just because it's the only way to be sure our expectations are being understood. It's also how we know that we are understanding the expectations of others.

And it's where we do ministry. Listening—heart-to-heart listening when we connect deeply with volunteers—is a gift to us both. When we move past discussing the weather to discussing how we feel about our faith or the illness of our parents or the pain we're feeling—that's ministry. We become open and truthful. We share who we really are.

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There's no shortcut when it comes to clear communication.

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There's no shortcut when it comes to clear communication. And there's no set of skills you can use that will give you a better return for your effort!

## Expectations About Quality

Just as volunteers want to do well in their volunteer roles, you, too, want the entire volunteer ministry to function well. We all want quality to be our hallmark.

But how do you get quality work from everyone in your ministry?

Here are some suggestions...

### 1. **Communicate not just what work is to be done, but how it's to be done.**

For instance, it's not enough for a volunteer to just show up on time to deliver a children's message. The volunteer must show up on time and be *prepared*, too. But what specifically makes a children's message a *quality* message? Is preparation enough...or is there more?

If leaders of volunteers are providing excellent orientation and training, your volunteers will have a clear understanding of what quality looks and sounds like. But that happens only if volunteers' supervisors are consistent and clear. Be sure volunteer supervisors do an excellent job with orientation and training!

- *Ask: "What do you need from me that you're not getting?"* Ask every volunteer this question every three to six months. It gets at whether the volunteer's supervisor has a leadership style that's connecting effectively.

For instance, if Jane is a relatively "hands-off" supervisor and Shawn needs more guidance than Jane is providing, this question gives Shawn permission to ask for more help. This question also opens up discussions about training or materials that Shawn might feel he needs to be successful.

- *Ask: "What do you wish you knew about your volunteer role that you don't know now?"* Pose this question to each volunteer every three to six months, too. We want volunteers to feel comfortable in their positions. If they answer this question by telling us they're unsure how to handle classroom discipline or if they have a question about designing the church website, we know we've got a problem.

Until volunteers feel adequately trained, they're likely to feel fearful or uncertain. This question gets at what your volunteers feel about their training.

If you regularly ask open-ended questions that are designed to solicit evaluations and probe areas where you can improve the volunteer ministry, then you'll find out if there's a problem with quality *before* the program begins to suffer.

## **2. Identify the problem that's interfering with quality, and then set expectations for dealing with it.**

Remember, your volunteers want to see high quality, too. They're not out to deliberately disappoint you or the people they serve.

In our experience, the following three most common reasons for poor quality efforts from volunteers aren't all the fault of the volunteers at all. If anything, they can be traced back to us as leaders.

- **A lack of aptitude**—At its core, this is usually the result of a volunteer being placed in the wrong position. Perhaps the placement interview didn't adequately reveal the volunteer's God-given abilities, skills, and passions. Maybe the volunteer didn't choose to reveal them in order to be placed in her current role—where she is failing.

This situation needn't end a volunteer's service to the church. Instead, simply place the volunteer in a new role that's more appropriate. There's no shame in failing to thrive in a position that's not in line with one's abilities, skills, and passion for ministry, but the volunteer may feel embarrassed anyway. Communicate your willingness to reassign the volunteer, and offer support in the transition.

Another alternative is to change the position so it fits the volunteer. Some positions are flexible enough to be easily adapted.

Communicate to the volunteer your expectation that things can't remain as they are, that change is needed. Then, with the cooperation of the volunteer, facilitate change.

- **A lack of skill**—Picture a Sunday school teacher who loves children, loves teaching, and is ready and willing to lead a class every Sunday morning. Yet this individual lacks the skill that comes with experience. Leave him alone with the fourth-grade boys more than 20 minutes, and the room is reduced to charred rubble and chaos.

If there's aptitude but a lack of training, provide training. Use CDs and videos, provide books to read, identify workshops to attend. Even better, provide a mentor to come alongside the volunteer and help him grow in his skills.

If your best efforts to provide training still don't do the trick, look to redirect the volunteer to another role that's more in line with his or her current skills. This requires tact, but seldom is it a surprise when you tell a volunteer that things aren't working out. The volunteer already knows and wants to resolve the situation somehow. Remember, volunteers want to do well in their volunteer roles!

It's unfair to a volunteer to suggest that he or she is failing and yet be vague about the standards of excellence you require. "You're not good enough" is a message none of us like to hear. It's damaging, de-motivating, and seldom

true. What *is* true is that the Sunday school teacher in question isn't able to maintain classroom discipline and create a learning environment

Outline again what a well-disciplined classroom looks like, and help the volunteer see where there's room for growth. Jointly determine what will happen so the teacher can get the skills he needs. Then work the plan you've jointly agreed will do the job.

You've set fair expectations about quality because you've described what "quality" means in this context, and you've shown that it's possible to get there.

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Look to redirect  
the volunteer to  
another role.

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- **A lack of motivation**—Sometimes it seems that a volunteer just doesn't care. A teacher no longer prepares adequately, a committee member skips meetings without explanation, a church treasurer lets checks and bills stack up.

Don't assume that a change in behavior necessarily signals a character flaw or a total lack of concern. Rather than become offended, find out what the problem is, and deal with it. If the volunteer reports directly to you, find out if the issue is your leadership style. If that's the problem, you can work to change how you relate to the volunteer.

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Find out what the problem is and deal with it.

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A volunteer may seem less reliable if there's a problem in the ministry area in which the volunteer serves. The group may be experiencing conflict, which often de-motivates volunteers. If that's the situation, deal with it.

A personal or professional problem may be consuming the volunteer's attention, leaving little time or energy to fulfill the volunteer role. Find out if it's a temporary or long-term issue; if it's the former, offer a short-term leave of absence, and find out how you can support the volunteer through the crisis. If it's a longer-term concern, let the volunteer resign with your blessings rather than fade away.

And perhaps the volunteer just needs a reminder that what she does is important—and that others are counting on him or her.

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Quality, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder—until you define it.

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Quality, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder—until you define it. If an expectation of quality is church attendance a minimum of three times per month, then say so. If the expectation is that they create lesson outlines a week in advance, be specific. You can't hold volunteers accountable to unexpressed expectations. Until you clearly communicate what you want, you're unlikely to see it.

When you see a lack of quality that isn't responding to your proactive involvement as the volunteer supervisor, be prepared to act.

Your people matter, but so do the ministry roles they're in. If the quality of a ministry program is suffering because of a particular person who can't or won't make the necessary changes to improve, prayerfully consider how to redirect the volunteer to another position.

But first focus on what *you* may be contributing to the situation.

In his book *The Five-Star Church*, Alan Nelson puts it this way: "Assume that you are part of the blame whenever quality does not take place. Perhaps it was poor communication or training."

Good advice. He goes on to share the risk of stopping there without taking corrective action, "If you do nothing...team members who are responding well can resent the lack of equity."

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Focus on what  
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Don't get caught in the blame game, trying to determine exactly whose fault it is that a volunteer is failing to deliver quality after you've set clear expectations. Act—so the problem doesn't continue as you sort out who's responsible for what.

It's *essential* to confront problem situations. The first time a deadline is missed or a volunteer fails to show up for a scheduled event, deal with it. Make sure the unmet expectation is understood by everyone involved. There may be valid reasons a commitment wasn't honored. But as a volunteer leader, you won't know until you raise the question.

And a word of caution: Don't try to "rescue" a failing volunteer by getting the staff (or other volunteers) to jump in and save the day. That action on your part sets an expectation, too, and may become standard procedure. You don't want to create that world, because you'll live in it.

Expectations aren't reality, but unless you are intentional about creating a culture where open, clear communication is what's normal, expectations may be as close to reality as anyone gets.

## Attitudinal Blocks: When Your Expectations Aren't Met

Are you familiar with “attitudinal blocks”? Unfortunately, you probably are—and they can drain the fun out of running a volunteer ministry.

Think of attitudinal blocks as roadblocks.

Think of attitudinal blocks as roadblocks on the way toward effective volunteer leadership. You're moving right along, expecting clear sailing, when suddenly you round a corner and smack straight into one. It can take your breath away and put you on the sidelines awhile.

You may never encounter the following four attitudinal blocks outlined here, but many leaders of volunteer ministries do. We bring them to your attention for two reasons: (1) You'll know you're not alone if you encounter them; and (2) we don't want them to derail you as you move ahead in your ministry. Unmet expectations can do that to you.

Don't think these problems are imaginary or far-fetched. The dramatic scenarios described below are based on actual situations. They are presented as dramas so you can use them as role-play exercises in a small group or in a workshop for volunteer leaders.

### 1. You expect as the volunteer ministry leader to be considered a full member of the team—but you aren't.

*Actors:* Volunteer ministry leader, senior pastor, assistant pastor, and secretary

*Setting:* Church office

**Volunteer leader:** I'd find it helpful if we could set up a weekly meeting to get together and exchange information and concerns.

**Assistant pastor:** That's hard to do, since we're all operating on different schedules.

**Senior pastor:** Our schedules are constantly shifting. There isn't a time during the week we're even all here at the same time.

**Secretary:** I feel a need for an information-exchange meeting, too. I get telephone calls and sometimes don't know information people want. Maybe if we all got together, it would help me to get more lead time on information and be able to "plug in" better.

**Assistant pastor:** But you already do a great job keeping ahead of things, and we both update you at least once a day.

**Senior pastor:** The church doesn't work like other organizations. We're always on call. We can't just set up a weekly meeting and always make it work. We've tried before, but it's impossible to maintain.

**Volunteer leader:** I understand it'll be a challenge, but I still want to set a time for a weekly staff meeting, if only to help me. I feel responsible for the information being shared with me regarding needs and how church members want to help. At our meeting we could discuss how to best meet the needs of all our programs and people and decide who would be best at dealing with them. I'd feel better if I knew we were following up effectively when someone wants to get involved in one of our ministries. I think we're letting lots of possible volunteers fall through the cracks.

**Secretary:** And I'd feel better if I knew everyone was being contacted. I feel bad whenever I type up the church directory and see names of people I haven't seen at church for a long time. Maybe they're being contacted, but if so, I don't hear about it.

**Senior pastor:** Well, I suppose we could *try* scheduling a standing meeting again and see how it works out. When do you suppose we could all meet?

They set a date, but the senior pastor then cancels because he later discovers he'd already booked that time for another meeting.

## 2. You expect to be welcomed by the pastor, but instead you're perceived as a threat.

*Actors:* Pastor, lay leader

*Setting:* Pastor's office

**Lay leader:** I've been meaning to ask you, Pastor, how is our new volunteer coordinator doing? She's been on board here six months and I'm curious as to how it's working out.

**Pastor:** (*Hesitantly*) Well...by and large, it's going very well. I mean she's very enthusiastic and a real achiever. She's getting things organized around here right and left! (*Pauses*) But sometimes I'm afraid she goes a little bit overboard.

**Lay leader:** How so?

**Pastor:** Well, sometimes she strays into my domain. I mean our roles are still pretty fuzzy about who's supposed to do what.

**Lay leader:** That could get frustrating for both of you, I'm sure. Give me a "for instance" and maybe I can help.

**Pastor:** Well...several times she's actually gotten into doing *ministry*... and that's what I'm here for!

**Lay leader:** What kind of ministry are you talking about? Can you give me an example?

**Pastor:** Last week when Mrs. Peterson died so suddenly, the family called her to go talk to the Petersons' teenage daughter—and that was while I was still helping get things straightened out at the hospital. Why didn't they let me know the girl needed help—instead of calling her? After all, I'm the pastor here!

**Lay leader:** It sounds like you're angry about that.

**Pastor:** Of course I'm not! I'm just...well, I guess I *am* angry. I've been called to be the pastor. What do you expect me to do—just sit here and let her take charge? Her job description says *she's* responsible to *me*.

**Lay leader:** You mean she's not communicating with you?

**Pastor:** Oh, she does that fine. It's just that she's supposed to find volunteers, plug them into programs, and run that show. *I'm* supposed to do ministry. That's my job.

**Lay leader:** So, it's when she starts caring for people that you get upset.

**Pastor:** I just don't want the congregation to get confused. Pretty soon they won't know where to turn—to her or me.

### **3. You expect current church leaders to enthusiastically embrace the volunteer ministry—and they don't.**

*Actors:* Volunteer leader, secretary

*Setting:* Church office

**Volunteer leader:** Mary, do you have a minute? I've just got to talk to someone!

**Secretary:** Sure, come on in. The pastors are gone, and it's quiet for the moment. What's on your mind?

**Volunteer leader:** It's last night's council meeting. I'm so frustrated, I'm ready to quit!

**Secretary:** What happened?

**Volunteer leader:** It's not what happened—it's what didn't happen...again! I asked for time on the agenda to report on the results of the one-to-one interviews we've been conducting with church members the last two months. I wanted to remind the committee chairpersons to call the people I've referred to them.

**Secretary:** Sounds great. What happened at the meeting that upset you?

**Volunteer leader:** First of all, I ended up last on the agenda again—even after the purchase of a new garden hose! It was 10:30 p.m., and I could tell everyone just wanted to get out of there and go home, but I plunged ahead anyhow.

I asked four committee chairpersons how their follow-up calls were going, and not *one* of them had contacted one referral. Not one! Matt said he's been too busy. Amy says she hates hearing "no." Dave said it's easier to do things himself. And Roxie said she always feels like she's begging when she calls people.

Mary, these people *want* to help. They *want* to be called! Here these "pewsitters" everyone gripes about are finally volunteering for ministry, and no one calls them. It's ridiculous!

**Secretary:** I can see why you're upset!

#### **4. You expect that you've got things under control, but you discover there's room for improvement.**

*Actors:* Pastor, volunteer leader (who's been in that role for three years), and three members of the volunteer ministry task force (who've just returned from the Equipping Institute training they attended with the pastor and volunteer leader.)

*Setting:* Church office

**Pastor:** This is our first meeting since the training on equipping ministry. I hope everyone is still as enthused as I am about the planning we did at the training.

**Task force member 1:** I sure am!

**Task force member 2:** Can't wait to try out some of those new ideas!

**Task force member 3:** It was terrific to rethink where we're going with our ministry and what's really possible.

**Volunteer leader:** You know, when I got back, I realized we're already doing most of it—they just had fancier terms for stuff I've been doing for a long time.

**Pastor:** You've got some great things in place, but it's always a good idea to take a look now and then to see if we can improve on a good thing.

**Task force member 1:** For instance, we've never done personal interviews with our people—we've relied on time and talent sheets and casual conversations. My hunch is we really don't know a lot of our people. We need to do more discovery.

**Volunteer leader:** When you've worked with them as long as I have, you know them. I just haven't written it all down. But just ask me who is good at almost anything that needs doing and I can tell you in a minute. No sense making things more complicated than they have to be.

## How to Solve Attitudinal Blocks

The fact is there's no simple solution for becoming a fully accepted member on a team that's closed. Or for changing the attitude of a threatened pastor. Or for convincing church leaders that volunteer equipping is valuable. Or, for that matter, overcoming resistance to change—our resistance or other people's resistance.

What all these situations have in common is that they are, at heart, "people problems," and they have to do with expectations. They defy a quick, simple formulaic answer that fits all situations. Each attitude is personal and flows out of someone's beliefs, experiences, and values.

You can't mandate that attitudes change; you can only seek to understand the people who hold those attitudes...and then work to change the attitudes by providing information and proven results.

When you're staring across a conference table at a row of disbelieving faces, it's hard to think the church board members will ever change their minds and will fund volunteer-equipping ministry.

But they will.

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**You can't mandate that attitudes change; you can only seek to understand.**

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When you see your pastor shake his head and tell you—yet again—that there’s no way he’ll approve your interviewing each church member about their abilities, skills, and passions, it’s hard to believe that his heart can change.

But it can.

You may be facing an uphill climb as you create an excellent, sustainable, thriving volunteer ministry. Maybe that’s something you should have expected. To think something so valuable and precious could be birthed or taken to the next level without some childbirth pain isn’t very realistic.

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You are on  
a mission  
that requires  
faithfulness  
and tenacity.

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So set your expectations accordingly. Determine you’ll be in the process for the long haul. Called by God and given a vision of your church that means being doers of God’s Word as well as hearers of God’s Word, you are on a mission that requires two things: (1) *Faithfulness*—to hear God and do what he tells you to do; and (2) *tenacity*—the decision not to give up.

In his book *Servant Leadership*, Robert Greenleaf recounts a childhood story about a dogsled race in his hometown. Most of the boys in the race had big sleds and several dogs. Greenleaf (only 5 years old) had a small sled and one little dog. The course was one mile staked out on the lake.

As the race started, the more powerful contenders quickly left Greenleaf behind. In fact, he hardly looked like he was in the race at all.

All went well until, about halfway around, the team that was second started to pass the team then in the lead. They came too close, and the dogs got in a fight.

Pretty soon the other dog teams joined in, and little Greenleaf could see one big seething mass of kids, sleds, and dogs about half a mile away. So he gave them all wide berth and was the only one who finished the race...which made him the winner!

As Greenleaf reflects on the gargantuan problems we sometimes face, he refers to that scene from long ago. He concludes: "I draw the obvious moral. No matter how difficult the challenge or how impossible or hopeless the task may seem, if you are reasonably sure of your course—just keep going!"

And *that's* an expectation you can meet: never giving up.

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