

## **Enter**

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What actually happens when we invite a new volunteer to be part of our youth ministry?

This is an important question. Often, “recruiting,” is the operative word when we attempt to “fill spots,” “get leaders,” “build the team,” or let’s be honest... survive. Volunteers are vital for any ministry to be healthy. More importantly, there is theological priority for calling people to use their gifts for serving a needy church (Christ’s body) and a needy world (Christ’s love).

A leader must be mindful of their volunteers’ entry point. What *exactly* is a volunteer entering in to? I’d like to suggest that there are multiple entry points that should be considered...

### **Volunteers enter our view**

I’ll admit it. There have been times that I have recruited someone to volunteer in our ministry, and once they were “in,” they often fell off my radar screen of attention, as I focused on the next person or event. The temptation for youth leaders is to act like a college recruiter. We attempt to sell potential volunteers on all the benefits of the ministry by telling them how perfect they are for the role, while moving them to tears with stories of hell-bound teenagers coming to Jesus who now act like perfect angels. Right.

Once a person moves from “potential volunteer” to just “volunteer,” it’s tempting to think they’re set to go and we’re on to the next thing on the “to do” list. Ironically, the new volunteer gets abandoned when they get connected to the ministry!

As youth leaders, let’s make sure they remain on our view by...

- Keeping them informed. Assume that the new volunteer knows very little about your youth ministry culture. Nothing cuts through volunteer ambiguity and anxiety than good communication.
- Keeping them in sight. Make it your practice to spend extra time with your newer volunteers. Call them, talk with them, ask them questions, tell them that volunteering is a process, not a position.
- Keeping them cared for. Connect them with your veteran volunteers for additional support, but don’t stop doing the previous suggestions.

### **Volunteers enter the life of the youth ministry**

If we believe that ministry is dynamically changing, we must embrace the reality that any volunteer who enters the ministry... changes the ministry. As leaders, we must be prepared for this and be aware that volunteers do not fill a slot, but infect a community. In light of a volunteer’s “infection” upon entry, youth leaders guide their entry by...

- Asking the tough questions of potential volunteers. Our recruiting mentality changes when we think of someone infecting the youth ministry rather than filling a slot. You can “remove” someone from a slot who doesn’t work. You need to recover from a bad infection. Be slow to bring in new volunteers. Ask the right questions. Seek the counsel of others. Protect everyone.
- Helping volunteers discover their unique connection to the body. While they may see themselves as a “small group leader,” we must help them discover what kind of small group leader they might become. This means giving them enough guidance to integrate into the body and enough freedom to be themselves. Ultimately people should be invited into the volunteer community for who they are more than what they do.

### **Volunteers enter their world**

Often volunteers think that they are volunteering to change a life. We need to help them see that that the life that may change the most... may be their own. As youth leaders, we can help them enter their own self-reflection by...

- Asking them what they are discovering about themselves before we ask them about what they’re “accomplishing.”
- Allowing safe space for them to share their excitement, fears, and doubts.
- Offering them high expectations and high support in their journey. As youth leaders, we want to inspire our volunteers to be godly, loving, risk-taking people who enter into faith-stretching circumstances and so we will resist bailing them out when things get tough, but we also will remain committed to cheering them on through the beautiful and the difficult times.

### **Volunteers enter your world**

When a volunteer enters the youth ministry, be ready for them to enter your world, too. Often a volunteer enters into your youth ministry because of the group’s image or your reputation. Quickly, a volunteer gets an up-close view of the good, the bad, and the ugly... in you. Allow volunteers to see the “very real” by bringing them closer through...

- Giving them freedom to ask questions. Questions like, “Why do you do it that way?” will be answered out of our own fear, defensiveness, or openness to change. Often, the biggest obstacle toward volunteer transparency, authenticity, and unity... is the youth pastor. If you want to know how transparent you are, look at your volunteers.
- Remembering that any evaluation of a volunteer begins with your own leadership. One of the first questions I ask when I meet with a volunteer is, “How and I doing leading you?” Good leadership isn’t afraid of receiving feedback from volunteers, and taking it to heart. Volunteers aren’t called to execute the youth pastor’s vision, but to make meaning of an ever-changing vision as volunteers, families, and students move in and out of the

community. Volunteers are our eyes and our pulse takers. Let them enter in, get close, and give the feedback we desperately need.

- Being willing to change. Allowing volunteers to enter in, will shape us, change us, and make us better leaders. If you sense yourself resisting this, you may want to ask yourself, “Why?”

A healthy youth ministry body is one where there is intentionality for all to enter in through all these dimensions. Volunteers have an infecting effect that will shape us. I believe that if we are committed to our volunteers’ entry points, we can infect the world that’s craving a truly embodied gospel.

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