



## How to Reward Volunteers

Volunteers can be both the easiest and hardest team members to encourage and show appreciation to. They are “easy” to encourage because often their expectations aren’t very high (with the exception of adolescent volunteers!) and therefore any positive communication is received well.

But volunteers are also difficult to show appreciation to, for a variety of reasons. First, they often aren’t around very often. They may come to help weekly, monthly or just for special events. And when they are present, there is usually plenty of work to do and the supervisor is busy managing lots of people. Second, unless they have been volunteering for a long time (which is the exception rather than the rule), the person(s) who are supervising don’t typically get to know the individual volunteers very well. So you don’t know how best to encourage them.

We have found that a very beneficial experience is for organizations, as part of their orientation for volunteers, to give the MBA Inventory and then introduce the appreciation languages concept. We have successfully used this as part of the “kick-off” process at the beginning of the organization’s service year\* (for example, in the fall at the beginning of the school year). It immediately communicates to your volunteers that you value them and want to know how to encourage them in their service.

### Practical Suggestions

But if you need some short fill-in-the-gap suggestions of how to encourage and show support to your volunteers, here is a list of suggestions of actions you can implement right away:

- \* Give positive verbal encouragement to them frequently.
- \* Tell them “thanks” often and immediately.
- \* Reinforce positive behaviors you want others to emulate.
- \* Use people as positive examples – tell stories about them.
- \* Praise them in front of team members or the people they are serving.
- \* Learn their name and use it.
- \* Go and talk with them as they arrive and show up at the end before they leave.
- \* Look them in the eye when talking to them.
- \* Give them clear instructions and standards for what is expected for a “job well done” and then give them encouragement as they try to meet the standard set.

- \* Ask or assess what they are good at, and what they like to do. If possible, match their abilities and interests with similar tasks.
- \* Work along side of them.
- \* Find out about them personally while serving with them.
- \* Ask if there is anything they need that would help their work go better.
- \* Give them a small gift that has the organization's logo or tagline on it (but make sure it is something they need or value), giving them more of a sense of connection with the organization.
- \* Have volunteers work together in small teams rather than individually.
- \* Provide snacks and refreshments during or after their time of service.
- \* Spend some individual time with them. Give them an opportunity to ask you questions about the organization and your role in the organization.
- \* Give them a vision of how what they are doing ties into the broader goals of the organization and helps you toward what you are trying to accomplish.
- \* For organizations that have a lot of volunteers and supervising them is a major part of your organization's activity, having your staff go through the *5 Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace* training series can be an excellent way to increase your retention rate of volunteers. Go to <http://www.mbainventory.com/> for more information.

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