

BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE VOLUNTEER TEAM

Building a sustainable team is much like constructing a dry-stone wall. There are lots of modern ways of marking out a boundary... electric fences, barbed wire, fence panels, but all of them are expensive and/or temporary. Traditional dry-stone walls are built using natural materials that are found locally. Whilst they need regular maintenance, they are a long-term sustainable option that costs very little. Each individual stone is carefully chosen and placed in just the right space. Every stone is vital, from the big foundation stones to the hidden tie stones that hold the wall together. Dry-stone walling is a forgotten craft in many communities, quick and expensive methods have taken its place. A beautifully constructed dry-stone wall lasts for generations, and the longer it exists the more it teems with life.

Here are 5 simple Top Tips for building a sustainable team in your Parish / Community

1. THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

Absolutely everyone has a role to play. Break the ministry down into specific and needed tasks and roles (e.g. fundraising, listening, prayer support, baking, driving, refreshments...). Ensure the tasks and roles are real and valued, not tokenistic. There is richness in diversity, so think outside the box. In what ways can older members of the Church and community engage? What about young people? People with disabilities? Who is God calling, and why is He calling them?

2. CREATE A POSITIVE ATMOSPHERE

Enjoy being together as a team and getting to know one another. Rather than exhaust your team by producing more and more activities and events, remember to allow time to simply gather for food and fellowship. Jesus said (in John 13v35) "by this they will know that you are my disciples, how you love one another". A sincere and loving atmosphere takes time to develop, but is vital, because it sets the tone for the whole ministry... and is naturally infectious.

3. GOOD RELATIONSHIPS CHANGE EVERYTHING

When the relationships are warm and welcoming, the resulting natural synergy creates sparks that naturally ignite creativity, passion and long-term commitment. Rather than feeling like a burden, chore or obligation, volunteering can become the best part of the week! For example, it is ever so easy to dive straight into a group or activity without stopping to ask your team "How was your day? Do you need to be at home with your family tonight?". Be attentive and care deeply for your team, create a sense of family, and help people to flourish in their role.

4. ADAPT THE LANGUAGE

Often people plead for help from the front of Church in an apologetic way which gives the impression that the ministry is on the back foot – no-one wants to join a sinking ship! Whilst being authentic and truthful, do also be positive and excited about why it is good to be involved. Reframe questions and requests, whether spoken or written, so that they are aspirational, visionary and full of hope. Be real about the challenges and the call to serve Jesus sacrificially, but also be positive about the very many blessings that flow from being involved. Be creative and invitational, rather than rigid and obligational. For example, rather than asking 'Who can help us fill the Children's Ministry Rota?', simply start by asking 'Would anyone like to make hot chocolate?'

5. TRY BEFORE YOU BUY

Some volunteers fear that if they agree to help they are 'signing up for life'. Why not have an open evening, or an opportunity for people to come and have a go (still within Safeguarding good practice). For example, when it comes to building a Youth Ministry Team often people are surprised at how good it is to simply spend time with young people, and discover that they're not just "not scary", in fact they're often nicer than adults!