

Do You Know What You're Doing?!

by Karen Kogler

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“I volunteered to bring refreshments and make coffee for the meeting. I found out later I was also expected to be the babysitter. After a couple times alone with 30 kids, many of them uncontrollable, I couldn't wait to get out of there.”

“When we came to this church from our old church, I was so tired from everything I'd done there, I made up my mind I was not going to get involved and no one could make me!”

What do these comments have to do with mission and outreach? Mission is the core purpose of the church. Volunteers are the core workers of the church, vastly outnumbering professional church workers. For a church serious about the Great Commission, productive volunteers who are happy and content are vital. Such a church can't afford volunteers who are angry, frustrated, burned-out and turned-off.

Interestingly, the above comments were made last weekend by two people during their training as ministry orientation leaders in their congregation, volunteers who would get to know new members and invite them to consider ministry opportunities in the church. Despite their previous negative experiences, both were excited about this new ministry. They had been selected based on their spiritual gifts, had been personally invited and had received a ministry position description, detailing the responsibilities of the task.

Many factors are important if a church wishes to equip and support their volunteers, rather than use them up. One factor is rather simple and often overlooked or underused: the job description. It's been said, “Well begun is half done.” And a job description is a major part of a good beginning. Would you agree to a salaried position without knowing the pay, benefits, hours or responsibilities? Before giving up their valuable free time, people want to know those basics, too.

What does a job description do? And how does this help mission?

Focus on purpose: Why is this job worth doing? Our time is too valuable to give to busy work. A job description should emphasize the purpose of the task, showing how it supports the purpose of the congregation. A side benefit: determining the purpose of the many tasks done at church might help us decide which are really worth doing.

Spell out the details. You don't sign a contract without knowing the details. Wise people know the details before they commit to a task: the hours needed, the length of the commitment, the actual duties. Be completely honest. The result is less

burnout and more willing volunteers.

Include qualifications and benefits. By including the qualifications needed, you end up with better matches between volunteers and tasks. You may still have unqualified people express an interest in a position; be ready to lovingly guide them to more appropriate tasks. By adding the benefits a volunteer receives through that task, you may well peak the interest of someone who otherwise would pass up the opportunity.

If the finished job descriptions simply sit in a file or on a hard drive somewhere, they do no good or, worse, raise expectations without satisfying them. Don't bother to write job descriptions without a plan to use them! Update them, at least annually, by the people who know the job best—those doing it. Make them conveniently available (print and/or website) to new members and others who might want to browse the opportunities. Commit to never recruiting for any open position without a job description in hand. If you really want to commit to excellence in mission, include the job descriptions as part of annual review meetings between each volunteer and their supervisor, to address the topic: How can we do this better?

Want to share how your church is using job descriptions? Email your comments to karen.kogler@cui.edu and we'll create a section for them on our website.