



# Volunteer Retention and Preventing Volunteer Burnout

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## Retention



"A bit of nurturing and he should grow into the job nicely."



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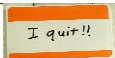
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## Why do Volunteers Leave?

- It's not because of swag...
- Time pressure/lack of flexibility
- Feeling ineffective or underutilized
- Emotional exhaustion / cumulative grief
- Poor communication or lack of feedback
- Feeling invisible or disconnected from impact
- Role mismatch or unclear expectations



3

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## Mentoring Programs

- Utilize Seasoned volunteers (create criteria)
- "Try before you Buy"
- Increase confidence
- Check in calls during first 90 days
- Creates "promotional" opportunities for volunteers
- Reinforces good habits early on
- Reduce early attrition



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## Competency Evaluations

- At hire and regular intervals
- Assesses skills and knowledge



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## Continuing Education

- Great retention tool
- Presentations by clinical staff or other team members
- Involve Community Partners
- Combine volunteers with existing staff education
- Structured courses that expand roles
  - Vigil, Doulas, Music & Caregiving, Bedside Art, Pet Evaluations



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## Opportunities to Connect

- Hospice volunteering is isolating
- Create opportunities for community, socialization and sharing
- Death Cafes



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## Connect them to the Mission

- Town Hall Meetings
- Memorials
- Newsletter articles



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## Celebrate Them!

- What do you celebrate?
- Who is involved in the celebration?
- Awards nominations
- Milestones and Special Days
- How do they want celebrated?
  - We often are on autopilot and keep doing the same thing



9

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### Make Things Easy & Accessible

- Increase digital processes
- Easy to navigate website
- Capture interest quickly
- Response time goals for prospects
- Self Scheduling/Sign Ups
- Off hours/virtual trainings
- Self Studies
- Virtual Volunteer Opportunities



10

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### Hire Smart!

- Not everyone who expresses interest is a good volunteer candidate or fit for your agency
- Thorough vetting processes up front can help future retention issues.
- Network with local nonprofits to refer volunteers



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### Retention isn't always Necessary

- Have a volunteer disciplinary policy
- "Clean the Closet" annually
- Understand ROI of a volunteer
- Respect your time and energy



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### Volunteer Pathways

- Right Role, Right Time
- Create offramps (not just LOA)
- Normalize role changes over time
- Create lower intensity roles
- When commitment outgrows capacity, burnout occurs.



13

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### Early Signs of Burnout

- Overstepping Role Boundaries
- Rescuer behaviors
- Increasing availability
- Emotionally numb
- Cynical
- Avoiding Check Ins



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### Boundaries & Burnout

- Is boundary training part of orientation?
- What policies exist around volunteering with someone who is already a friend?
- What safeguards are there so volunteers do not take on too much?
- How is volunteer workload monitored/measured?
- What supports are available to volunteers?
- Can volunteers shift roles within the organization easily?
- How up front are you about what volunteering entails?
- Regular Check Ins
- Flexible Scheduling/Self Scheduling



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### Boundaries & Burnout

- <https://tobijohnson.com/2013-preventing-volunteer-burnout-new-research-with-paul-clarke/>
- Provide breaks during shifts.
- Look for ways to create meaningful experiences.
- Encourage volunteers to try new things.
- Be supportive and open to communication.
- Try to identify the source of burnout.
- Allow volunteers to take time off.



16

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### Psychological Safety for Volunteers

- Can volunteers speak up when something is wrong?
- Can volunteers admit uncertainty or overwhelm
- Do leaders role model boundaries?
- Is taking a break OK?
- Is it really OK to say no?



17

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### Leader Self Audit

- Who are the 5 people I rely on the most?
- When was the last time I encouraged someone to do less?
- Do I measure volunteer hours or volunteer well being?
- When someone disengages do I ask why?



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### Coping with Volunteer Burnout

- Encourage them to reflect on what caused it
- Encourage self care
- Support LOA or reduced workload
- Mitigate by talking about it up front in training
- Stop asking the same people who always say yes
- It's OK to say "no"



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### Coping with Volunteer Burnout

**For the self-sufficient** - use a personal planner or calendar. Give yourself a fixed set of hours each month, scheduled in advance, and stick to it. Even if you fudge a little, you'll see a marked improvement in both your bandwidth and vigor.

**For the other-reliant** - create a personal 'board.' Be accountable to a few other volunteers, ideally from outside the main group you volunteer with and/or the region you are in. Keep tabs on each other, to make sure you're getting enough downtime and not overcommitting.

**For the over-achiever** - do both. We're talking to you board members, chapter leaders, and folks volunteer running conservation causes all by yourselves. You'll be glad for the structure (not, *restrictions*) of the planner and for the help from the board. Your causes are especially dependent on your avoidance of burnout. You do your cause no favors by thinking "I'll be fine."



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### Coping with Volunteer Burnout

Please rate the following self-descriptive statements according to the above scale:

1. My standards of performance seem higher than most other people that I work with.
2. I consider myself to be extremely dedicated and committed to the mission of my volunteer work.
3. I seem to want more intense interactions in my life than most other people believe.
4. Others tend to see me as highly competent.
5. I tend to be more of an emotional person than an intellectual, rational person.
6. I feel generally admired by my peers.
7. I consider myself to be a high energy person.
8. I have difficulty seeing others' needs and expectations.
9. I tend to be more self-critical than self-accepting.
10. I believe that if I simply try hard enough, I will reach my goals.
11. I would describe myself more as an over-achiever than a moderate person.
12. Once I reach a goal, I typically lose the thrill of having achieved it and quickly set my sights on another goal.
13. I think of myself as persuasive.
14. Though others may not, I think of myself as an impatient person.
15. I have trouble delegating tasks that I enjoy but know that others could carry out just as well or almost as well as I do.

**Scoring Key:**  
 15-20 — low potential to burnout  
 26-32 — moderate potential to burnout  
 38-75 — high potential to burnout



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