

CHAPTER 14: HOW TO MOTIVATE VOLUNTEERS

As a new leader of a statewide or local young lawyers division, one of your first questions may be “how do I get young lawyers involved in our association”? Essentially, what you are trying to figure out is how best you can motivate volunteers to give their time and energy to your association. How to motivate volunteers is something that every leader faces. What follows are ten strategies to try:

1. **Delegate, delegate, delegate.** We’ve all heard it before, but you have to implement this strategy to keep volunteers motivated. Active bar associations need active people. You may think you have the energy to do everything, but your members will feel unneeded and unimportant to the organization if you do not call upon their skills and abilities.

2. **Delegate up, not just down.** Be careful not to just delegate grunt work. Share responsibility and give your volunteers an opportunity to shine. Just because you are the association’s chair does not mean you have to make all the calls. Defer some decision-making authority to your directors and committee heads. Not only will your volunteers be grateful to you for your confidence in them, but your association will flourish with ready-made leaders.

3. **Have reasonable expectations.** Listen to your volunteer when he/she tells you to what they want to devote their time and how much time they have to offer. If someone volunteers to help out with a small, discrete project, then give him/her a small and discrete project. Not everyone wants to chair a committee or take a leading role, so don’t scare a volunteer away by only giving him/her that option. If, on the other hand, someone indicates they would like to initiate a new project, by all means, give them the reins and let them go for it. No matter how much time you put into your bar association, remember that you are probably not the norm. Be reasonable in what you expect from your volunteers.

4. **Chance for Recognition.** Why get involved in a bar association? Let’s face it, it is not always easy to get recognized as a young associate in a law firm. However, with just a little effort, a young lawyer can get recognized for their contributions in carrying out a bar event. Give your volunteers an opportunity to work and make sure they get the recognition they deserve in your affiliate’s newsletter or via the bar’s communications staff.

5. **Give people a reason to go to your event.** Many times members are put in the position of justifying their bar involvement to their employers. Make it easy on your members and volunteers to be involved by making sure that you (1) give them a reason to attend your event or program, and (2) publicize what that reason is. Whether it’s a great presentation, CLE credits, free food, or networking opportunities, sell your organization by offering value so that members can in turn sell their involvement to their employers. (And then, of course, deliver on your promise.) Make efforts to let young lawyers meet each other and learn each other’s practice areas. Plan events that encourage interaction between young lawyers and other professional associations such as accountants and bankers.

6. **Spread the Wealth.** The successful affiliate leader will recognize the importance of having a pool of volunteers ready to work. Guess what? Some volunteers will be more

productive or interested than others. Plan accordingly but give opportunities to work depending upon the difficulty of the assignment.

7. **Acknowledge volunteers' successes.** Be sure to acknowledge your volunteers' efforts. You can do this by sending them a personal thank-you note, running a thank-you column in your bar publication, thanking them at a regular meeting, or acknowledging them at a larger, social or annual meeting. You can also send a letter to that volunteer's employer informing them of your gratitude for that volunteer's contributions. But only do this after you've asked your volunteer to whom the letter should be directed and gotten the OK from the volunteer to do so. (Unfortunately not everyone's employer is supportive of bar association activity, and the last thing you want to do is put your volunteer in the hot seat.)

8. **Personal Touch.** How did you first get involved with the bar association? Whether at the local, state, or national level, chances are you got involved because someone suggested you get involved. What a great way for your affiliate to get new volunteers. Suggest your volunteers bring a young lawyer with them to events. Have your leaders personally call potential members to get them to an event. And, most importantly, make sure your new members have a contact person at the events to make them feel comfortable.

9. **Using the Senior Bar.** Look around at the leaders of your senior bar; chances are many of the leaders today got their start in your association's young lawyers division. Generally, these leaders look forward to the opportunity of working with your volunteers. Seek out these leaders to meet your members and let them know the value of bar association work. These leaders can truly make a strong impression upon your volunteers.

10. **Appreciate Mailbox Members.** No matter how good your YLS programs are, the reality is that many of your members will not become active volunteers. Not all is lost however. As an affiliate leader, you should still love these members. While they may not volunteer, they remain a critical part of your association. To keep these members, design your publications to be relevant and interesting for these lawyers by emphasizing on practice issues.

CONCLUSION

All of our organizations depend on member participation to be successful. As leaders in those organizations, we all face the challenging task of motivating and retaining our members. Hopefully these tips give you some helpful ideas to think about in rising to that challenge. If the Affiliate Assistance Team can be of service to you or your organization on this topic, please let us know. We would be happy to visit your organization to present strategies for motivating volunteers.

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