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# Informal Volunteer Recognition

## Creating a Culture of Appreciation

By John L. Lipp

# Self-Instruction Guide

for Individuals and Teams



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## IDEAL AUDIENCE FOR THIS GUIDE

This Guide has been written particularly for:

- Staff (regardless of title) with responsibility for planning and developing specific projects that involve volunteers and who want to understand their role in recognizing volunteers.
- Volunteer program managers (carrying all the responsibilities of this position) who want to understand how to recognize volunteers effectively.
- Volunteers in leadership roles who want to learn more about the principles and practices of leading their fellow volunteers effectively.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing this seminar and discussing its content, participants will be able to:

- Explain the difference between formal and informal recognition, and why informal recognition is essential.
- Understand how a volunteer's motivational orientation affects how a volunteer responds to different types of informal recognition.
- Know how to relate different methods of informal recognition to the intensity of different types of volunteer assignments.
- Provide meaningful recognition for both short-term and long-term volunteers.
- Implement several ways to recognize volunteers informally and begin to build a culture of appreciation.

## HOW TO USE THESE SELF-INSTRUCTION GUIDES

*Everyone Ready*® selects a several-page chapter, excerpt, or article from a respected source, often fresh material just published or newly revised, to become the “Featured Reading” on the chosen topic for each Self-Instruction Guide.

Read or complete each section of the Guide *in the sequence presented*. The order of the elements matters to the success of the learning experience. First, you will find preparatory information that sets the topic into context and a pre-reading self-assessment. Then the Featured Reading(s) are presented.

The Additional Perspectives following the Featured Reading(s) updates and expands the original writing and has been developed specifically for *Everyone Ready* participants. In addition, further resources, ways to test your understanding, and a post-reading self-assessment are included.

**Recommendation:** Consider forming a study group or learning team so that you benefit from the synergy of discussing the material with others in your program. Sharing your ideas aloud reinforces the learning and lays the groundwork for actually implementing many of the ideas developed.

## PRE-READING ASSESSMENT

Before you start to read, answer the questions below to see how much you know about this subject now.

1. List 3 ways reward systems can affect volunteer retention.

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I'm not sure of any.

2. The difference between formal recognition and informal recognition is...

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I'm not sure.

3. My organization validates the unique contributions of volunteers as well as recognizing their accomplishments.

yes       no       I'm not sure of the difference.

4. I can list at least a dozen specific and no-cost ways to show appreciation to volunteers.

yes       no

5. I understand how to relate methods of informal recognition to the intensity of different types of volunteer assignments.

yes       no       not sure

6. I understand how a volunteer's motivations affect how she or he responds to different types of recognition.

yes       no       not sure

7. Ways to provide meaningful recognition for both short-term and long-term volunteers include...

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I'm not sure how.

8. I see the connection between recognizing volunteers and recognizing *employees*.

yes       no       not sure

## UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES

### Formal versus Informal Recognition

Every year, organizations around the world take advantage of their country's version of National Volunteer Week and the enhanced publicity that comes with it, hosting lunches, dinners, teas, ice cream socials, etc., etc. in honor of their volunteers. These events usually entail some combination of the "FAS" equation—food, awards, and speeches—and are often the cornerstone of an organization's volunteer recognition efforts. Unfortunately, for many organizations, the idea of volunteer recognition starts and stops with these events. It's as if, on the giant to-do list of volunteer management, they've checked off "recognition" for another year and can move on to less time-consuming components of managing the volunteer program.

These types of events are considered *formal recognition*, meaning they are planned, institutionalized actions that happen on a repeating schedule, usually on an annual basis. As the name implies, formal recognition is something that is sanctioned by the organization and, by its very nature, often leaves little room for spontaneity. By contrast, *informal recognition* is all about the small, everyday gestures one does to express gratitude for other people. Rather than being an event that the organization arranges, it's an action initiated by a supervisor or co-worker and is more personal and spontaneous in nature. Informal recognition focuses on the unique characteristics or specific accomplishments of an individual volunteer, while formal events take a broad brushstroke to thank volunteers more generally and collectively. Such informal validations, which are always personal in nature, reinforce the vital concept that the most vibrant and resilient organizations are made up of *individuals*, coming together and sharing their unique strengths.

### Appreciation versus Recognition

Furthermore, it is also important to give both *appreciation* and *recognition*. Appreciation expresses "thank you" for time and effort, which can be done in a variety of formal and informal ways. Recognition, with its root "cognition," conveys the message that one is mindful of and values the unique contributions made by a volunteer. For example, publishing a volunteer's name on a report acknowledges his/her specific work, and asking for volunteer feedback values a volunteer's unique perspective.

### A Culture of Appreciation

By combining both formal and informal methods of recognition, an organization can create a "culture of appreciation" in which both volunteers and paid staff feel respected and valued for their contributions. They feel a deeper sense of connection to the organization and its mission. This results in increased retention, improved quality of work and, ultimately, a more pleasant work environment for both volunteers and employees.

This Guide looks at the art of informal volunteer recognition and explores a multitude of ways to create a culture of appreciation that can boost the morale of volunteers and paid staff.

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT AS YOU READ

- Does my organization's management show appreciation for the work I do? If yes, what specific things do they do to make me feel appreciated? If no, what could they do?
- Have I consciously made an effort to recognize volunteers who report to me? Have I consciously made an effort to recognize all of the volunteers I see at work, even those who do not directly report to me?
- Is there something I can do today to let an individual volunteer know how much I appreciate what he or she brings to our organization?
- What is my role in creating a "culture of appreciation" at our organization?

## Featured Readings

### FEATURED READING 1

Excerpted from Chapter 13 in *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Recruiting and Managing Volunteers* by John L. Lipp, ALPHA/Penguin Group Inc., © 2009, pp. 189-200.

#### *How to Say Thank You and Really Show It*

Recognition is one of my favorite topics. Unless you're a scrooge at heart (in which case working with volunteers probably isn't the best place for your talents!), it's personally rewarding to let other people know just how special they are and what a great job they're doing. Saying thanks, and doing it through a variety of creative words and actions, is one of the most effective ways to retain a team of dedicated volunteers.

At the same time, most volunteers will tell you that recognition is one of the least important factors motivating them to continue serving for a particular organization or cause. I've heard more than one volunteer say, "Sure, it's nice to be recognized, but it's not why I'm here." Ironically, those are the first volunteers to complain about "not being appreciated" and "taken for granted" and "doing all the work" as they hit the parking lot on their way home.

The bottom line: no matter what people say, they *do* need to be recognized for their contributions and talents. Wanting to feel appreciated is human nature, and it's one of the fundamental principles of working with volunteers.

#### **Creating a Culture of Thanks**

I call it a culture of thanks. It's that feeling you get when you enter an organization where people seem happy and you can feel positive energy everywhere. There might not be brass bands playing or cheerleaders waving pompoms from the sidelines, but still you know this is a place where people are doing things they enjoy and they want to be there.

Creating a culture of thanks is a key value of an organization that believes in actively rewarding people for their accomplishments. Creating a culture of thanks isn't a single action, but the culmination of several gestures.

People who are most successful at managing large groups of other people are those who understand that we all need positive affirmations. Managers in for-profit companies with paid employees often think that pay raises are the be-all and end-all for showing appreciation. While money can be a powerful motivator, it is often way down the list of what makes a company a good place to work. Since money is always off the table for people who manage volunteers, we are way ahead of the game in understanding all the other things one can do to recognize and appreciate their people.

Organizations that thrive share many common strategies and approaches to recognition. Most important, these groups recognize that creating a culture of thanks is an ongoing process that happens through every stage of a volunteer's involvement. It's not a single party (although those can be very cool and effective!) or an annual award, or even a week of special events tied to National Volunteer Week. Instead, it's all the things you do on a daily basis to make volunteers feel welcome, part of the team, and connected to the group.

#### ***Inspired Service***

*Every year the Points of Light Institute selects a week - usually the third or fourth week of April - to honor volunteers. National Volunteer Week is also connected with the President's Volunteer Service Awards, and there is usually some national and local press around this week as well. It's not a bad idea to tie into all the public goodwill around National Volunteer Week and honor your own volunteers, too. For more information and dates of upcoming National Volunteer Week celebrations, check out [www.pointsoflight.org](http://www.pointsoflight.org).*

## Featured Readings

### Recognition Is Everyone's Responsibility

One of the challenges that people who manage volunteers feel is a sense of isolation. Too often they hear the phrase "your volunteers" and get the sense that anything to do with the volunteers rests squarely on their shoulders.

Even if you are a volunteer yourself and are responsible for leading other volunteers, chances are you've had the same experience. While other people may pay lip service to the value of volunteers, they are reluctant to step up and actively support the program.

Volunteer recognition is one area where it is essential to involve everyone. There is nothing more demoralizing than a volunteer appreciation party where the organization's leaders (whether they're paid staff or other volunteers) don't attend. It makes the volunteers who roll up their sleeves and do the hands-on work of the organization feel like an afterthought. They end up questioning the organization's leadership and how much they "really understand" the importance of the volunteers. What was meant to inspire people to continue serving often ends up with people feeling it may be time to move on to another organization or cause where they hope to be more appreciated.

#### *Inspired Service*

*Consider putting up a sign in your office that says, "What have you done today to let our volunteers know how great they are?"*

The good news is that planning and implementing volunteer recognition can be fun, and it can be a great way to involve an organization's leadership in all aspects of the program. When people sit down and start discussing all the remarkable accomplishments of an organization's

volunteers, they begin to understand the complexities of what it takes to lead so many people. Often times these planning meetings will lead into discussions of not just "how do we thank our volunteers?" but "how do we make their experience better?" Asking and answering that question is the ultimate expression of volunteer recognition.

Finally, involving your leadership group in planning volunteer recognition can also be a good team-building exercise. It tends to be a noncontroversial topic that leads to a concrete plan with specific actions. When an organization's leadership focuses on recognition of others, they also tend to start appreciating each other. This culture of thanks begins to permeate the organization from the top down, and the words "thank you" become a much more common refrain.

### One Size Doesn't Fit All

It's important to keep in mind that one's idea of a volunteer reward may be another's embarrassment. Some people love it when others take them out to lunch on their birthday and the whole restaurant breaks into a rousing songfest. Others view this as about as much fun as having a tooth pulled (without the Novocain!) and find it an excruciating experience.

It's critical to make sure your volunteer-recognition efforts include elements that will appeal to the variety of people who make up your program.

#### *Volunteer Wisdom*

*The happy phrasing of a compliment is one of the rarest of human gifts and the happy delivery of it another. - Mark Twain*

...Volunteers serve for a multitude of reasons. These same individual preferences also drive how they feel about recognition and how effective it is at making them feel connected to your organization.

Those motivated by affiliation are going to want the opportunity for as much social interaction as possible when being recognized. Think the three P's: parties, potlucks, and people!

Achievers are going to want to be validated for their actual accomplishments. Think the three A's: awards, articles, and action.

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Power people are going to want to be acknowledged for their leadership. Think the three I's: influence, impact, and visibility. (Okay, visibility doesn't start with an "I," but there's an "I" in it, and power people always see the "I" first in everything they do.)

### ***Inspired Service***

*You should know your volunteers well enough to know what kind of recognition would best suit their personality. For example, if one of your superstar volunteers hates being in the spotlight, then avoid flashy public expressions of gratitude and instead take him out to lunch - just the two of you. It will mean a lot to him that you personalized your recognition efforts and kept him out of a personally embarrassing situation.*

### **Ongoing Recognition**

While hosting an annual volunteer party provides an opportunity for formal recognition, equally as important are the things you do on a daily basis to show appreciation. These daily gestures can have a big impact on your volunteer retention rate. The following examples of informal recognition are things you can do regularly to show your volunteers how much you appreciate their contributions.

When volunteers come in for their shift, stop what you're doing, walk up to them, and, with a smile (avoid those big fake smiles!), welcome them and ask them how they are

doing. And then stop and really listen.

If you are working on a writing project or a design piece or anything that could really benefit by having a second pair of eyes review it, ask a few volunteers if they wouldn't mind taking a few minutes to look at your draft and give you feedback. And when they do, pay close attention to their remarks.

At the end of your day, leave a volunteer a phone message or e-mail saying something to the effect, "I'm just finishing up today and reviewing everything we've accomplished. I just want let you know how much I appreciate everything you do to support our cause and how much you contribute to our success."

Take photographs of volunteers on the job and be creative in sharing them in print, via e-mail, on a bulletin board, on your web page, or through snail mail with a personal note.

Forward interesting articles related to your work to your volunteers with a little note: "Thought you might find this article interesting. Maybe we can discuss when I see you next."

Periodically ask volunteers about other organizations they volunteer for and what that experience is like for them.

Buy better coffee for the office. Bringing in a variety of snacks on an occasional basis, including healthy choices like fresh fruit in season, is also a nice touch. The bottom line: food is the favorite four-letter "F" word of volunteer managers everywhere!

Recognize a volunteer's birthday or anniversary of service with a card or a mini-office celebration. (Who doesn't like to take a 15-minute break in the afternoon to share a piece of cake or ice cream?)

Establish a volunteer advisory committee to solicit feedback from volunteers on a variety of organizational and program issues.

Encourage your organization's leadership - a program director, the agency executive director/CEO, your pastor or rabbi, a board officer - to take a few minutes to visit with volunteers on duty and engage them in a discussion

### ***Heartburn***

*It can be very embarrassing when your boss says the wrong thing to a volunteer, such as asking someone who just lost a spouse how that spouse is doing. Make sure your organization's leadership is up-to-date on what's happening in your volunteer program, and in the lives of any volunteers they will be visiting.*

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about the organization's mission and the role of volunteers. Or better yet, have them pitch in for a few minutes and work alongside the volunteers.

Say thank you after a volunteer completes a specific task and is leaving at the end of his or her shift. You can even say thank you in the middle of the shift. (To date, I've never heard of a volunteer leaving because someone said thank you one too many times!)

Be sure to say thank you to any of your peers as well. Volunteers, especially volunteers who form strong affiliative bonds with an organization, are very sensitive to office dynamics and feel best about their volunteer work when they feel the entire office is working together as a cohesive team.

[...]

### Individuals vs. the Group

Many volunteer programs struggle with how much appreciation to show individual volunteers versus the group as a whole. Arguments can be made that by focusing on individual volunteers you neglect the real value of having volunteers in the first place: the fact that it's a community coming together for a shared cause. There is also the concern that focusing on individuals can have the unintended consequence of making other volunteers feel left out or even jealous.

On the other hand, even though all volunteers are created equal, they don't all serve equally. Some give a lot more than others and truly go the extra mile for the cause. These people deserve the extra pat on the back!

The solution is to do both: make sure your recognition program celebrates individuals who serve your cause and, in recognizing those individuals, always talk about how they are part of a larger volunteer effort and emphasize the impact the overall volunteer program makes.

If you have to choose, always go for the group. Ultimately you want a sustainable volunteer program, and no program based on a single individual can survive over the long haul. You want your programs and their impact to outlive even you (as hard as that is to imagine!), and by recognizing the group and its collective achievements, you're creating a base of people to fight the good fight long after you're gone.

### Ten Other Ways to Say Thanks

Okay, here are a few more ideas to get you started down the road to integrating volunteer recognition into your organization:

1. Get name badges for your office volunteers.
2. Have an annual "Design the Volunteer T-Shirt" contest and use the winning design as that year's T-shirt for special events. Long-term volunteers will be able to wear their T-shirts from past years.
3. No budget? Ask a local company to pay for having volunteer T-shirts printed in exchange for having their logo tastefully (that means small!) printed on the shirt.
4. Have a "Volunteer of the Month" and post his or her personal story on your web page to inspire others.
5. Ask a volunteer if he or she would like to take a 15-minute coffee break with you. Of course, it works best if you buy the coffee!

#### ***Inspired Service***

*When planning your volunteer recognition efforts, don't think about what you would enjoy; instead, ask what other people would want. When managing people, it's always important to think about things from their perspective.*

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6. Create holidays in honor of your long-term office volunteers. For instance, if you have a volunteer named Adrienne who comes in every Monday like clockwork, consider making the first Monday of May (any month will work!) your Adrienne Day and celebrate accordingly. This will be fun for everybody and may just encourage the volunteer to stay on for an extra year.
7. Conference rooms, clients service areas, the kitchen, chairs, printers, computers, etc., can all be named after outstanding volunteers. (They do it for major donors, why not major volunteers!) Just be careful about naming the bathroom in honor of someone.
8. Schedule a monthly drop-in potluck for volunteers who work in the field but would like to get to know one another in a social setting. (Happy hours or coffee clatches work, too.)
9. Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper making a statement of gratitude to all of your volunteers.
10. If you send a regular newsletter to volunteers, include an "Above and Beyond" section where you publicly acknowledge individual volunteers for specific things that are well above and beyond the call of duty!

### Impacts of Showing Appreciation

Here's how to know if your volunteer recognition program is successful:

- Volunteers feel appreciated for their individual contributions to your group's mission.
- Volunteers feel a sense of pride for their collective contributions to your mission.
- The general public has an increased appreciation and understanding of your group's volunteers.
- Your group's leadership and your peers have an increased appreciation for the work of your volunteers.
- Your volunteers are motivated to continue serving and keep coming back.
- Your volunteers recruit their co-workers, friends, and family through positive word of mouth.

One of the joys of working with volunteers is having the opportunity to thank them, celebrate them, acknowledge them, and let the whole world know how lucky you are to be in the company of such great people. So don't sweat volunteer recognition. Have fun with it, be creative, and do it now! I guarantee you the culture of thanks you help to create at your organization will follow you to all aspects of your life.

### The Least You Need to Know

- From saying thank you and smiling to annual parties with cool awards, volunteer recognition is an ongoing process that ensures people feel appreciated.
- A culture of thanks involves appreciating, on a daily basis, everything people bring to your organization.
- Everyone - not just the volunteer manager - is responsible for making sure volunteers feel appreciated and respected.
- Good volunteer recognition makes sure a person feels appreciated for his or her individual contributions, as well as for being part of a larger group.
- The more creative and personal your volunteer recognition, the more effective it is.
- You can never say thank you to a volunteer too many times.

**Featured Readings****FEATURED READING 2**

Excerpted from chapter 4 in *Keeping Volunteers: A Guide to Retention* by Steve McCurley and Rick Lynch, © 2005, Fat Cat Publications, pp. 31-39.

***Making Volunteers Feel Special*****Providing Validations to Volunteers**

One method for enhancing a volunteer's sense of uniqueness is to praise them for personality traits that they possess. These validations tend to make the volunteer feel good. And, this sense of feeling appreciated makes volunteers feel connected.

A validation is a statement that praises a person's positive characteristics. Some examples of validations include:

- I admire your work ethic.
- I'm impressed at how pleasant you are after a hard day.
- You sure are smart.
- I love your sense of humor.
- You are so good at solving problems.
- I like the way you stay calm in the face of conflict.
- You are such a caring person.

Such statements can be made at any time, without the volunteer having done anything in particular. They are recognized not for the work they do but for the kind of people they are.

Validations are very powerful statements. People are not used to hearing such comments. Some of us have been trained not to make such statements to another person. Oddly, people who feel totally uncomfortable saying something like "You always come up with good ideas," have no difficulty saying "You are a brainless idiot." As a consequence, keep in mind that a little of this goes a long way; and it is easy to overdo it.

In their simplest form, validations begin with phrases such as:

- You are...
- You always...

Such statements would be followed by a positive personality trait. For example:

- You sure are smart.
- You always come up with the best ideas.
- You are the hardest worker I've ever seen.

The technical term for this approach in psychology is "altercasting," attributing a positive characteristic to someone as a way of motivating them to actually exhibit the characteristic.

Validations are even more connecting if they begin with the word "I." For example:

- I admire ...
- I'm impressed by...

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- I like ...
- I value ...
- I treasure....

Again, these phrases are followed by a mention of the trait being praised:

- I admire how pleasant you are at the end of a stressful day.
- I'm impressed by your ability to stick to a task.
- I value your keen insight.
- I like the way you keep an even temper.

Because it is likely your volunteers will not have heard many validations in their lives, you should be careful not to overdo it. But once people get used to hearing these kinds of statements from you, they might become comfortable validating each other. A mutually validating environment is one in which people feel connected and unique at the same time.

One charity executive helped this process get started by handing all of her people a list of the names of all the group members. Next to each name, she asked them to write a positive quality they perceived in that person. She then compiled the results, giving each person a list of all the positive qualities the others had identified in them. Morale instantly improved, and people became more accepting of each other as members. By knowing that the rest of the group valued their personal qualities, people were able to feel both connected and unique.

[...]

### Recognizing the Accomplishments of Volunteers

Another way to enhance a volunteer's sense of being special is to express appreciation for his or her unique contributions to the [organization]. By letting people know we appreciate their voluntary efforts on our behalf, we help them keep a sense that it is worth it to come back.

Reward systems help in a variety of ways:

1. They establish a cultural norm that fosters accomplishment and achievement.
2. They clarify expectations among new volunteers as to what might be expected of them.
3. They honor those who contribute to and help accomplish the mission of the organization.

Many [organizations] have formal programs of recognition. These sometimes have the drawback, however, of giving everyone the same token of appreciation. To really make recognition meaningful to our volunteers, we have to get to know them as individuals and express our appreciation for their efforts in a way they find satisfying. To take a minor example, if you know someone loves coffee, giving them a gift certificate to Starbucks may be an appropriate way to express your appreciation. This may not satisfy another volunteer, however, who thinks that Starbucks is a greedy corporation oppressing the world's poor.

### Matching Recognition to Types of Volunteers

Getting to know each volunteer can be difficult in large charities where no member of staff can personally know all the volunteers. In such circumstances, you might have a bit of knowledge about individuals but not enough to gauge their individual tastes and preferences. Fortunately, it is also

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possible to think about systems of volunteer recognition that are appropriate to particular types of volunteers, thus allowing a program to make educated guesses about recognition items that would be appropriate and welcomed by entire categories of volunteers.

We'll consider three different ways of thinking about providing recognition items to volunteers:

- By varying levels of intensity – daily, intermediate and major
- By motivational orientation of the volunteer – achievement, affiliation or power
- By style of volunteering – short-term or long-term

### *Levels of Intensity*

Here we match the effort we put out in recognizing the volunteer with the level of accomplishment that we are praising them for. Someone who shows up to do her work and who completes it routinely, for example, might get verbal praise such as “Thanks for coming in today.” If a volunteer brings in a million dollars to your cash starved [organization], on the other hand, she or he should be praised in a more labor-intensive way, such as putting on a banquet in his or her honor. Here are some examples of different levels of recognition activity:

Daily means of providing recognition:

- Saying “Thank you.”
- Telling volunteers they did a good job.
- Suggesting volunteers join you for coffee.
- Asking for their opinions.
- Greeting volunteers when they come in the morning.
- Showing interest in their personal interests.
- Smiling when you see them.
- Bragging about them to your boss (in their presence).
- Jotting small thank-you notes to them.
- Having a refreshment with volunteers after work.
- Saying something positive about a volunteer’s personal qualities.
- Telling volunteers what happened at the organization since their last visit.

Intermediate means of providing recognition:

- Taking volunteers to lunch.
- Providing food at volunteer meetings.
- Letting volunteers put their names on the products they produce.
- Writing them a letter of commendation (with copies to personnel file and other appropriate people.)
- Putting volunteers on important task forces or committees.
- Giving a best parking space to the “volunteer of the month.”
- Posting graphic displays, showing progress toward targets.
- Mentioning major contributors by name in your status reports to upper management.

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- Inviting volunteers to present their results to higher-ups.
- Giving volunteers permission to go to a seminar, convention, or professional meeting, if possible at the organization's expense.
- Writing articles about their performance for newsletters or newspapers.
- Having volunteers present a training session to co-workers.
- Decorating a volunteer's work area on their birthday.
- Asking your boss to write volunteers letters of thanks.
- Celebrating the major accomplishments of a volunteer.
- Letting volunteers represent you at important meetings.
- Putting their picture on the bulletin board with news of their accomplishments.
- Cutting out articles and cartoons volunteers might be interested in.
- Organizing informal chats with organization leadership.

### Major means of providing recognition:

- Making special caps, shirts, belt buckles or lapel badges honoring the group.
- Encouraging volunteers to write an article about some accomplishment at work.
- Giving a plaque, certificate, or trophy for being best employee, best crew, most improved results, etc.
- Offering tuition assistance to volunteers.
- Buying volunteers good equipment.
- Getting a volunteer's picture in the paper for outstanding accomplishment.
- Giving volunteers additional responsibilities and a new title.
- Renting newspaper space to thank volunteers.
- Putting up a banner celebrating a major accomplishment.
- Honoring a volunteer for years of service to the organization.
- Enlisting volunteers in training staff and other volunteers.
- Involving volunteers in the annual planning process.

### Motivational Orientation

...We noted that people volunteer for a variety of different reasons. Sometimes psychologists categorize those motivations into three major categories—the need for achievement, the need for affiliation, and the need for power.<sup>1</sup> For volunteers who seem to be more motivated by one of these than another, you can tailor the recognition to fit the motivational need.

#### Achievement-oriented volunteers

- Ideal recognition for this type of volunteer is additional information or more challenging tasks, such as a book on the subject area of the organization or ability to participate in advanced training sessions or work with more difficult clients

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to David McClelland's *The Achieving Society* (1961) for a full explanation of his theory of needs.

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- Work being recognized is best linked to a very specific accomplishment
- Phrasing of recognition through “Best,” “Most” awards
- Recognition decision should include “Checkpoints” or “Records”
- Awardee should be selected by respected co-workers or recognized experts

### Affiliation-oriented volunteers

- Recognition should be given at group event
- Recognition should be given in presence of peers, family, other bonded groupings
- Recognition item or award should have a “Personal Touch”
- Recognition should be organizational in nature, given by the organization, with symbols of the organization attached
- Recognition should be voted or affirmed by peers
- If primary affiliate bonding is with client, not others in the organization, then the client should take part in the recognition, through a personal note of thanks or as presenter of the award

### Power-oriented volunteers

- Key aspect of recognition is “Promotion,” conveying greater access to authority or information or a more important title or position
- Recognition item should convey status, such as a special parking space
- Recognition should be commendation from “Names,” either known in the community or from higher up in the organization
- Audience for the recognition should include higher-ups in the organization and the community
- Recognition should be announced to the community at large, put in newspaper, volunteer newsletter and Web site
- Recognition decisions should be made or ratified by the organization’s leadership

### *Style of Volunteering*

Recognition might also vary depending on whether the person is a long-term volunteer or only with [the organization] for a short time:

#### Long-term volunteer

- Recognition with and by peer group of volunteers and staff
- Recognition items make use of group symbols
- Recognition entails greater power, involvement, information about the organization – “earned” status and preference
- Presenter of recognition is a person in authority from within the organization
- Recognition is linked to success in furthering the mission of the organization

You will note strong resemblances between the long-term volunteer and the affiliation-oriented volunteer. This is because long-term volunteers commonly form strong affiliative bonds with the organization, its cause, and with volunteers and other co-workers.

## Featured Readings

### Short-term volunteer

- Recognition is given in immediate work unit or social group
- Recognition is “portable,” something the volunteers can take with them when they leave – a present, photograph or other memorabilia of experience, or training that may benefit them in another setting, etc.
- Recognition is provided via home or work – letter to employer, church, or family
- Presenter is either the immediate supervisor of the volunteer or the client with whom a relationship has been formed

The short-term volunteer is interested in very different forms of recognition, primarily those not directly connected as much to the organizational structure as to what is accomplished through volunteering or what volunteering there might mean for the volunteer. Zappala, Parker and Green (2001) comment:

*Recognition for individual volunteers is therefore less about awards for years of service (the ‘gold watch’ approach) and more about providing feedback to the individual about the outcomes achieved through their project-based volunteering.*

[...]

### Last Thoughts on Volunteer Recognition

Volunteer Program Managers have a tendency to think of volunteer recognition as something that is “done” by the volunteer program or the [organization]. In reality, a true feeling of recognition is much more complex, and is more dependent upon one’s perception of the attitudes of those around you.

A study done by the Strategic Volunteering Advisory Group in Vancouver (2001) among volunteers at a low-income downtown shelter community illustrates this principle:

*Volunteer coordinators discussed formal volunteer appreciation (dinners, outings, etc.) at some length. However, that was a topic that was not once mentioned by volunteers.*

*When volunteers felt appreciated, they mostly mentioned day-to-day feedback on their work, as well as ‘feeling like a staff member.’ They also expressed not feeling appreciated, for example that their experience was not being taken seriously by staff...for volunteers, day-to-day, on-the-spot appreciation and recognition is most important. That includes a feeling that they have a voice and are taken seriously. When volunteers feel – realistically or unrealistically – that this type of appreciation and recognition is not occurring throughout the year, they may see formal volunteer appreciation as something superficial or artificial.*

*What needs to be done is as little as watching out for work well done, for good team work, for a great attitude, and then commenting on it.*

Vineyard (2001) sums this up neatly:

*Recognition must be an attitude that permeates the entire planning and implementation efforts throughout the year. It is far more than pins, plaques and certificates...*

## ASK THE TRAINER SPECIFIC QUESTIONS



Trainer John Lipp

### *Q&A Discussion Board for Full Program Members*

Many *Everyone Ready* participants ask “But, how does all this relate to *my* situation?”

The Discussion Board is your chance to ask specific questions related to your organization and to connect with others who may be having similar experiences.

#### **When?**

During the entire time this Guide is featured on the *Everyone Ready* Main Page, trainer John Lipp will be ready to answer any questions that you post on the Discussion Board, accessed via the left column of the *Everyone Ready* Main Page.

### **How Does the Discussion Board Work?**

1. Look for the trainer’s photo in the top center of the *Everyone Ready* Main page and select “Join the Discussion” underneath.
2. Indicate whether or not you would like to receive e-mail notifications about new questions and answers posted to the Discussion Board for this topic.
3. The Discussion Board window will appear.
4. Select a “thread” (a particular topic) to read and respond to, or start a new thread (if you have a completely different issue to discuss).
5. Follow the directions on the screen to post a response or question.
6. The trainer will respond via the Discussion Board within 48 hours. If you’ve signed up to receive notifications, you’ll get a direct e-mail with the answer, and your exchange will also be posted to the Discussion Board for the benefit of all participants (you will be given the option to keep the posting anonymous).

## STUDY QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR TEAM USE

- How do we implement informal recognition ideas in the most sincere and spontaneous ways, avoiding any sense that they were an afterthought?
- How can we implement informal recognition ideas for those volunteers who work off-site and never come into the office?
- As co-workers, are there things we can do to show how much we appreciate each other?
- What types of informal recognition ideas would work better for our youth volunteers? For our senior volunteers? For our volunteers who are juggling their commitment with other major time pressures such as family, work or education?

## TRY-THIS EXERCISES

### 1. Recognizing Unique Skills of On-site Volunteers

Record the names of the volunteers that you and your co-workers see on an ongoing basis. In a small group setting or in an e-mail round robin, ask each co-worker to identify a positive trait about each volunteer. Afterward, discuss each volunteer briefly and emphasize all of the positive traits that volunteers collectively bring to the organization. As a follow-up, share with each volunteer the list of positive attributes that were identified. This can be done verbally, in a note card, or even on a made-up certificate that says, "This Certificate Honors You for Just Being You and for Being (list of traits)." This is especially effective for the superstar volunteers who work directly to support staff and have made a long-term commitment to the organization and its mission.

### 2. Recognizing Volunteers from "Afar"

With your co-workers, review a list of all the active volunteers who work in your department, keeping in mind that several of these volunteers may have little contact with staff, perform their duties exclusively off-site with clients, or even be "virtual volunteers" who only interface with staff via e-mail. Assign each staff member a call-list of up to 10 volunteers and have them call each volunteer just to say "hi," check-in, and say "thanks." This can be done even as a "volunteer call-a-thon" during a scheduled period with refreshments and an opportunity for staff to report back about their experience. This should be done, at a minimum, on an annual basis.

## RESOURCES ON THIS SUBJECT

### Books (Some available from the Energize Online Bookstore)\*

Lipp, John L., *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Recruiting and Managing Volunteers*. ALPHA/Penguin Group Inc., 2009. <http://amzn.to/eLKnJ2>

McCurley, Steve and Rick Lynch. *Keeping Volunteers: A Guide to Retention*. Fat Cat Publications, 2005. Particularly chapters 5 & 8.\* <http://www.energizeinc.com/store/5-218-E-1>

McCurley, Steve and Rick Lynch. *Volunteer Management: Mobilizing All the Resources of the Community, 3rd Edition*. INTERPUB Group, 2011.\* <http://www.energizeinc.com/store/5-224-E-1>

Strategic Volunteering Advisory Group and Isabella Mori, *The Strategic Volunteering Report*, July 2001, (Vancouver: Strathcona Community Center). <http://www.vcn.bc.ca/skillsco/svreport.htm>

Vineyard, Sue. *Recognizing Volunteers and Paid Staff*. Heritage Arts Publishing, 2001.\* <http://www.energizeinc.com/store/2-211-E-1>

Younggren, Lynnette and Sikanas, Debra. *Joy of Recognition: Designing and Implementing a Successful Recognition Program*. Baudville, 2003. <http://tinyurl.com/joyofRec>

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\* Can be purchased using your *Everyone Ready* discount code in the Energize, Inc. online bookstore at [www.energizeinc.com/bookstore](http://www.energizeinc.com/bookstore). Your discount code, which you will need to enter at the time of checkout, can be found on your *Everyone Ready* Main Page.

## Books (continued)

Wittich, Bill. *77 Ways to Recognize Volunteers*. Knowledge Transfer Publishing, 2003.\*  
<http://www.energizeinc.com/store/5-209-E-1>

Zappala Gianni, Ben Parker and Vanessa Green. "The 'New Face' of Volunteering in Social Enterprises: The Smith Family Experience," Background Paper No 2, Research and Advocacy Team, The Smith Family, April 2001, <http://www.smithfamily.com.au>.

## Web Pages

*Our Shared Resources - Recognition and retention page*

<http://www.oursharedresources.com/Resource/ListForCategory/20> - A free service where those who work in the field of volunteer management will be able to add useful resources and others in the field will be able to access them.

*Volunteer Recognition Ideas*

<http://energizeinc.com/ideas.html> - Leaders of volunteers share tons of easy to implement ideas for both formal and informal recognition are collected on this site.

*Quotes on Volunteering*

<http://www.energizeinc.com/reflect/quote1.html> - A source of great quotes to help inspire your volunteers and coworkers.

*Employee Recognition, Rewards, Awards, and Thank You Ideas*

<http://humanresources.about.com/od/rewardrecognition> - A commercial site with several articles on providing recognition to employees that can be easily adapted to volunteers.

## Twitter

Follow John Lipp on Twitter and receive Volunteer Recognition tips and other great ideas for your volunteer program. <http://twitter.com/#!/voluncheer>

## POST-READING ASSESSMENT

Now that you have completed this Guide, answer the questions below again. Compare your responses to those you gave in the pre-reading assessment.

1. List 3 ways reward systems can affect volunteer retention.

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I'm not sure of any.

2. The difference between formal recognition and informal recognition is...

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I'm not sure.

3. My organization validates the unique contributions of volunteers as well as recognizing their accomplishments.

yes       no       I'm not sure of the difference.

4. I can list at least a dozen specific and no-cost ways to show appreciation to volunteers.

yes       no

5. I understand how to relate methods of informal recognition to the intensity of different types of volunteer assignments.

yes       no       not sure

6. I understand how a volunteer's motivations affect how she or he responds to different types of recognition.

yes       no       not sure

7. Ways to provide meaningful recognition for both short-term and long-term volunteers include...

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I'm not sure how.

9. I see the connection between recognizing volunteers and recognizing *employees*.

yes       no       not sure

## ABOUT THE TRAINER



### John L. Lipp

As a writer and consultant specializing in volunteerism, nonprofit management, and executive transition issues, John L. Lipp has worked with a variety of organizations over the past 23 years and has served as a trainer and keynote speaker for national and international audiences.

In April 2002, he was honored to be an invited presenter at the 1st Asia-Pacific Regional Conference on Volunteer Administration in Busan, Korea and in March 2005 he traveled for the U.S. State Department and presented on volunteerism throughout Argentina. John has published on the topics of volunteer retention and recruitment, and is a contributor to Energize's online journal, *e-Volunteerism* and *Everyone Ready*® series of training guides on volunteer management for national organizations. He is also the co-author of *Volunteers for the City: A How-To Manual for Developing or Enhancing Municipal Volunteer Programs*. John's book, *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Recruiting and Managing Volunteers*, was published in October 2009 from Penguin/Alpha.

Since 2004, John has served as the President/CEO of Pets Are Wonderful Support (PAWS), a San Francisco nonprofit with an active volunteer pool of 500 individuals, dedicated to providing practical support so low-income people living with disabling illnesses and seniors can keep the love and companionship of their pets ([www.pawssf.org](http://www.pawssf.org)).

Follow John on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/voluncheer> and receive weekly volunteer recognition tips and other great ideas for your volunteer program. For additional information on John's consulting practice, check out his web site at <http://www.voluncheer.com> and contact him directly at [John@voluncheer.com](mailto:John@voluncheer.com) or (510) 332-7911.

### Works by John in the *e-Volunteerism* journal

"All the World's a Stage...and You're the Star." *e-Volunteerism*, Vol. V, Issue 2, Jan-March 2005.  
Co-authored with Ona Rita Yufe. Access this article by logging into *e-Volunteerism* from your *Everyone Ready* Main Page.

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*Everyone Ready*<sup>®</sup> is a staff development training plan produced by Energize, Inc. to sharpen volunteer management skills. The plan includes online training materials provided throughout the year on basic and advanced volunteer management subjects. There are individual and organizational memberships, the latter designed to allow organizations to share the content with volunteer and paid staff at every level and geographic location across their networks.

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© Energize, Inc., 2011  
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### Featured Readings

Excerpted from Chapter 13 in *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Recruiting and Managing Volunteers* by John L. Lipp, ALPHA/Penguin Group Inc., © 2009, pp. 189-200.

Excerpted from Chapter 4, "Making Volunteers Feel Special" in *Keeping Volunteers: A Guide to Retention* by Steve McCurley and Rick Lynch, Fat Cat Publications, © 2005, pp. 31-39.

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