

Teach Shoulder-Tapping

Melissa had been the lead teacher in the preschool room since September. Now Thanksgiving was approaching, and she was still short-handed. Every time she met with her volunteers, they would say the same thing: “You need to tell the pastor that he has to get us more help in here!” And every time she met with Pastor Johnson, she would deliver the message: “My volunteers are dying! We need more help. Please stand up this Sunday and ask for more volunteers. Tell them the children deserve our best.” Pastor Johnson would empathize with Melissa and assure her again that he was working on it and would continue to ask the congregation.

What’s wrong with this picture? First, Melissa believes that it is Pastor Johnson’s role to recruit new volunteers for her ministry. Second, Melissa’s volunteers also believe that. And third, Pastor Johnson has communicated by his actions that he believes it as well! The entire culture of that church supports the idea that Pastor Johnson is responsible for recruiting new volunteers.

If the pastors or the church staff members are the ones solely responsible for finding and placing new volunteers, then the growth of the church will be limited. Why? Because very few people will respond to pleas for help. Rather, most will jump in and help either because *they want to make a difference with their lives* or because *they want deeper relational connections with others*.

That’s why you must teach “shoulder-tapping.” All leaders and volunteers must believe that it is their responsibility to “tap the shoulders” of the folks next to them and invite them into ministry. I’m not referring to the people sitting next to them on Sunday morning, but the people standing next to them in life—the people with whom they are in relationship. It is so inviting to hear, “Join me.” This tells me that someone wants to be with me, that I have worth, that I can make a difference.

Every volunteer in my ministry area has contacts that I don't have. They have nurtured friendships and developed relationships that are different from mine. For that reason, the shoulders they tap will be within a unique network of relationships.

Just try this. If you tell each volunteer in your church that in the next year it is his or her job to "tap the shoulder" of one person who is not currently serving, you will double your team within one year! Wouldn't that be fantastic? Now, in reality, many of your seasoned volunteers (those who have been in the church for a number of years) won't find anyone because all of their friends are already serving. They've "tapped out" all of their relationships and haven't been nurturing new relationships with the unchurched. However, some of those who are new in your church will make up for it by tapping ten, twelve, or more friends.

If you're really brave, let your volunteers tap the shoulders of those who don't attend your church. What a great way to build a relationship with seekers in your community!

The next time Melissa meets with her team, she can ask, "Who do you know who you could invite to serve with you next week?" This simple question will turn her team into a proactive, problem-solving group rather than a blame-casting, complaining one. Sounds like a good change to me.

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Simply Strategic Volunteers
Tim Stevens