A couple of years ago, I was a volunteer assistant coach for a high school football team. After I met with the head coach to confirm the fact that he could indeed use me, he gave me a pair of shorts and a shirt and told me what time practice started. When Monday rolled around, I walked out to the field and stood there, desperately looking for someone I knew. I felt like a sixth-grader entering middle school for the first time. When I finally saw the head coach and went over to check in, he briefly acknowledged me and then went back to work with the players. I soon realized that I was going to have to make this work on my own. I tried hard every day to find jobs to do on my own, eventually getting to know one of the coaches, who then let me participate in a few drills. But, day after day, I showed up without a job or a purpose and had to manufacture one. I lasted about five weeks before I decided to quit.

This experience taught me a lot about leadership and what it feels like to volunteer for something without having clear direction. Here are a few ideas on what we can do to ensure that we are loving, encouraging, and appropriately using the volunteers God has entrusted to us:

1. Get rid of the word volunteer. Use something such as ministry partners instead. We need to help our volunteers feel and know that they are co-laborers with us and that they matter.

2. Give your volunteers specific role and time requirements. Do this in writing. This communicates that their service is valued.

3. Promote a servant lifestyle. Encourage your volunteers to serve in the roles they have committed to—and to also be Jesus in the world where they spend the rest of their time.

4. Care weekly for your ministry partners. If you can’t cover them all yourself, find additional people to help you care for them! People don’t like to feel used. Even a note, a quick call, or a coffee run can let your ministry partners know that you love and care for them as individuals.

5. Place your volunteers in the roles they were made for. We need to help people discover their passion and mission in life. If working in student ministry is not it, we should help them figure out how God has wired them to help build his Kingdom.

We as point persons and pastors must continue to see ourselves as people developers. In order to develop people, we must love, care for, and encourage them to be all that God has designed them to be. When we create that environment for our ministry partners, it carries over into how they invest in the students.

Todd Lovelace is a member of the Youth Ministry Team and works with Youth for Christ and a coaching ministry called Lead222. You can reach Todd at toddlovelace@mac.com.

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<td>May 3</td>
<td>Project Day for Spread the Word (go to <a href="http://www.chogy.org">www.chogy.org</a> for more information and free teaching materials)</td>
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<td>May 25</td>
<td>Paradise Gathering—Paradise, Kansas (go to <a href="http://www.paradise08.com">www.paradise08.com</a> for more information)</td>
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<td>June 20–25</td>
<td>North American Convention—Anderson, Indiana (go to <a href="http://www.chog.org/nac">www.chog.org/nac</a> for more information)</td>
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<td>July 14–17</td>
<td>International Youth Convention—San Antonio, Texas (go to <a href="http://www.iyc2008.org">www.iyc2008.org</a> for more information)</td>
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<td>October 10–13</td>
<td>Youth Specialties Conference—Sacramento, California (go to <a href="http://www.youthspecialties.com">www.youthspecialties.com</a> for more information)</td>
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<td>October 31–November 3</td>
<td>Youth Specialties Conference—Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (go to <a href="http://www.youthspecialties.com">www.youthspecialties.com</a> for more information)</td>
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<td>December 27–30</td>
<td>National Inspirational Youth Convention—Grapevine, Texas (go to <a href="http://www.niyc.org">www.niyc.org</a> for more information)</td>
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Excitement is building for IYC2008. Is your group prepared and energized?

Check out www.iyc2008.org to help you and your group plan for life change in San Antonio:

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COMMITTED TO RAISING UP A NEW GENERATION OF CHRIST-CENTERED LEADERS
Adult volunteers are the heart and soul of youth ministry. The impact of a ministry will truly rise and fall on the example and commitment of its leaders. This issue is about helping you find, grow, encourage, and nurture your volunteer leaders.

I would encourage you not to cut corners in this area! First, find potential volunteers with character; then explore their talents and gifts. (A person can have talent without character.) Make sure character comes first. Go through a deliberate application process; ask other people about the potential volunteers, and make sure they are living Christ-centered lives. I would rather have a position go unfilled then have the wrong person in it. I can honestly say from experience that it takes a lot more work to undo the damage of a leader who is a negative example than to wait for the right person.

If you are the main leader (paid or unpaid), pour yourself into your volunteers. Get to know them: their likes and dislikes, their families, and their birthdays and anniversaries. Be a part of their lives. Remember, youth leaders will set the pace for what happens in a youth ministry. Choose wisely.

If you are the main adult leader for your youth group and are serving as a volunteer, hats off to you. You are making a tremendous difference!

Committed to raising up a new generation of Christ-centered leaders,

Andy Stephenson, PhD
Leader of Youth and Family Ministries

Andy can be reached at AStephenson@chog.org.

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**The Journey**

**The Journey** is a flexible Web-based discipleship tool featuring direct links to Scripture, commentaries, music, artwork, history, and much more. **The Journey** explores issues that are timely and relevant to older teens and young adults today. The undated materials are written and assembled by a team of postmodern writers; you can choose the topics you want and explore them for as long as you want.

A 120-day subscription to **The Journey** is just $15, but you can sample it for free at www.thejourney.net.org. Since **The Journey** is a leader’s resource, subscriptions for all group members are not necessary.
Let's face it: Youth ministry can be scary for people who don't know what it's about. The number one fear most potential volunteers have is the insecurity of wondering if the students really want them there.

I was recently with a youth pastor who told me that his church has decided not to use volunteers anymore because it's just too hard to recruit, train, and guide these types of people. He went on to say that the only people who “serve” in his church are getting paid to do so. I have been in youth ministry since 1995, and I cannot imagine trying to do youth ministry without volunteers. Yes, sometimes it’s hard to recruit these people, but the effort is well worth the rewards.

Why work with volunteers?
- We need a variety of adults ministering alongside us.
- Volunteers will reach a variety of students who you might otherwise never reach.
- People develop people; programs rarely develop people.
- It's biblical to be in community.
- Everyone needs other people in their lives.

How can volunteers be recruited?
- **Pray.** Never underestimate God’s ability to provide the right person at the right time.
- **Spend one-on-one time.** In my experience, this approach has proven to have the greatest potential. Look for people who are potential volunteers and get to know them, their passions, and where they are currently serving (if at all) in the church.
- **Ask your students.** The teens in your group can tell you which adults in the church they connect with; ask your students to ask these adults if they might be interested in working with the youth ministry.
- **Ask others.** The key to finding volunteers is asking. Ask your current volunteers and other adults in your church if they know people who might be interested in working with the youth ministry. Ask the parents of your students. Ask, ask, ask!
- **Highlight.** Take time during a church service to highlight your youth ministry program; show the congregation what is going on with the students. This may bring forward some individuals who have a passion for youth ministry.
- **Discuss spiritual gifts.** Take the congregation through a program or series that helps them discover their spiritual gifts and ministry interests. Some potential youth workers don’t know they could be youth workers because no one has ever pointed it out to them!
- **Serve.** Have your students serve the other ministries in the church. When the congregation realizes what great students you have, they will all want to volunteer. (OK, maybe not all, but there might be one or two.)

Let’s face it: Youth ministry can be scary for people who don’t know what it’s about. The number one fear most potential volunteers have is the insecurity of wondering if the students really want them there.

**How should volunteers not be recruited?**
- Don’t use guilt or pity.
- Don’t call through the church directory. You may end up with people you don’t want to serve.
- Don’t ask those interested in youth ministry to circle Y on the response card.
- Don’t require parents of present kids to serve. This will create a headache for you and them, not to mention for your students.
- Don’t offer a “Get Out of Tithe Free” card to the first one who volunteers; you may end up with more volunteers than you need, and your senior pastor will not be very happy with you.

In all things, remember that you are seeking to create a community of people to serve in the area of student ministries. Invite potential volunteers to participate in and help build a community, not a program.

*Ryan Shockey is the Spread the Word coordinator for the Youth Ministry Team. He is currently on staff at Highland Park Community Church in Casper, Wyoming. He can be reached at rwshockey@hpcc.cc.*
Leaders who want to grow their volunteers must begin with their own personal commitment to be growing themselves and to be humbly modeling their journey of discovery with God. None of us have it all figured out. We all make mistakes, but few are willing to be transparent enough about them while passionately seeking to better themselves as leaders. If people see your commitment to grow and get better, it will inspire them to a higher personal commitment.

To grow, your volunteers need an environment in which they are expected to grow. They need time to share about what God is doing in their personal lives. And that means time not spent planning the calendar or putting on an event for students. Instead, invite your volunteer team to share about their families and work, to read the Word together, and definitely to pray for each other. As the leader, you must be aware that time is your volunteers’ most important resource; some of them may struggle at first to see the value of taking even more time to share about their personal journeys. But that time spent together as a team will encourage others, it will bring your team closer together, and it will strengthen the foundation from which you are working.

Finally, in order for your volunteers to grow, they need resources and experiences that will stretch them. Pass along your favorite book, e-mail them links to your favorite Web sites, take them to a youth workers’ training event, or ask them to serve in an area they are gifted in but that will require them to stretch beyond their comfort zone. Again, you may get some resistance, but try to see through the initial hesitancy to the end result of what your volunteers can become if they keep growing.

My parents often say of their grandchildren (including my own two kids), “We can’t spoil them enough!” This is exactly the same philosophy I have in keeping volunteers: You simply can’t spoil them enough. They can’t receive enough encouragement, e-mails, phone calls, text messages, MySpace comments, and hugs. For many of us, it seems that as soon as we finish one thing, there are immediately several other things demanding our attention, but when we take time out of what we need to do and put time into a thoughtful thank-you, our volunteers never seem to forget it. It provides them the boost they need to keep going. Loving on them is a way of saying thanks for loving students, giving up their valuable time, and making a difference. Now, who doesn’t need to hear that more often?

Another important factor in keeping adult volunteers is making sure they understand the vision of the ministry and the role they play in it. It needs to be clear where you are going, how you plan to get there, and how each volunteer is going to help you accomplish the mission. If volunteers feel they are just filling a spot and can be replaced by anyone, it won’t be long until the demand for time will draw them away from serving. But if they feel that their gifts are special and that no one can do exactly what they are doing, that they are irreplaceable, and that you and the other leaders on your volunteer team value their ministry, then your volunteers will stay involved much longer.

Chip Taylor is a Youth Ministry Team member and the youth pastor at Bayside Community Church in Safety Harbor, Florida. He can be reached at chip@baysidechurch.net.

HOW DO THEY DO THAT?

Many of you have attended large events such as IYC and been “wowed” by the amazing sights on the screens. (Many of the things that wow us in media often wow us with their cost as well.) One of those sights may have been a live camera image on screen with song lyrics appearing over the top of it. We see this technique repeated each day while watching the local or national weathermen stand in front of a map. It’s really a green screen, but somehow you and I see a map instead. The technology making this possible is chroma-key—the same concept used for lyrics being seen over a camera shot.

The chroma-key unit used backstage at IYC may have cost more than the car in your garage, but don’t lose heart. Edirol (www.edirol.com) makes a video-mixing unit for under $1,000. With this mixer, up to four inputs can run through the unit (cameras, a computer running your presentation software, a DVD player, and other things). In our venue, we use one computer running backgrounds (stills and loops) and one running lyrics. Another input is a camera, and the fourth input is a DVD player. The chroma-key feature in the Edirol V4 superimposes our lyrics over any image coming from any of the other inputs.
If you’re like me, you often think about things you can do to equip, encourage, or simply share time with your volunteers, and then you think, Do I have enough time and money? Here are a few suggestions you can do with and for your volunteer leaders to disciple, value, and care for them. Most are low risk–high reward and can be accomplished with little money.

- **With: Invite a volunteer to lunch.** This says, “Thank you, you are important!” Low risk and probably costs less than $20.
- **For: Find out what each of your volunteers likes.** This might include preferences in food, music, media, and sports. From time to time, send notes or small gifts that relate to these preferences. Before departing for state youth convention, we collected information on our volunteers as part of a “getting to know you” time; we then filled bags with favorite snacks, relevant stickers, and other small gifts to say, “Thank you for giving up your weekend to impact students’ lives.” Costs only what you put into the bags—about $6 or $7 each.
- **With: Purchase StrengthsFinder 2.0 by Tom Rath and go through it with your volunteers.** Do the study together, learning about each other along the way. This values the impact your volunteers can make and honors the gifts God has given them. Even though this is a secular leadership resource, the information has definite spiritual significance. I found this resource online for around $12.00 each. Other leadership or discipleship-style resources would work as well.
- **For: Write personal notes.** In the electronic age, when someone takes the time to send a handwritten note, it speaks to how much the recipient is valued and appreciated. Writing notes acknowledges and encourages, and it doesn’t take more than a few minutes of your time.
- **With: Create a special worship experience just for your volunteers.** This could be for just a few people or for a large group. Teaching might be included, but make sure the focus is on worshipping together as a volunteer staff. This emphasizes community and says that you care for them on a spiritual level, not just about them showing up. As a bonus, you could treat your volunteers with a gift card or goodie bag on the way out.
- **For: Look for new and better ways to communicate with your volunteers.** Often, volunteers feel ill-equipped to deal with a situation because they feel they don’t have the information they need. Communicate to them early and empower them to invest in the lives of students with less worry.
- **With: Play some video games together.** This is sure to bring a smile to any volunteer gamer’s face.
- **For and With: Take your entire staff out for a meal together when they aren’t expecting it.** One time when I was serving as a volunteer on a retreat, the youth pastor planned some extra time into one of the food stops. During that time, he let the youth go to the various fast food establishments while he treated the volunteer staff to Red Lobster. This was an awesome surprise as I only had enough money for a burger. He just wanted to thank us for giving our personal time for the Kingdom. I’ve never forgotten that surprise meal—and Red Lobster never tasted so good! This is low risk but a cost that would need to be planned for.

So go out and write that note this week, and to make it extra special, add a $5 gift card to a coffee shop or bakery. And if you have some additional ideas for things to do with and for volunteers, send them in so we can share them with everyone else!

Howard Megill is a Youth Ministry Team member and the state youth leader for Kentucky Ministries. He can be reached at howard@kycog.org.