

RECRUITMENT & RETENTION OF THE VOLUNTEER:
THE MISSING PIECE OF THE FIRE SERVICE



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ABSTRACT

RECRUITMENT & RETENTION OF THE VOLUNTEER: **THE MISSING PIECE OF THE FIRE SERVICE**

Franklin Woodrow Wilson II
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Recruitment and retention of volunteers in the fire service today still trouble many fire departments across the United States. Fire chiefs are forced to re-evaluate existing programs and incentives in order to attract new members. But is the fire service missing some key points, not addressed by many existing documents? Yes. Has the fire service missed opportunities to attract capable, willing, and interested members of the community? Yes.

This report takes a look at recruitment and retention from a different angle. It also looks at barriers not commonly addressed, such as philosophy and self esteem. Alternative ideas develop when the fire service looks to market the fire department as a business. Issue and diversity challenges will also be looked at.

Discussing the volunteer role in the fire service with ideas to expand out of traditional volunteer firefighter role. Selecting, orienting, and training of volunteers will help to maximize retention. Motivation of the volunteer will ensure that members do not become complacent in their volunteer role.

This report will also look at potential programs and opportunities that promote a successful recruitment and retention program. The fire service must brainstorm new concepts, and be willing to loosen the reins of authority and control. This report is meant to stimulate new thought concepts, and offer fire department leaders a fresh perspective at how to successfully develop a recruitment and retention program for the volunteer.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I never realized the numerous individuals that provided me with such substantial support, knowledge, and resource. Writing a technical document for the fire service truly is a collective effort. I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you to the individuals and organizations that have provided me with resources, facts, and assistance to complete this arduous technical document. I sincerely believe that my efforts in this document will demonstrate how thankful I am for your cooperation, knowledge, and support.

I am grateful to my wife, Melia, for her assistance, patience, and encouragement on the many long days that were spent in preparation of this report. I also thank my sons, Cameron and Tyler, for giving up their “daddy time” so that I could complete this project. I love you family.

I must thank the individual that provided me with the ability to write a technical document, my English professor, Ms. Pat Palmer. Your guidance and structure has been nothing less than spectacular. Thank you for caring so much about a student’s education.

I also thank my fire chief, Kenneth Burdette, for his willingness to support my endeavor and provide me assistance when needed. I look forward to working with our organization to develop a recruitment and retention program that benefits our fire department and our community.

A huge thank to Mat Dubinett of Peebles District Volunteer Fire Company for his tremendous help in demonstrating how his organization has met the challenge of recruitment and retention head-on. Project: Step Up is the culmination of effort of three fire departments that realized that they needed to take charge and keep the community protected. Well Done!! Mat; prepare yourself for more phone calls.

Thank you to Dianne Nash of Volusia County Fire Services for her contribution to this document. Volusia County has made great strides to the recruitment and retention of volunteers in addition to developing a work environment where paid and volunteer members work together to serve the community.

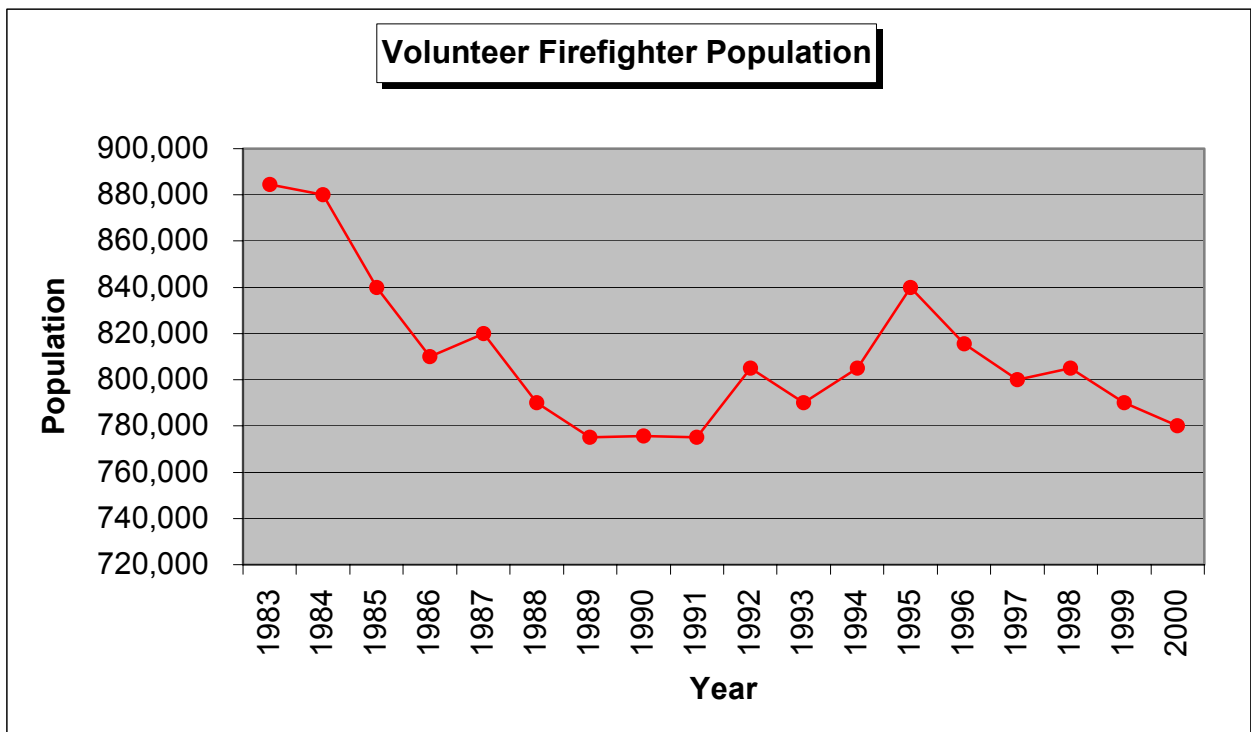
To Steve Holmes of United Parcel Service for his permission to use a remarkable survey which examined the volunteer in America today. Steve, I truly appreciate your willingness to assist the fire service. Your organizations’ survey was a true asset to my research, and has helped to formulate additional questions and research avenues.

THANK YOU ALL FOR YOUR SUPPORT IN MY SUCCESS! Individuals outside of the fire service never truly understand the importance that is placed on our friendships. Over the course of 16 years, I have been fortunate enough to meet some remarkable individuals in the fire service, and to this day continue to value the friendship that has been earned. The fire service truly is a family, with 200 years of memories.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

The fire service today is a microcosm of characters, education, experience, and personalities. For over 200 years, the individuals of the fire service have contributed their service and unique memories to a most respected service. The fire service today is not without our own tribulations. One such tribulation is the absence of a volunteer recruitment and retention program.

Throughout the history of America, volunteer firefighters have helped to shape the fire service of today. Over the past twenty years, the fire service has seen a 20% drop in the number of individuals who volunteer their time, and continue to see a 2% to 3% decrease per year. In addition, September 11, 2001 has brought volunteer recruitment and retention to the forefront.



Source: National Volunteer Fire Council, 2000.

Each fire department has a responsibility to conduct its own needs assessment, and determine the appropriate types of volunteer programs. There are departments (Hyattsville, Maryland) that are composed entirely of volunteer firefighters, and have reached a high plateau of success and achievement. There are departments (Phoenix, Arizona) that are composed entirely of career firefighters, and have reached groundbreaking milestones. The reality is that most departments do not fall into either of these categories, and must recognize that in order to accomplish the primary mission statement, “protection of life and property”, these departments should utilize this needs assessment as a resource tool to maximize the potential within their own organization. Within a combination department, the volunteer can become a resourceful and reliable individual when properly prepared for their unique challenges.

United Parcel Service (UPS) has sponsored research among volunteer organizations that shows that managing volunteers effectively is a problem for many not-for-profit organizations. UPS recognizes that these organizations could accomplish even more if they could better recruit, manage, and recognize the work of volunteers. These organizations often lack the resources to put systems in place that will allow them to get the most out of volunteers and retain them as committed workers. UPS is addressing this problem with major grants to deserving organizations. United Parcel Service conducted a report on managing volunteers in 1998. This report states:

America is a nation of volunteers. Not-for-profit organizations have an unending need for time and talents of volunteers. Organizations that are able to recruit and make effective use of volunteer resources are positioned to make the greatest contribution to those who need help. These organizations improve the quality of life of volunteers as well as others. (United Parcel Service, 1)

The facts are clear! The need exists in many fire departments of the United States, to research, develop, implement, and maintain a recruitment and retention program for the volunteer.

I am currently a career lieutenant with Central Kitsap Fire and Rescue in Silverdale, Washington. I was a volunteer firefighter from 1986 to 1994 on both the east and west coast. During my period as a volunteer firefighter I saw the positive and negative aspects to the fire service and to the volunteer. I have selected this research because I value the dedication that is provided by the volunteer across the United States. I also realize that the volunteer program was one facet of my success in becoming a career firefighter, and I want to ensure that other young men and women can benefit from that same opportunity.

HISTORY OF THE FIRE SERVICE

The history of the fire service in the United States begins in New Amsterdam (later New York), when Director-General Peter Stuyvesant appointed four fire wardens in 1648. Early efforts at fire prevention and extinction relied on chimney laws, bucket brigades, simple ladders, and hand-pumped engines imported from Europe, all manned by loosely organized volunteer firefighters.

The labor of firefighting was divided from the beginning. Hose companies supplied water to the engines and they, in turn, applied it to the fire. Hook and ladder companies were responsible for rescue, ventilation, and overhaul. It is much the same today. Similarly, the helmets, turnout coats, boots, axes, and so on used today closely resemble their predecessors.

Despite their energy, skill, enthusiasm, and dedication, volunteers in large cities were unable to control major fires. A typical example is New York: large portions of the city were destroyed in 1776, 1835, and again in 1845. Even so, the volunteers stubbornly defended their system and hand-drawn equipment against the critics.

By the mid-nineteenth century, urban volunteer fire departments in this country had reached their pinnacle. They were well organized and, for the most part, effective firefighting forces. But they were also excessively large, racked by dissension and rowdyism, and unwilling to adopt the new technology of the steam engine. This resistance to change, well-publicized fights, and pressure from insurance companies and influential citizens led to the end of the volunteer system in large cities. Politics, ethnic tension, greater fire risks, increasing population, and a decline in the quality of membership were also factors in the change from volunteer to career firefighters.

A paid department, however, did not guarantee that major fires could be quickly and successfully controlled. Witness the devastating fires that occurred in Chicago, 1871; Boston, 1872; Baltimore, 1904; and San Francisco, 1906. Nevertheless, paid departments did offer the following advantages: a constant labor force, modern equipment, greater discipline and efficiency, selective response, and improved alarm systems.

The transition was not an easy one, however, and the volunteers sometimes fought with their paid successors. It should be noted, though, that many former volunteers filled the ranks of these early paid departments. Elisha Kingsland, long a volunteer, served as New York's first paid chief engineer.

Fire protection in the United States today is provided by volunteer and paid firefighters, male and female, acting both separately and in concert. Volunteer departments greatly outnumber paid ones at present, but the fire service continues to change. In many suburban and rural areas, volunteer departments are in peril. Recruiting and retaining members is becoming increasingly difficult because of the high cost of housing, strict training requirements, population mobility, and distant employment. The coming decades will bring more paid departments, greater reliance upon firefighters, and increased interdepartmental cooperation via the mutual aid system.

Another factor that affects today's firefighter is the keen competition for the taxpayer's dollar; regrettably, this often revives the old rivalry between volunteer and paid firefighters. Municipal governments and their constituents are faced with the huge costs of apparatus and equipment, insurance, and building maintenance. Volunteer departments have traditionally provided low-cost fire protection, but can they continue to do so?

RECRUITMENT

MARKETING THE FIRE DEPARTMENT

Marketing in the fire service is the process of understanding your customers, developing services they want, identifying their needs, and finding the ways to tell them about the opportunity to do business with you. This is just another way of describing member/volunteer recruitment. Some of us grow weary of begging people to volunteer, participate, and make a difference in their community. The paradigm has to shift positions.

Over the past 200 years, perhaps the greatest travesty or deficit to the fire service success is the apparent inability or unwillingness to toot their horn, aggressively market their services, and approach the nature of their mission statement in a "business-like" manner. The fire service does tremendous work in the public/private sector that would never be accomplished by the government or through corporate entities. Unfortunately, however, no one usually gets to know the extent of what is accomplished until the organization is placed under attack or the funding is threatened. The fire service believes that they do good work and should not have to tell others of the work they do because it should be obvious. Nothing could be further from the truth.

However, the fire service must compete for scarcity of funds, and corporate businesses that want even a larger portion of the market share. Their erroneous assumption leads the fire service to neglect the significance of marketing, prospecting, sustainability, expansion, retention of customers and the addition of new customers, understanding their products, and environmental threats and opportunities.

As a result, quantitative and qualitative data is not rigidly captured and presented in the form of a testimony or prospectus to their internal and external customers, current and potential funders, or bipartisan legitimizers until they are required to do so.

Why is this significant? What does this have to do with recruitment and retention? The most important reason put forward here is an encouragement to the fire service to start now to shift the paradigm of how they look at recruitment and retention. How can the fire service begin to take a different approach? Additional terms to consider are *prospecting* and *researching*. An attitude must be developed for prospecting. Successful work is serious business and it is about time that we began to treat it like a business! People are waiting to be asked. The fire service often times have not because we ask not.

ISSUES AND DIVERSITY CHALLENGES

Consider the channels the fire service uses to recruit through. Are these formal and informal channels appropriate to the audience you are trying to attract? Contemplate putting into place a well-thought-out approach to recruitment of diverse members and staff.

In recruiting diverse members there are at least four important elements to be considering once you have identified a particular group that you wish to focus on in your recruiting. These elements are the *Relationship*, *Environment*, *Service*, and *Promotion*.

Relationship refers to the level of give-and take you set up between you, the recruiter, and the individuals you are recruiting. How much time and energy will you put into recruiting diverse members and staff? How much will you try to understand the worldview and cultural norms of those you recruit? In exchange, how much will you expect your diverse staff to understand your worldview and cultural norms?

What will the power and control relationship in your setting look like? Is there any reciprocity? Any sharing of power? If you are offering a position in your organization to someone whose people are not already represented on your staff, what incentive can you offer them to joining your group? Can you think of any benefits to the individual? To his or her community? To your program? In summary, are you willing to strive for a balanced exchange of effort and commitment? It is a balance that ultimately leads to the most success in recruiting and retaining a diverse staff.

Environment refers to the physical whereabouts of your organization or program. Consider questions like is my organization/site accessible (transportation cost, physical challenges) to diverse people? Are diverse groups familiar with the location? What impression does my organization give to people through environment, symbols, and images? Are these welcoming to diverse groups of people?

Service refers to whether the service that a program provides is relevant (or not relevant) to diverse communities. How are people from a given group going to react to a particular organization's service approach? Who, if anyone, requested the service provided? Who did not? Is the service respectful of diverse cultural norms and traditions?

Promotion relates to how the printed and oral ways of presenting your organization are or are not relevant and sensitive to the specific group you are trying to recruit. What does your use of language and graphic images portray? What channels and venues are you using to promote your organization? Are these formal and informal channels appropriate to the audience you are trying to attract? A program should put into place a well-thought-out approach to retention of diverse members and staff. The inability to recognize the talents, and to draw upon those individual talents will be the fire department's own demise.

CRITICAL AREAS TO INCREASE RECRUITMENT

COMMUNITY

- ❖ If community members are to become more self-reliant and develop a genuine commitment to implementing, using, and managing improved living and quality of life standards, then they cannot be treated as passive beneficiaries. People must be encouraged to participate and express their ideas and leadership. Fire departments must be prepared to stimulate local problem-solving capacities and to involve the community deeply and actively generating new ideas and taking initiative.
- ❖ How is the community defined?
- ❖ Communities can only be built by focusing on the strengths and capacities of the citizens who call that community home.
- ❖ Be careful in judging those who have been placed in a position of disadvantage.

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has. -- Margaret Mead

SELF ESTEEM

- ❖ Critical for the success of the fire service, and of the personnel in the fire service.
- ❖ Having a good or high opinion of one's self is important.
- ❖ Volunteers feel like they belong to a special group of people, such as their family or the fire department.

NEEDS

- ❖ People bring specific needs to any effort to recruit them and are motivated when jobs allow them to fulfill those needs. According to Abraham Maslow, unmet needs motivate and people respond to the lowest level of needs before going on to those higher in his/her hierarchy. Those needs can include psychological (are meals provided), safety (can I learn new skills that may help me get a job), social (can I meet new people), esteem (will I receive recognition for my efforts, or self actualizing (will I be able to use my gifts/talents).
- ❖ What assets does the community have and what has it expressed in terms of "real" needs?
- ❖ Capacity Inventories are important (new enterprises, links to other fire service agencies, develop local skills banks, institutes learning exchange, introduces new participants, new cultural and artistic resources)
- ❖ Volunteers see themselves as unique and special - aware of their own interests and talents and know that there is no one else exactly like them.

PHILOSOPHY

- ❖ What is our mission and primary objective for being in business? Do we all understand it and agree to it?
- ❖ A volunteer's commitment to a fire department validates the existence of community support, and desire for fire department success.
- ❖ Volunteers diversify and expand the skills we can offer to our customers.
- ❖ The fire service should provide meaningful work to do.
- ❖ The fire service goal: For everyone to have a great experience.
- ❖ Volunteers are NOT a second choice and that is the attitude that we must convey.

- ❖ Agreement on how the fire service will deal with difficult challenges to policy, governance, supervision, selection, etc. so that ONE supportive message is conveyed to all members, volunteer and paid.

GOALS

- ❖ Have we developed goals that meet the needs of our partners, members, governing organizations, and/or the community that we serve?
- ❖ Identify the needs of or clients/public and paid staff; and then mobilize non-cash resources in the community to meet those needs.
- ❖ Motivation is an essential factor in ensuring that members join and stay interested in what they are doing and learning. Some researchers have described motivation as the “skill and will” to learn.
- ❖ Goals will need to be specific for achievement purposes.
- ❖ One of our goals is to find the right people of a particular type.
- ❖ Value clarification (understanding what is important to each individual) is critical to getting everyone on the same page.
- ❖ Develop different levels of involvement.
- ❖ The goal: Have a system where *everyone* can be involved.
- ❖ Develop individual educational/personal development plans for everyone involved.

MESSAGE

- ❖ Is the message factual and does it provide a good representation of what we do, want to do, what we need, and how others can help?
- ❖ Make sure that the message asks for help.
- ❖ Market challenging and creative work. You do not have to beg!
- ❖ They are in charge of important things about their own lives.
- ❖ Volunteers believe that they can do what they set out to do even if they make mistakes.

The two common reasons for losing are: not knowing you're competing in the first place, and not knowing with whom you really are competing. --Phillip Simborg, Grubb & Ellis Company

RETENTION

Success lies in the fire service's ability to clearly understand the needs of their relevant publics, ensure that the organizational philosophy is clearly understood and accepted, and then be able to develop clear goals to address needs consistent with the organizational philosophy. Equally critical is the ability to communicate a message that invites others to contribute, and an open process that will help to assess the motivation and capitalize on as many assets as possible. Everything rests upon a flexible support system that holds it all together when things do not go according to agreed upon needs, philosophy, and goals.

TRUST

Does the fire services have the volunteer's best interests at heart? Can the volunteer depend upon the fire service to help them reach their goals? Honest communication is impossible without trust. Communication must flow horizontally and vertically, and from top down to bottom up.

OPPORTUNITY

Opportunity is the ability to learn, grow, be challenged, and do something that makes a difference. Will volunteers be able to get their needs met in the fire service? Some are looking for opportunities to earn a career, to achieve success; others want to be affiliated in positive relationships, and others want simply to be able to empower others. Does a context exist within your fire department to allow this to happen?

RESPECT

Respect involves listening and being in-tune to what is being said, when it is said, how it is said, and to whom it is being said. The fire service must think with regard to doing unto others, as you would have them do unto you. Respect involves understanding similarities and differences that result in fair treatment of all *individuals*.

PRAISE

Give praise whenever possible on every effort toward success - little things mean a lot. Does the fire service have the wherewithal to seek teachable moments and opportunities to give consistent, fair praise? People often times have only been told that they are failures.

PATIENCE

Work with participants as they learn, grow, and make mistakes. It is going to take time and the fire service can't expect them to start, and hit the ground running. Can the fire service manage the time so that seasoned personnel can spend time with new people?

UNDERSTANDING

This may be their first time in a "work setting", and they want to do the best they can. Does the fire service understand the level of care and support they will each need?

SAFETY

Ensuring that no harm will result from or during participation in your program. Is this organization and environment safer than the living situation that they are currently in? Will people help the new people feel welcomed and safe?

PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Erik Erikson was an American psychoanalyst who developed the concept of the identity crisis, an inevitable conflict that accompanies the growth of a sense of identity in late adolescence. In 1933 Erikson immigrated to the United States, where his studies of Native American children enabled him to correlate personality growth with parental and societal values. Erikson became engaged in varied clinical work, widening the scope of social, cultural, and other environmental factors.

While Erikson's work was primarily directed at the younger members of our society, I find that Erikson's theories have application in the recruitment and retention of volunteers. The information presented here is adapted from work done by R. Ferguson and J. Snipes from work on identity by E. Erikson, in conjunction with work done for YouthBuild.

CONSIDERATION OF ERIK ERIKSON'S THEORY

TRUST: Young people will hold these questions in mind: 1) Can I trust them? Is the program for real or is it a scam? Do they have my best interest at heart? Are they competent and prepared? Do they have the resources to help me? If I do well are they going to validate me? Is it a safe environment? (Items would be good for addressing during orientation). Many of these issues we may not be able to articulate but we need to be able to recognize them and respond. They may trust you. They may say, "People give up on me that's why I give up on myself". Are we leveling with people - if all you're giving up is authority they will not bond? Emotional safety - ridicule when talking, can't let it pass. Are they going to help me solve my problems so that I can get here every day? Is it a punitive program structure? Are you handling early confrontations? The setup is one to guarantee failure, I'm either in it for the money or because I like power and superiority.

AUTONOMY: Resolution can last up to first 5 months of the program. What does it take to make it here? Do I have what it takes? Will they help me? If they make it through this they can do it without a lot of controls. They have heard from many that they cannot succeed, they will test limits - getting ahead Vs getting by (street - admitting that I don't have it all together).

INITIATIVE: How hard will I try? Will I maximize? What's going to happen to my old friends? Is it right to leave them behind (peer pressure)? For women - they're friends are less supportive in addition to less women and support within the program. Clarifying values systems without condemning the old lifestyle. Some try to keep one foot in the program and one foot on the street.

INDUSTRY: What am I learning? What more do I need to learn to succeed? Do I know enough to succeed on my own? If they can answer these questions they will increase confidence. They may be able to set, internalize, and achieve goals -- something they can buy in to. They need to know that this will be stronger than the forces beyond their control. Success needs to be recognized and pointed out.

IDENTITY: Who am I now? What have I become? Is it OK? Do my new talents and skills define me? Did I sell out? New definition of how they see themselves.

PROGRAM IMPLICATIONS: Director's commitment, staff's commitment, design/implementation of program; people skills - know and understand, training and formal training, objectives (competencies), on the site/project observations and feedback, role play difficult situations, share success with each other, periodic assessments of objectives, what went well, what could have been done differently, etc.

PROBLEMS FACING RECRUITMENT & RETENTION

No single area of the United States is working to address problems that are uniquely different than those found in other areas. Development of solutions can commence after the problems have been identified and prioritized. All members of the organization **MUST WORK TOGETHER** to effectively brainstorm problems, and all members **MUST WORK TOGETHER** to develop realistic solutions.

Several key issues impede today's retention and recruitment problem in the volunteer fire service. The problems are highly complex, and have as many facets as that of a priceless diamond. Two-income families, and single parent households know to well the hardened training standards, leadership issues, and restricted schedules. These issues are challenging to the fire service, BUT these challenges can be overcome!

BASIC PRINCIPLES

Selective recruitment is a key factor in keeping volunteers. Volunteers must be matched with appropriate assignments, and people who are likely to be uncommitted must be screened out. Careful monitoring of new volunteers can help avert the "post-honeymoon blues" effect during the first few months of volunteering.

Research would suggest that volunteers' first few months of service are the most critical because it is during this time when they are most likely to drop out. This may be caused by a gap between the idealistic expectations of new volunteers and the actual experience of volunteering. Volunteer coordinators need to be sufficiently involved with new volunteers to monitor and address problems as they arise.

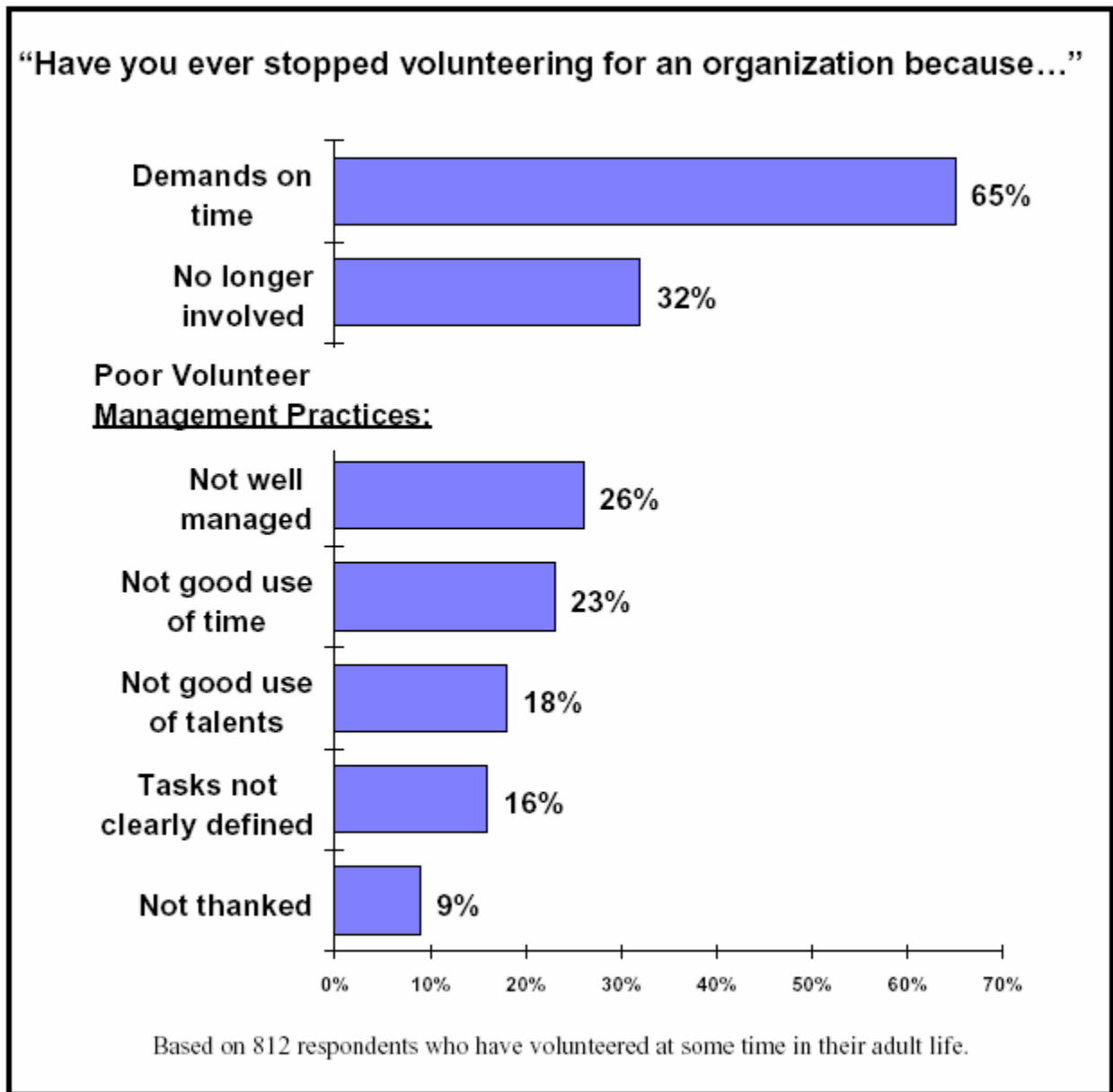
To maintain the commitment of volunteers, it is important to offer intrinsic rewards – that is, jobs that are challenging, interesting, and IMPORTANT. Volunteers differ from one another in terms of what they find interesting. Even so, being given “busywork” is unlikely to prompt high volunteer commitment. A major challenge in working with older volunteers is making use of their skills while providing them with opportunities to assume different responsibilities. Most volunteers do not want to simply repeat the kind of work they did before they retired.

A critical factor in sustaining volunteer commitment is to provide for successful experiences. Volunteers who believe that they are capable of helping and that their investment is worth their efforts are much more likely to continue their work than those who feel frustrated, rejected, and incompetent.

Friendship is an important factor in volunteer commitment. To an important degree, volunteers sustain their commitment to particular volunteer organizations because of their personal relationships with their fellow volunteers, paid staff, and/or the people they help. It is personal ties and obligations that keep people coming back, not simply interest in volunteering in general or even interest in a particular cause.

LOSING VOLUNTEERS

Two out of five volunteers have stopped volunteering for an organization at some time because of one or more poor volunteer management practices.

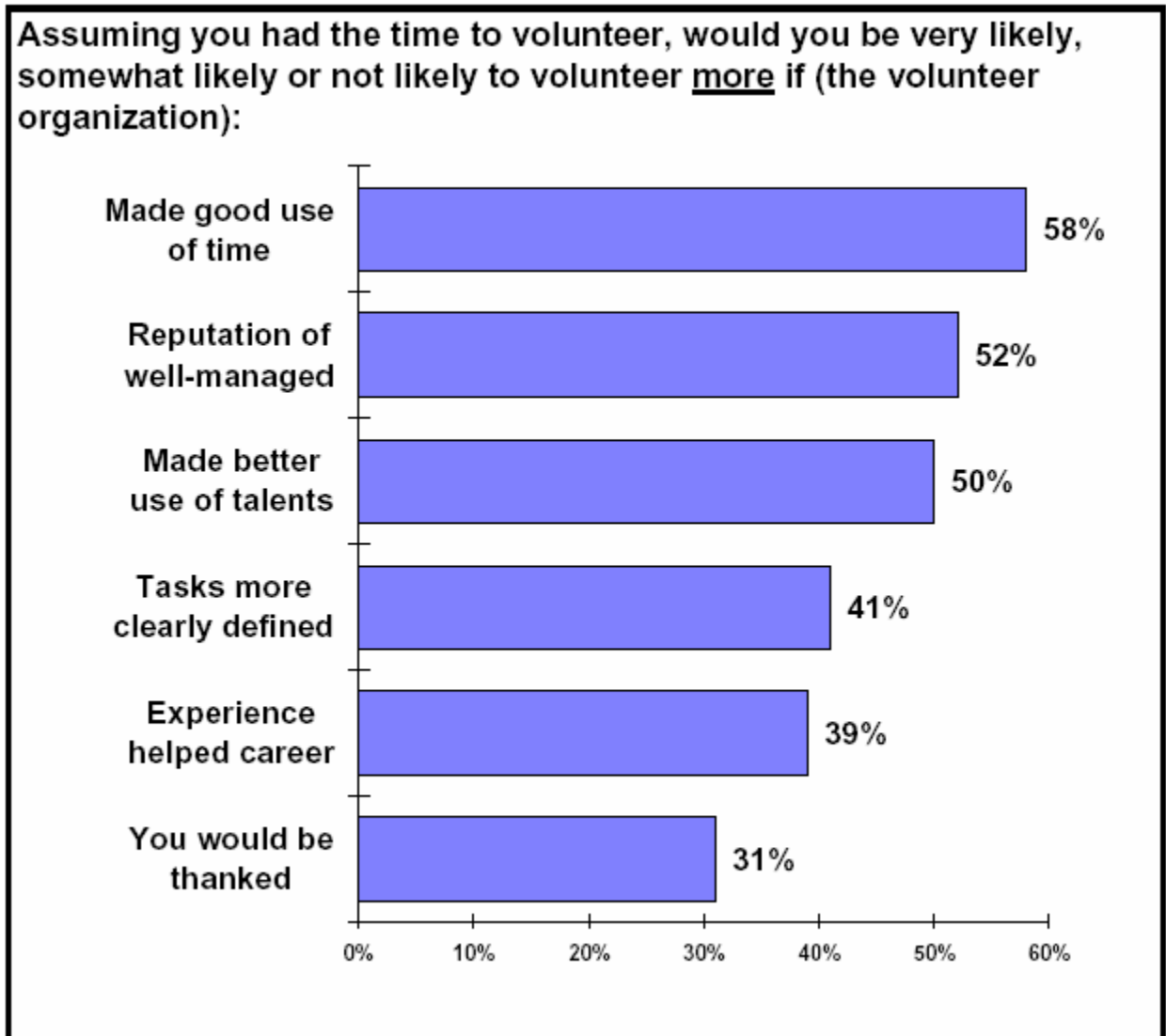


Source: United Parcel Service. Contact UPS Public Relations, (404) 828-7123

Clearly, the first two issues are beyond the control of the fire department. What is of significant interest is how many volunteers are lost as a result of poor volunteer management practices. Bottom line: Poor volunteer management practices result in more lost volunteers than people losing interest because of changing personal or family needs. The best way for an organization to receive more hours of volunteer service is to be careful that managers of the time already being volunteered by people of all ages and from all strata of our society.

MOTIVATING PEOPLE TO VOLUNTEER

The fire service is more likely to recruit willing volunteers when those perspective volunteers feel an organization is well managed and will make good use of their time.



Source: United Parcel Service. Contact UPS Public Relations, (404) 828-7123

Respect for time leads the list. Assuming that time was available, 58% of the public says they would volunteer more if “the organization made good use of volunteer time.” People do not always volunteer for activities that use their job skills. Habitat for Humanity uses many unskilled “carpenters”. The people who volunteer at concession stands are not necessarily using high-level expertise or talents. The expectation for efficiency is not as high for talents as it is for time.

ROOT PROBLEMS SPECIFIC TO THE FIRE SERVICE

During a three-year period (1994-1996), the United States Fire Administration established a cooperative agreement with the National Volunteer Fire Council to sponsor a series of nine regional workshops to span the nation.

These regional workshops held two objectives. Develop a forum where regional representatives could discuss retention and recruitment problems, and report on solutions, which may be applicable regionally, and nationally. Disseminate ideas on retention and recruitment through volunteer leaders who attended, and who in turn shared the information through state and local conferences, newsletters, and other means. Table 1 on the following page identifies those unique issues.

Table 1. Retention and Recruitment Root Problems	
Sources of Problems	Contributing Factors
TIME DEMANDS	The two-income families and working multiple jobs Increased training time demands Higher emergency call volume Additional demands within department (fund raising, administrative)
TRAINING REQUIREMENTS	Higher training standards and new federal requirements More time demands Greater public expectation of fire department's response capabilities (broader range of services such as EMS, hazmat, technical rescue, etc.) Additional training demands to provide broader range of services Recertification demands
INCREASING CALL VOLUME	Fire department assuming wider response roles Increasing emergency medical call volume Increase in number of automatic fire alarms Greater reliance by public on fire department's services
CHANGES IN THE "NATURE OF THE BUSINESS"	Abuse of emergency services by the public Less of an emphasis on social aspects of volunteering
CHANGES IN SOCIOLOGICAL CONDITIONS (IN URBAN AND SUBURBAN AREAS)	Transience Loss of community feeling Less community pride Less of an interest or time for volunteering Two-income family and time demands "Me" generation
CHANGES IN SOCIOLOGICAL AREAS (RURAL AREAS)	Employers less willing to let employees off to run calls Time demands "Me" generation
LEADERSHIP PROBLEMS	Poor leadership and lack of coordination Authoritative management style Failure to manage change
FEDERAL LEGISLATION AND REGULATIONS	Fair Labor Standards Act interpretation "2-in, @-out" OSHA ruling requiring four firefighters on scene before entering hazardous environment Environmental Protection Agency live-fire burn limitations
INCREASING USE OF COMBINATION DEPARTMENTS	Disagreements among chiefs or other department leaders Friction between volunteer and career members
HIGHER COSTS OF HOUSING (IN AFFLUENT COMMUNITIES)	Volunteers cannot afford to live in the community they serve
AGING COMMUNITIES	Greater number of older people today Lack of economic growth and jobs in some towns

Source: Federal Emergency Management Agency, 1998

Recruitment and Retention in the Volunteer Fire Service, Final Report December 1998, written by TriData Corporation, has thoroughly defined these problems. For the purposes of this report, I am directing my readers to read this report. The United States Fire Administration and the National Volunteer Fire Council labored with great effort to conduct the regional workshops in an effort to identify issues regarding recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters.

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION: SUMMARY

The fire service recognizes the pressures placed on volunteers, but must find ways to make volunteer opportunities more doable. A fundamental change in the nature of some of its volunteer jobs is likely necessary in order to attract new, energetic professionals to volunteer in the fire service. The fire service should experiment with new ways to divide volunteer labor requirements. For example, the fire service might define some jobs in ways that make tasks doable by volunteer teams.

The fire service is fortunate to have a talented, and dedicated staff. This talented, and dedicated staff must work with the volunteers to help maximize the impact of society's ventures. The fire service should build on its current volunteer-staff partnerships, and provide support to volunteers who need help. One part of the fire services' challenge is to structure the volunteer-staff partnerships in ways that make the volunteer duties and activities feasible while ensuring that the expectations for staff are reasonable. As with volunteer resources, staff resources are limited. Consequently, the fire service needs to improve efficiencies and increase productivity. The fire service should experiment with new ways to promote an organized, well-defined corps of volunteers.

The fire service should take advantage of technology to increase the efficiency of volunteer time. Given the unique characteristics of the fire service's volunteer resources, the fire service should use computer-intensive media and other technologies to attract a diverse population of participants. A useful investment in technology could also lead to new member services (e.g., distributed workshops and distance education). A well-developed groupware or remote conferencing setup might enhance committee and board meetings.

In order to make volunteer opportunities more doable and improve the fire service's use of volunteer time, the fire service could consider the following:

1. The fire service should clearly determine the areas that are available for volunteer personnel. The fire departments must take the time to carefully examine the entire organization to determine all of the possibilities that are available to a volunteer.
2. The fire service must clearly define the role of volunteer positions, ensuring that the volunteer opportunities represent feasible commitments and provide an effective volunteer support infrastructure, including staff—volunteer teams and technological support.
3. The fire service should increase its use of computer-intensive media and other technologies to improve the efficiency of scarce volunteer and staff resources.

The fire service needs to better communicate important information to all personnel.

Current communication tools do not appear to meet the volunteer's need for information. The society should use electronic technologies to improve communications between the fire service and its volunteers. Indeed, all committees, board meetings, and conferences should have communication mechanisms using contemporary technology to deliver important fire service information to volunteers at all levels of the organization.

One aspect of fire service operations that makes the volunteer job more doable is the concept of self-governance at the appropriate level. The fire service has done a good job pushing decision-making down in the organization. The fire service should continue to promote the concept of self-governance.

Therefore, the fire service should embrace the principle of self-governance in its programs, always trying to put decisions to the extent that it is practical or reasonable, in the hands of those who actually carry out those programs.

THE VOLUNTEER ROLE

DEFINE THE OPPORTUNITIES

Up to now, this document has been written without significant challenge. The fire service faces the most difficult challenge, developing roles and responsibilities for their volunteers. Taking a moment to understand that I am using the word volunteer, and not volunteer firefighter, the fire service must look beyond the volunteer as a firefighter. There are so many areas of responsibility within the fire service. A few of these areas are:

1. Public Education
2. Reading Programs
3. CPR & First Aid Program
4. School District Functions
5. Auxiliary Groups
6. Fundraising
7. Campaign Awareness for Levies and Bond Issues
8. Web Page Design and/or Maintenance

Providing a range of opportunities and levels of commitment can also help the fire service attract volunteers from a variety of economic, educational, and racial and ethnic backgrounds, who bring different skills, expertise and life experiences.

The fire service could consider forming partnerships with community organizations and residential facilities in order to recruit volunteers--people who do not traditionally participate in service programs--for specialized projects. A team of older African-American adults from a senior center, for example, can create a storytelling troupe that regularly visits local elementary schools to help children gain a greater appreciation of their cultural heritage. Other programs, like West Seneca AmeriCorps, in New York State, recruit a large, diverse pool of volunteers and then have the flexibility to link them to activities where their backgrounds contribute to their effectiveness.

RESOURCES

A resource is a source of information or expertise. Fire departments have not reached out to the resources in their communities. Fire departments fail to become directly involved in their communities' activities. Reaching outward to gain knowledge of the available resources and becoming involved in the activities of the community will help the fire service to better understand both the needs and wants of the citizens.

Fire departments do not realize that people from the community can be a resource. Volunteers not only fight fires, they also help departments with their senior outreach programs, inspecting home day-care facilities, only to name a few examples. These support functions are so important to all fire departments. (United States, 51)

Before a fire department asks anyone or any organization for support, make sure that the approach is well planned, and organized. Consider the following information before requesting support:

1. Written program description
2. Who should work on this particular project
3. A timeline is a necessity
4. Job descriptions for both paid staff and volunteers
5. Cost estimates, budget proposals
6. Anticipated answers to possible questions

Preplanning can make the difference between success and failure. Have a plan in place before seeking volunteers, money, grants, or any other type of resource.

SELECTING, ORIENTING, & TRAINING

It is a fine thing to have ability, but to discover ability in others is the true test. – Elbert Hubbard.

Selecting

Today, in many cities, counties, corporations, and other local governments, organizations screen people who apply, whether paid or volunteer. Does your organization furnish a current, accurate description of the position? Does the job description state clearly and accurately the duties and responsibilities of a volunteer as well as the skills the volunteer will need?

Interviews

An interview is considered successful when you get the information you need for selecting the right person for the right job. But there is another reason for conducting a good interview: you are not only interviewing, you are *being* interviewed. Your interview will be that person's first contact with his or her fire department, and you will want that first impression to be a good one.

There exist some basic "rules-of-the-road" to follow when conducting interviews:

1. Avoid questions that can be answered by a yes or no.
2. Ask questions that provoke thought.
3. Be sure that you and the applicant are talking about the same thing.
4. When the applicant speaks, listen until he or she is finished.
5. Do not begin to think about your answer until the applicant has stopped talking.

Most of us are so busy with our own thoughts while another person is talking that we often miss a great deal of what is said. But interviewing means hearing everything that is said, and *how* it is said. In other words, you should truly listen. To do this, you should see that there are no interruptions by people or the telephone.

Do not worry about pauses in the conversation. It is not necessary to say something as soon as the other person stops talking. Give the applicants time to gather their thoughts and continue with what they are saying. And give the applicants a chance to ask questions about the job. They need a clear understanding of what is expected. Also, you can often tell a lot about a person by the kinds of questions he or she asks.

ORIENTING

Volunteer orientation is another task; it benefits the volunteer, yourself, and, in fact, the entire department. A volunteer who is properly oriented is much more likely to become a retainable volunteer.

The main ingredients of a volunteer orientation program are: discussing expectations, explaining and informing, and setting up a check-back system.

Discussing Expectations

Early in the orientation period two points should be made clear: what the organization expects of the volunteer, and what the volunteer expects from the organization. Misunderstandings will arise if volunteers fail to mention their own expectations, and then the volunteer may become dissatisfied and disappointed.

Explaining and Informing

The new volunteer needs to know where things are, how things are done, and who does what. When orienting a new volunteer, give that volunteer a good start by taking the following steps:

1. Write down when and where the volunteer should report on their first drill, who will greet them, and who will give them their first instructions.
2. EXPLAIN THE RULES AND REGULATIONS OF THE ORGANIZATION – especially those that deal with safety, chain of command, responding in POV's, personal protective equipment, absences, and volunteer point system.
3. Introduce new volunteers to everyone they will come into contact with during their first month.

4. Give the new volunteer a tour of the district, and their assigned station. Point out where tools, equipment, and supplies are stored, and where they will find restrooms, soda machines, places to clean up, and other offices and work areas they should know about.
5. Give the new volunteer a volunteer handbook (if your organization does not have a handbook – MAKE ONE). Set aside some time during the first drill night to explain important sections and answer questions.
6. Explain the steps a department member must follow to clear up misunderstandings or get action on complaints.
7. Explain how supplies and equipment should be used, including the telephone system, computer systems, copying systems, and daily tools of the trade, and forms that are filled out routinely.
8. During the first drill explain how each member fits in with the work of the department. Show how the job, no matter how simple or small, helps provide services to citizens, and is an essential part of a well-run fire department.

Orientation will be much smoother if you assign one or two experienced and helpful members to assist each new volunteer. Be sure that the new volunteers understand that these persons have been assigned to help them and to answer their questions.

The first work assignment for the new volunteer should be a simple one, but the work should be useful. It should not be practice work unless the job is so hazardous that practice is necessary. Bunker gear and SCBA donning and doffing may be a good example. Be sure to check back at the end of drill to see that the task that was assigned has been done correctly.

Setting Up a Check-back System

For the first six months the new volunteer is under some pressure. Everything and everyone is new and strange. Almost everything is being done for the first time. Most new volunteers have moments when they wonder, “Can I really do this job?”

The understanding, supportive fire department will help new volunteers get adjusted by using the check-back system. This means setting aside time for the new volunteer to ask questions and time for the department to tell the volunteer what he or she is doing right, and what needs improving or changing. This type of stocktaking keeps volunteers morale high. It reassures newcomers as to whether they are doing a good job. It also keeps them informed about the department’s expectations.

TRAINING

In the fire service, training volunteers for their role, and developing their skills and abilities is the number #1 responsibility of the department. Failure to accomplish this task results in unnecessary injuries and fatalities.

During this training period it is a good point to remember that some people may have unpleasant memories of their school days. Part of the training division’s responsibilities will be to provide the climate for learning by endorsing training activities, encouraging members to take advantage of them, and helping all members in every way to grow. It will be helpful to recall those training programs that have been most valuable to the organization and why.

Planning the Training Program

There are a number of points to consider in the early planning stages. The training officer might begin by asking the following basic questions:

1. What are the mandatory minimum requirements for a volunteer, and at what level of skill?
2. What skills should they learn? What attitudes?
3. How soon is the training needed?
4. What does the new volunteer already know? What skills do they have at present?
5. What does the new volunteer think they need to learn? (Ask them.)

When these questions have been answered, and then consider the following:

1. What is needed to provide this training?
2. Equipment? Tools?
3. Teaching Aids?
4. Money?
5. Instructors?
6. How much time will be needed?
7. How should the instruction be scheduled?

Our chief want in life is somebody who shall make us do what we can – Ralph Waldo Emerson

MOTIVATING

When we talk about motivation we are really talking about the amount of physical and mental energy that a volunteer is willing to invest in his or her fire department. I feel that this definition covers three points:

- ❖ Motivation is already within people. The task of the fire department is not to provide motivation. What is important for the fire department is to know how to release high levels of motivation to do the job.
- ❖ Different people are willing to invest different amounts of energy and enthusiasm in their fire department. Not everyone is a rate buster, an overachiever. On the other hand, not everyone by any means is lazy or “poorly motivated”.
- ❖ The return in personal satisfaction that a volunteer receives from an investment of energy in the fire department affects the level of that volunteer’s motivation. In other words, a low return in need satisfaction results in a low level of motivation; a high return in need satisfaction results in a high level of motivation.

We have heard all the misinformed comments about needing more motivation, more money, or more whatever. We now know, after many years of research into human behavior, some revealing facts about how and why people work hard. I have found three important findings on what makes people do their best or something less than their best:

1. Scientists tell us that whatever people do is done to satisfy a physical need (such as the need for food) or an emotional need (such as the need for acceptance, recognition, or achievement).
2. Raises, bonuses, or extra points are not the only way or even the best way of encouraging people to work more and improve. Of course, a fair compensation may be necessary, but we have tended to exaggerate the power of money in motivating people to perform. Instead, the understanding of and ability to satisfy people's human needs count most, because having the chance to satisfy needs is what motivates a person to get the job done – and done well.
3. The attitudes people have toward work and their job are to a substantial degree the result of the experiences these people have had at the fire department or in life. They may have learned that hard work or quality work does not pay off.

Many people, especially our younger generations, believe that having interesting work to do is of great importance. Many of us probably know people who work harder and better for their church, club, or community as unpaid volunteers than they do for their employer who pays them for working. This is because they gain more satisfaction of their higher-level human needs from their unpaid work than they do from their paid jobs. **Their volunteer work provides more motivators – interesting work or challenge, real responsibility, or personal fulfillment – than their employment provides!**

When human needs are unsatisfied in the job situation, a person's work motivation will be at the lowest level at which there is an unsatisfied need. The fire department's job, then, is to free this blockage in order to release higher levels of motivation in every department member.

THE VOLUNTEER ROLE: SUMMARY

The fire service has an obligation to provide every community with the very best services possible, using the best resources available, while being extremely responsible with the community's tax dollar. Recruitment and retention are small potatoes when a fire department begins to address the role of a volunteer. "Two hundred years of tradition unimpeded by progress." Members of the fire service listen to this quote, believe those very words, and then wonder why programs such as volunteer recruitment and retention fail to exist.

The fire service has such a vast network of resources, and yet we fail to maximize the potential of those networks. The fire service needs to re-evaluate the way it conducts business. The fire service needs to gain support of the community that it serves through partnerships, activities, and goodwill. The volunteer has an appropriate place within the organization, and the fire service has the tools necessary to make these pieces fit.

PROGRAM & OPPORTUNITIES THAT MEAN SUCCESS



Source: Lt. Franklin W Wilson II, Central Kitsap Fire & Rescue, 2002

I have taken a deep look into volunteer recruitment and retention, and have identified areas that I feel will have a substantial impact on a volunteer in the fire service. As I continue to review this document, I make note that I failed to discuss what programs or opportunities can be developed within a fire department to ensure that efforts of recruitment and retention are not done in vain.

To often, the fire service does a remarkable job of researching and identifying problems within our organization, but the fire service fails to commit continued attention to these problems in an attempt to maintain their absence.

To some degree, new problems within the fire service are the result of old problems that are not fully silenced or eliminated. The fire service possesses some of the most incredible individuals, and the fire service must make use of each of them.

UNDERSTAND

The fire service must become more interested in understanding others and less in having the volunteer understand you. It means harnessing the idea that if you want quality, fulfilling communication that is nourishing to your organization and others, understanding others must come first. As the organization begins to understand where people are coming from, what they are trying to say, what is important to them, and so forth, being understood is a breeze; it falls into place without effort. In the reverse process, however, the organization is putting the cart before the horse (which is what we do most of the time). When the organization tries to be understood before you understand, the effort that is exerted will be felt by the organization and the volunteer or volunteers that are trying to be reached. Communications break down, and what happens is a battle of two egos.

Seeking to first understand isn't about who is right or wrong; it is a philosophy of effective communication. When an organization practices this method they will notice that people they communicate with will feel listened to, heard, and understood. This will translate into better business.

LISTEN

I grew up believing that I was a good listener. And although I have become a better listener than I was fifteen years ago, I must admit I still have room for improvement. The fire service faces this same challenge.

Effective listening is more than simply avoiding the bad habit of interrupting others while they are speaking or finishing their sentences. Listening is being content to listen to the entire thought of someone rather than waiting impatiently for your chance to respond.

Slowing down the response and becoming a better listener aids you in becoming a better person. It takes pressure from you. Think about this, you will notice that it takes an enormous amount of energy and is very stressful to be sitting at the edge of your seat trying to guess what the person in front of you is going to say so that you can fire back your response. Relax; listen more intently to what is being said. Not only do you feel more relaxed, but so does the person you are listening to. The conversation will slow down, because no one feels that they are in competition for speaking time.

FIREFIGHTER IN TRAINING PROGRAM

This is a two-year scholarship program that provides a Fire Science Associate in Technical Arts Degree to students who want to prepare for entry-level careers as firefighters for public fire departments, fire districts, industrial fire departments, and Department of Defense. The program provides general education, technical firefighting courses, and cooperative work experience at a fire station.

This program allows young men and women the opportunity to earn a college education and become exposed to the daily life in the fire service. Developed by Olympic College, Bremerton, Washington in conjunction with the Kitsap County Training Officers, candidates must complete an application process, written exam, candidate physical ability test, and an oral interview. Upon successful completion of all phases, candidates have the opportunity to work alongside paid firefighters in a student capacity to learn all aspects of being a career firefighter.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL TECHNICIAN SUPPORT DIVISION

This program eliminates the firefighting aspect of the fire service, and specifically targets volunteers who are interested in working onboard a Basic Life Support Unit as a driver-operator or technician. The concept of this program was to attract individuals who enjoyed the concept of emergency medicine and patient care, but did not fancy the idea of running into burning buildings.

Volunteers accepted into this program would complete a modified firefighter recruit academy, Emergency Medical Technician course, BLS Academy, Ambulance Driver/Operator course, EVAP, and appropriate vehicle qualifications. Members would participate in a rotating sign-up calendar to provide staffing of a BLS unit within the fire district.

TENDER/TANKER SUPPORT DIVISION

The Tender/Tanker program allows an individual to “specialize” in a particular area of the fire department, without having to be a firefighter. These individuals are responsible for getting our most precious commodity to the scene of the fire, **WATER**. This program may be well suited for many areas of the country that do not have well-established water distribution systems in place, and rely heavily upon a water shuttle operation at major fires.

Volunteers accepted into this program would complete a modified firefighter academy, Tender Driver/Operator course, Hydraulics course, Fire Department pumpers course, EVAP, and appropriate vehicle qualifications. Volunteers would participate in a rotating sign-up calendar to provide staffing within the fire district.

IMAGINATION AND BRAINSTORM WITHIN YOUR OWN ORGANIZATION

I have described only a few programs that are unique possibilities to our area in Kitsap County, Washington. But these do not have to be the only programs that are used. It is our responsibility as the fire service, to examine our own department and neighboring agencies, and determine what potentials exist to develop programs that retain quality volunteers. The fire departments need to think outside of the box, and utilize special skills that are possessed by citizens of their communities.

Making a commitment to developing volunteer programs requires a willingness to give up some control and decision-making power to others. This can be a frightening prospect. We all know the old adage: "If you want something done right, do it yourself." But if we really believed that, we wouldn't be in the business of training volunteers.

By definition, volunteer programs can collect useful and resourceful individuals. We have to extend that same faith in our volunteers to the decision-making parts of our programs. If we are not willing to share power, we will have "mascots" or tokens--not true volunteers. And, most likely, we won't have them for very long.

All organizations that rely in part on volunteers to deliver essential services know that, despite the literal definition, "volunteers" are not free. National service programs that are choosing to invest in volunteer recruitment, training, and support are doing so because this investment can pay off in improved program efficiency and effectiveness. The benefits can be enormous for the community and the fire department for which the volunteers are reaching.

There exist significant opportunities for fire departments to earn grant funding, or donations from private enterprise. These opportunities do not come without effort, and the fire service must make every attempt available to earn those funding opportunities. The fire service must utilize ALL available resources!

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Volunteers are recognized as a vital national resource. In a radio address in December 1996, President Clinton spoke of his vision of a million people serving as volunteer tutors in support of his America Reads Challenge, which seeks to ensure that every child is an able reader by the time she or he enters the third grade. The Presidents' Summit for America's Future, held in Philadelphia in April 1997, was a call to the nation to build on the spirit of volunteerism to address a number of the fundamental challenges facing this country's children. And the proposed legislation to reauthorize national service—the National and Community Service Amendments Act of 1998—underscores this renewed emphasis on volunteerism.

Success lies in the fire service's ability to clearly understand the needs of their relevant publics, ensure that the organizational philosophy is clearly understood and accepted, and then able to develop clear goals to address needs consistent with the organizational philosophy. Equally critical is the ability to communicate a message that invites others to contribute, and an open process that will help to assess the motivation and capitalize on as many assets as possible. Everything rests upon a flexible support system that holds it all together when things do not go according to agreed upon needs, philosophy, and goals.

There exist unique individuals within our fire district boundaries, which are waiting for an opportunity to show support of their fire department by becoming a volunteer. Some of those individuals may become our future paid firefighters, paramedics, and company officers. Others may be content with answering telephones twice a week at the headquarters building, instructing a C.P.R. class once a month, or reading a book to a group of children. The point is that the fire service must identify these particular roles, provide accurate definitions, and develop training accordingly.

I have recognized that a majority of fire departments across the United States do not possess a volunteer recruitment and retention program. The fire service needs to realize that some program must exist to provide support during high volume alarm periods, multiple-alarm incidents, and disasters. Only those well-established, metropolitan cities that possess a large, organized taxation structure can benefit in having an all-career fire department. The ability to develop and implement a volunteer recruitment and retention program should be a priority for fire departments across the United States.

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This interview was conducted to research a particular department's volunteer firefighter program. I was provided a copy of the introduction presentation, and the department's general directive that relates to the volunteer academy. Volusia County has maintained a well-regimented program, and has established a cooperative agreement with Daytona Beach Community College.

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This interview was conducted to research a student's view of being a volunteer firefighter with an area fire department. This young man has maximized his abilities by earning a scholarship for a "student-firefighter". This scholarship has provided him the opportunity to earn a two-year Fire Science degree, and work cooperatively with career firefighters exploring the fire service as a career.

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United States. Strategies for Marketing Your Fire Department Today and Beyond. Emmitsburg, Maryland: Federal Emergency Management Agency, 1998.

A manual to assist fire service leaders in examining the future, the role of the fire service in that future, and ideas on how to get there. This book was designed for fire service leaders, and yet offers intriguing insights for members at all levels.