

VOLUNTEER TRAINING EVENTS

HOW TO GET PEOPLE TO ATTEND

by Annette Safstrom



HOW TO GET VOLUNTEERS TO ATTEND YOUR TRAINING EVENT

In almost every church I visit, I hear the same responses when I ask about teacher training. “We have tried, but no one will come.” Or, “I feel like we have already asked so much of our volunteers, that I feel bad asking for more time.”

As children’s ministers, we know how important it is for our volunteers to be equipped for the job of ministering to little ones. Without proper training, our volunteers are left to figure things out on their own. I don’t know about you, but I want all the children in our ministry to experience the same quality of ministry. Certain things just shouldn’t be left to chance (or interpretation!) Things like discipline policies, ratios, bathroom and diaper changing policies, and pickup procedures are important enough that everyone needs to be on the same page.

I can almost hear you saying, “Annette, people in my church are busy and don’t really want to come to one more meeting.” Don’t worry, I have dealt with the same thing. So, that’s where our work begins. Making them WANT to come to our teacher training event. Here are some tips for overcoming this all-too-prevalent obstacle:

- **Reframe it!** No one looks forward to being “talked at.” But people love to be celebrated and to have fun. Marketing is everything here. You don’t have to call your get-together a training every time. Call your event something intriguing. Send invitations, and make it feel like a party. My rule of thumb is this: *Everyone needs to be invited three different ways if you want them to come.* A mass email just won’t do it. The more personal your invitation, the better your chances of having a great turnout. I like to mail an invitation about three weeks out, send an email two weeks out, and make a personal call the week of. I know that takes some time, but the benefits you will reap from personally reaching out to your team are well worth it.
- **Deliver what they need.** Everyone wants to be a part of something meaningful. Make sure they leave your event with some inspiration. Share how they have contributed something valuable. Give specific examples of kids who really learned something or were changed by a volunteer.
- **Make it fun.** You really don’t need to talk that long to get your training done anyway, so make the event into a party. Take the time you have your teachers together to build some community. You can even use some fun games and activities to actually train. At one event, we used a Jeopardy style game to teach

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our Safe Sanctuary policies, and gave out play money for them to use to bid on donated items at the end of the night.

- **Respect their time.** I know this is a hard one, but if you want your volunteers to come back next time, end on time. It shows people that you value them and their time, and that you will keep your word.
- **Make sure they leave with something valuable.** Each person should leave with something that they will use the very next time they enter their classroom. For example, give them some practical ways to get kids focused when mayhem breaks out (and it will). Or sprinkle them with some “kid-culture” by showing clips from trending TV shows, music videos, or video games, giving them some common ground with the kids. (*Children’s Ministry Magazine* is a great resource for this one.)