

The Laffe Project Presents:

Every Volunteer is a New Relationship

This is going to be a common theme here at the LAFFE Project, but the bottom line is: Everything is a Relationship. Volunteers are no different. If you just groaned, I know your pain, but the bottom line is just this - the animals are not really the goal for your volunteers.

Anyone who wants to volunteer at an organization that they believe in really believes they are doing it FOR the animal. But, the reality is, we bring all our human "issues" with us when we go to volunteer, go to work, go to church, and so on....

What does that mean for you? Yes, one more thing to do and learn about - but just remind your self, YOU are doing it for the animals! Okay, now what? The first thing is, you will never be able to make everyone happy - but you already know that. So, the second thing is, what is next?

There are two things to focus on with volunteers. Finding them and keeping them. If you can't keep them, don't put your energy into finding them until you know how to keep them. If you tell yourself it's natural for volunteers to be like revolving doors - yes and no, and that is where YOUR issues will come up!

But for this article, let's just stay with a few basics.

- Men and Women need different things from the volunteer experience. There is no one size fits all approach.
- **If you only do one thing, read: Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus by John Gray.** Yes, it was written a while ago and no, it's not just about romance. People are primarily motivated by needing to be appreciated, respected, admired, needed - you just need to learn what women need and what men need so you are responding appropriately. Plus, it helps your personal relationships!
- If you can do two things, then LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN! One reason we don't like listening is we either think we are right or we don't want to hear we might be wrong! And, while you may be right since it IS your program, don't be so quick to judge. Often others can see what we can't and people will tell you what they need - either verbally or by leaving with out a word, the difference is whether you can listen and not judge.
- Volunteers are just that, volunteers. One of the biggest complaints I've heard is that they get treated like a paid employee with expectations of a paid employee. This is hard because your program needs paid employees but the reality is most can't afford it. You've got to be very clear about what your expectations are of your volunteers.
- Find other ways to give back to your volunteers. Who in your community might donate manicures, massages, movie passes, or coffee? A local business may not have time to volunteer, but this is a way they can give back plus introduce a potential new client. It can be a win/win - and include their company info in your media/blog/website - free advertising for them can also be a way to give free services and products to your volunteers.
- Say thank you, a lot. You can never say thank you enough to your volunteers. They may pretend like they don't need you to say it, but they do! Also, thank them in public and in your materials - be proud of what they do for you and share it with the world