

Baby Boomer Volunteerism Finding Volunteers and Retaining Them

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Baby Boomers, the generation that changed the face of America now takes on the challenges of aging. As they retire, they offer a treasure of volunteer experience.

The Boomers born between 1946 and 1964 are a silver tsunami of experiential and intelligence capital, a grand resource waiting to be tapped. In these times of downsizing and budget restrictions, some organizations are beginning to rely more on volunteer support. The challenge is not so much in finding volunteers as it is in keeping them.

The leading edge of the Boomer Generation turned 60 years old in 2006. The [United States Census Bureau](#) states that there were 78.2 million Boomers as of July 1, 2005. An estimated 7,918 people turned 60 each day in 2006, amounting to 330 every hour. That is an awful lot of treasure in experiential and intelligence capital, when one knows how to seek it out.

Finding Boomer Volunteers

The process of finding volunteers is not difficult. With so many people, an organized search can be taken down many channels. These include:

- Local churches
- Advertising in local papers, radio stations and Googling "How to find volunteers" on line
- Local businesses
- Local clubs and organizations
- Word of mouth
- Community colleges (many Boomers are going back to school to learn new skills)

Motivating Boomer Volunteers

Having volunteers is just one part of the volunteer process. Keeping your volunteers interested, motivated and willing to participate is the other. This means the manager must understand that a fair exchange agreement exists albeit very different from that of the typical paid employee.

[Rosebeth Moss Kanter](#) wrote in 2007: "People living longer inevitably want to focus on things that make life worth living... what I call the 'three Ms of motivation': mastery, membership and meaning. The fourth M of money plays a declining role once basic needs are met, although many older adults also need earned income."

Person Centered Partnerships

The world of successful volunteerism is based on Person Centered Partnerships (PCP) and a development of a fair exchange agreements between the volunteer and manager. PCP involves:

- The volunteer through their freedom of choice selects an organization, as a place where they come to serve others effectively.
- The manager accepting the service of the volunteer, recognizes the volunteer's worth and is interested in fully utilizing the skills of that volunteer.
- Both the volunteer and the manager in a spirit of mutual understanding, are willing to negotiate their positions with respect to each other, the organization and those persons to be served.

A fair exchange agreement is about SALE(S).

S = Service to others (Meaning)

A = Actual utilization of personal and professional experience

L = Learning Opportunities (Mastery)

E = Effective recognition of service (Membership)

Managers who view Boomer volunteers as simply unpaid workers create an environment that:

- Devalues human assets – people are worth “less” than when they were in regular employment
- Disenfranchises the volunteer and tells them that they are “not enough”
- Alienates volunteers from management and creates a situation of rapid turnover in business

Retaining Boomer Volunteers - SALE in Action

Boomer volunteers place great value on serving others. Placing the volunteer in a place that utilizes their skill sets is good for the organization and the volunteer's esteem. Having the volunteer attend organizational training workshops and seminars strengthens the individual and the organization.

Management and staff recognition of the volunteer's work is a simple and effective means of showing gratitude and their place on the team. Other forms of recognition range from a simple thank you for a job well done, to validating volunteer opinions, awards given and holiday get together events.

Stable volunteer connections strengthen the organization and supports the community.

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