

HAPPY VOLUNTEERS: Finding them, keeping them, sustaining them and using them effectively

Teri Rasmusson

Our dance organizations are created by volunteers. We need a powerful base of diverse volunteers with energy to get up and do what needs to be done! More volunteers means the work is more spread out, and creates a LOT less burnout. How do we identify the right people and manipulate (ummm... convince) them to give their talents and precious time to the dance community? This session will explore answers that will enable us to create a larger and stronger volunteer base, both in leadership and operations.

WORKSHOP HANDOUT AND PRESENTATION: Happy Volunteers (Teri Rasmusson)

Happy Volunteers
Many Hands Make Light Work

1. Volunteers want you to be prepared for them. They would like to know what you expect of them. Provide a clear job description for each of you group's volunteer positions.
2. Not everyone is a self-starter. Folks like good clear training. Even if a task is simple, take the time to explain it. A buddy system of providing an experienced volunteer to work with a new person is a good idea. Volunteers also enjoy knowing they can step into a leadership role after some time.
3. Volunteers like to feel welcome. Show them around the venue. Introduce them to other folks in your group. Show them that your organization is a warm, friendly, helpful, and happy to see them.
4. Volunteers like to know up front approximately how long a particular job will take. Such as: A door shift taking money, hall set up, clean up, teaching a dance lesson, refreshment prep and clean up.
5. Volunteers will want to switch around their jobs a bit to keep them more interesting. A change might be good once in awhile.
6. It is important that volunteers have a clear sense of how to represent your group that fits in with your mission and purpose. Give them an example of what to say at the door that meets the needs of the dancers arriving for the first time, and your group. Our group finds it helpful to have 2 door people during the busy times when folks arrive. Volunteers can often work out who will be best at a task. Greeting and explaining the hall and locations of everything they may need to know; taking money and making change. Volunteers need to know a clear sense of your budget when shopping so they feel successful. This can come experience if you are just starting out. You will have an idea of how much you can allow for refreshments, or if you need to find folks who can volunteer to bake goodies for your event.

7. It is a touchy subject at times, but you need to trust the folks who work at your door and with the money. That is usually understood, but perhaps you can work this out with your volunteer coordinator. If you do not have one, get a sense of the people you have when you explain the different positions you need filled for a night. We have found that if there is any trouble or a questionable volunteer, others may fill you in on their concerns. Otherwise, you have to trust the box is correct when you go to count it out and pay the expenses for that evening. Our group also has a tally sheet so we have an estimate of how many dancers attend.

8. Some volunteers may become dissatisfied when there is a lack of communication between the volunteer coordinator, or whom ever you have working with your volunteers. You will need someone to be the point person for scheduling volunteers. Some volunteers may sign up for a regular shift for each dance. This is always a good thing. It is still good to check in with them for each event so you do not assume they will always be there. Things do come up. Keep a list of your volunteers. Keep a note book handy of things they need, such as supplies, and their own suggestions that would make your event even more successful as you go along during the season.

9. It is a good idea to know how many volunteers you need for each event. Divide the jobs into shifts at the door, kitchen prep, clean up and the like. This will allow everyone an opportunity to dance and they will know how long their jobs will take so they can plan their enjoyable evening. You may find you can fill a sudden need for a someone on the spot if an emergency comes up and you have fewer volunteers.

10. Volunteers like to be appreciated. It is nice to thank them as often as possible. You may come up with some creative ways to show your groups appreciation. Such as flowers, announcements at your event, volunteer spotlight in your newsletter, a volunteer appreciation dinner after an event.

11. The perks of volunteering can be a number of things. Getting in free is a good start. This can attract students, dancers who are retired, or on a limited income for what ever reason. It can also be for the enjoyment of meeting people at the door, getting to know folks, dancers, musicians or the rest of your staff such as the sound person, etc. Sometimes you need extra volunteers for special events. Getting into a special event that costs extra to attend is a good perk.

12. Getting the word out that you need volunteers. Making announcements as to the need for volunteers at your events, newsletters, your dance hotline, non profit sections of the news paper may work at times. Word of mouth from your current volunteers is always a good start. They can share their enjoyment as a volunteer, and how it helps your organization.

13. As you know, we are all volunteers. We are the life blood of any dance organization. It provides so much joy and entertainment to everyday life when you see folks enjoying an evening of dance and music. I always like listening to the feedback I hear on the floor when a dance evening has ended. Our volunteers enjoy knowing they are working along side of such

a variety of folks with such different occupations, education, back grounds and from all over the country. The common goal is that they all enjoy dancing and love the music. Without them it would be hard to afford our events.

14. Provide your volunteers with guidelines written out for the requirements of your hall, clean up policies, your groups policies such as no alcohol, smoking etc. . . and they will get right to it.

These are just guidelines to Happy Volunteers as we know it.

ATTENDEE NOTES:

Use signupgenius.com to sign up volunteers online.

Reward volunteers. Hold Volunteer Appreciation Dinner, give Doug Plummer's calendar, CDSS coupon from the CDSS store, thank you photo board to showcase tonight's volunteers, etc.