

The Volunteer Project

STOP RECRUITING. START RETAINING.

A book about volunteer cultures where individuals not only stick around, but they invite their friends to join them as well.

by Darren Kizer, Christine Kreisher & Steph Whitacre



Our Zero Recruitment Dream

(Taken from the introduction of The Volunteer Project.)

Have you ever had more volunteers than you needed? You didn't have to ask for help; they just poured in your doors. We have experienced these seasons of ministry, and we loved them! Our experiences and research have brought us to believe unashamedly that it is possible to experience volunteer cultures where zero recruitment is necessary.

In fact, this book is inspired by our dream to see zero recruitment cultures spring up in churches and organizations everywhere. Our desire is that by implementing the strategies found in the following pages, those who lead volunteers will discover the success that comes when you stop trying to recruit new volunteers and instead start focusing on retaining current volunteers.

It is baffling to consider how one volunteer culture can excel beyond others with similar facilities, budgets, and leadership teams. Especially during periods of low volunteer participation, leaders may pause to ask why other ministries are excelling in volunteer participation, while their own struggles. We have studied volunteer data within numerous churches and nonprofit organizations, and have concluded the difference lies within the volunteer culture. Zero recruitment leaders have crafted a culture that is irresistible and attractive.

Zero recruitment cultures . . .

- always have enough volunteers.
- design atmospheres that feel electric.
- draw the best leaders.
- are wildly productive while simultaneously full of laughter.

Volunteers in zero recruitment cultures describe their roles as . . .

- life giving.
- full of opportunities to make new friends.
- fueling their pursuit of meaning.
- enjoyable.
- propelling them forward at home and work.



Our goal is to help you experience a volunteer culture where you can stop recruiting and start retaining. Don't get us wrong—we are not saying you will never need to recruit volunteers again. If you are in a growing ministry (which we hope you are), the launching of a new program or site will place you in recruitment mode. When we say to **stop recruiting** and **start retaining**, here is what we mean: *If you choose to stop recruiting and start retaining, you can focus on retention and make that your passion. And if you value your volunteers above your programs, you will create a culture that makes retention easier and attracts additional volunteers.*

The problem is that far too often the immediacy of empty volunteer positions lures us into pouring the majority of our energy into recruitment. When you focus primarily on recruitment, you will continually focus on orienting and engaging a stream of new volunteers. The more time you spend recruiting, the less time you spend investing in current volunteers. Keep in mind that **volunteers are not a renewable resource**. That's why it is paramount to celebrate and care for the ones who are already engaged.

Retention should always trump recruitment. It takes exponentially more energy to recruit a volunteer than to retain one. If you adopt a leadership model focused on retention, you will begin to experience a culture where volunteers stick around, and even do much of the recruiting for you by inviting others to join them. Instead of being stuck in an endless cycle of recruit and replace, you will begin to see your volunteer culture shift to one of enthusiasm and magnetic opportunities.

Let's Do This

When you think about your top three volunteer experiences, what made them great? What about your worst experience? What made it so miserable? When we are speaking or consulting, we will ask volunteers and leaders to tell us about their best and worst volunteer experiences, and we tend to get very similar answers. There are consistent themes that show up every time.

When describing their worst volunteer experiences, people tend to use words and phrases like . . .

- unorganized.
- no clear direction.
- I didn't have friends there.
- too much red tape.
- I felt obligated to stay.

When describing their best volunteer experiences, people tend to say things like . . .

- I have friends there.
- I feel like I belong.
- I am making a difference.
- I feel supported, valued, and appreciated.

In this book, we unpack four proven strategies for attracting and keeping volunteers that support the positive statements associated with great volunteer experiences. You will begin to identify wins and see success quickly, which can then be applied to the wider culture. Incremental improvement is key in moving closer to a zero recruitment culture.

Are you ready? It's time to **stop recruiting** and **start retaining**.



The Four Strategies

1

CELEBRATE THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

Celebrating the significance of volunteers' investments centers on the leader making a commitment to providing opportunities for volunteers to serve in roles that are a good fit for their skills and interests. It begins with the leader making a mindset shift from just filling volunteer vacancies to connecting volunteers with roles in which they will thrive. Volunteers experiencing significance say things like, *"I love making a difference!"*

2

PROVIDE FIRST-CLASS SUPPORT

Effective leadership begins with well-informed and resourced volunteers. Volunteers should be communicated with often and provided tools for their roles in advance. Leaders should invest in training for skills that are applicable in a volunteer's home and workplace, reaching beyond the role he fulfills in the church or organization. When this happens, volunteers will exclaim, *"I've got what I need and I feel valued!"*

3

FUEL MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS

Many people choose to volunteer because they are looking for community and connection to other like-minded people. This strategy focuses on team building principles and the importance of providing opportunities for volunteer groups to share stories, play, and laugh together. A volunteer experiencing community will express the sentiment that, *"I belong here,"* and, *"I've got friends here."*

4

EMPOWER THEIR PASSIONS

This strategy focuses on establishing clear vision and parameters within volunteer teams. If leaders do not give clear vision, volunteers will invent their own. Empowering volunteers happens when leaders remove the red tape and give volunteers permission to carry out the mission. We challenge leaders to not make assumptions for their volunteers, but invite individuals into opportunities that will stretch them beyond what they have done in the past. Volunteers will be excited to say, *"I'm trusted and have opportunities to develop into a better leader."*



The ZRM Survey

Imagine having a nagging, persistent headache that lasts for weeks. You go to the doctor and describe your problem, and without asking you further questions or ordering any tests, he gives you two aspirin and sends you home. You leave frustrated because he simply masked the symptoms without determining the root of the problem. Sometimes we do the same thing. We have an ongoing shortage of volunteers, and instead of asking questions and doing a thorough examination, we treat the problem with a temporary fix.

When we coach ministry leaders, often people will ask how to assess their volunteer culture. One tool we suggest using is a survey that asks volunteers for information pertinent to the problem the leader is trying to solve. Without fail, leaders always respond to our suggestion with, “What questions should I ask?” That’s why, as part of *The Volunteer Project*, we include a survey and assessment that can be completed by both leaders and volunteers.

Of course, assessing volunteer satisfaction is only the first step. It’s what you do with the findings that will make a real difference. When you turn insight into action by making necessary changes, you will see a dramatic impact on volunteer satisfaction and retention.

That’s what *The Volunteer Project* is all about: assessing your strengths and weaknesses so you can celebrate and continue to develop the areas in which you are strong, and identify and begin to mend the areas that need improvement. To do this, we highly recommend using the Zero Recruitment Model (ZRM) Survey.

The ZRM Survey is professionally engineered around the four volunteer retention strategies found in this book. After taking the survey, you will be able to see your scores within the next 24 hours. These scores will provide feedback about areas in which you are excelling, as well as areas of volunteer leadership that can be improved.

There is also a parallel survey you can request your volunteers take to provide confidential, anonymous feedback. Once your volunteers have responded to the survey, you will be sent two more sets of scores to assist in your evaluation. You will be able to evaluate your volunteer culture using the following three scores:

Your Leader Score is the result of your self-reporting on the assessment. This score will raise your self-awareness and help you to focus on your own leadership development. (*The Leader Score is available immediately after taking the survey.*)

The Volunteer Team Score reveals the combined results of the sampling of volunteers you ask to participate in the survey. To protect anonymity and generate straightforward feedback, you will provide an email contact for each volunteer participating in the survey (maximum 100) and we will send the survey to your contact list. (*The results of the combined Volunteer Team Score are available ten days after you submit your volunteer contact list.*)

The Sync Score is the comparative results between the Leader Score and the Volunteer Team Score. This explores where there is harmony or divergence between leader and volunteer perceptions. (*The results of the comparative Sync Score are available ten days after you submit your volunteer contact list.*)



Are you ready to STOP RECRUITING?

TAKE THE SURVEY

At this time, the Zero Recruitment Model Survey can be accessed for the low cost of FREE. So give it a whirl! Log on to stoprecruiting.com/survey to participate in the survey and immediately begin improving your volunteer culture.

Note to Orange Conference participants: *Due to higher-than-normal volume during the conference season, please allow an additional week for the processing of your Leader Score results.*

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“I’ve had the honor of traveling around the country with Darren, going from church to church to see how he works with and leads volunteers. Get ready to change the way you look at the world of volunteerism!”

Jon Acuff

New York Times Bestselling author of *Do Over*

“Where was this book when I was a children’s ministry pastor? I never felt like I had enough passionate, talented volunteers and it hurt my heart every time one of them left me. Darren Kizer, Christine Kreisher and Steph Whitacre get right to the heart of the matter in *The Volunteer Project*. Full of sound strategy to stop the begging and move to engaging and retaining your most valuable asset, this book is a must read for every ministry leader.”

Sherry Surratt

Former CEO and President, MOPS International

