A Volunteer Needs a Good Reason for Doing the Task

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The Need

If work is not meaningful, do not ask volunteers to do it. Volunteers need to know that their contribution is important. They find time to work on projects that contribute to goals that they support. They are motivated when they gain in some way—a new skill, new relationships, a feeling that what they did made a difference. Volunteers are more likely to complete tasks and do so on time when they know that others are counting on them.

How to Meet the Need

- **If the work is not important, stop doing it.** If a task or project is not a critical element of your overall mission, goals, or strategic plan, why is it being done? Review all standing committees and eliminate those that are filled year after year, but have nothing to do, and those for which no one wants to volunteer.

- **Tell the volunteers that what they are doing is important to the organization**. Help them understand the importance of their contribution—how each task fits into a bigger project or objective. Tell them what's at stake if the work is not done well and on time. Remind them of what's in it for them, based on their reasons for volunteering.

- Let them know you have selected them as the best person for the job and that they aren't merely the first person who said yes.

- **Develop an action plan early in the project.** Include the overall project goals and objectives, steps that will be taken, the person responsible for each action, and the deadline for completion.

- **Create a project activity tracking form for each project.** Use the table function in Microsoft Word or a spreadsheet in Microsoft Excel or similar programs that will allow you to sort by columns. Include all activities from your action plan as described above. Add dates of meetings, conference calls, and dates status reports are due. Sort the columns by "Who," "Deadline," or "Status" to monitor the plan as time progresses. Distribute a copy to each volunteer up front and just prior to each reporting date to remind team members of deadlines and to create peer pressure to get the tasks completed. This lets them know that others are counting on them…

By communicating the importance of the task to volunteers, and by letting them know that others are counting on their contribution, they will feel a greater sense of importance and thus give a greater level of commitment to the task.