

Building Children's Ministry

BuildingChildrensMinistry.com



Attracting First-time Volunteers

By Jim Braniff,
adapted from "The Great Kid-venture"
Promiseland Conference Workshop

It can be a challenge to find volunteers from outside the usual circle of people. You may have tried various events or appeals to invite new faces into your children's ministry—but what strategies really work? A survey of over 800 recruiting ideas revealed that the best-proven strategies contain the same ingredients. If you want to motivate new people to join your children's ministry, you'll need to know the strategies that succeed at motivating first-time volunteers.

Goals:

To learn proven strategies for finding and motivating new volunteers.



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AND



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Start with a Strategy

Successful recruitment doesn't happen by accident; it begins with a plan.

Recruit to the Right Place

The first step of recruiting is knowing where you have recruitment needs. There are four key roles of ministry that you need to fill:

- Leadership to make things run.
- Operations to make them run smoothly.
- Curriculum and program to teach kids the Bible.
- Someone to shepherd these kids in a small group.

Consider who is filling each of these roles now. This can help you figure out what types of people are needed and where the holes and gaps are, so you can recruit toward those needs and fulfill those functions.

Notice that some of these roles don't involve direct contact with children—which means you can recruit those that say, "I like my kids, but not other people's," or, "I'm no good with children." There may be a place for them.

Discuss

- *How are different spiritual gifts uniquely suited to each of these roles?*
- *Why might a Sunday school teacher experience burnout attempting to do all of these?*
- *How can your children's ministry better delegate its responsibilities and roles?*

Find Where to Fish

Who you ask to volunteer depends on what you're recruiting toward. Match your need with a "pond" of potential recruits. For example, if you need someone to smile and love and hug the children, who does that already? Grandparents. Find someone inside your seniors group who can help you recruit his or her peers. Need someone with a heart to teach children? Consider placing notices on bulletin boards at the community college, where many of the students are studying to become elementary teachers.

Discuss

- *What kind of people do we need? Where are these kinds of people already gathering?*

Polish the Pitch

How do you make an effective appeal? People are most permanently motivated by positive vision. Construct every appeal you make—personal, public, written—according to the 80/20 rule: 80 percent of the appeal should be why, and 20 percent should be how. First create a vision for children's ministry (that's the 80), then show them how they can help to make it happen (that's the 20). People want to give their lives to something with purpose and significance. Show them where they can fit in.

Discuss

- *Examine a typical appeal for volunteers, maybe even one you've made from the front of the church or in the bulletin. How did it fit or break the 80/20 rule?*
- *How could you have worded it differently to greater motivate a positive response?*

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Know What Works

There are four general ways of asking for volunteers: asking in person, appealing to the congregation, inviting people in groups, and publicizing your appeal in writing. Examining over 800 recruiting ideas from dozens of churches revealed that the most effective appeals were:

1. Personal contact: by far the most effective way to recruit new volunteers was face-to-face and by phone
2. Congregational appeals
3. Group appeals
4. Appeals in writing

Personal appeals

Within the category of personal appeals, the four most effective appeals were (in order):

1. Asking parents
2. Asking people one-on-one
3. Inviting current volunteers to bring a friend for a day
4. Inviting current volunteers to find a serving partner or apprentice

Congregational appeals

Within the category of congregational appeals, the most effective appeals were:

1. Special events centered on highlighting the children's ministry
2. Presenting photos and videos to the congregation
3. Including the children as one element in the Sunday morning service, followed by an invitation
4. Including a children's ministry volunteer's testimony in a regular service

Group appeals

The best responses targeted at groups came from (in order):

1. Ministry fairs
2. Children's ministry open houses
3. Partnering the children's ministry with other ministries (such as the small group ministry)
4. Making appeals as part of a spiritual gift training or class

Appeals in writing

The most effective writing appeals were (in order):

1. Volunteer opportunity brochures
2. A bulletin insert that corresponds with a public appeal
3. An information booth
4. Flyers

Discuss

- *Which of these appeals have you attempted in the past?*
- *Which have you never considered before?*
- *Which of these might you consider now, knowing their level of effectiveness?*

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Put It in Writing

When your appeal is written, use these three tips to increase the response.

Regardless of the format—brochures, bulletins, flyers, letters, websites, or return reply cards—you are more likely to generate enthusiasm and get a response if you are intentional about how you write.

1. Insist on excellence in presentation. Use the artists, graphic designers, editors, printers, and technology experts in your congregation to produce the best presentation possible. Ultimately, your materials will compete with other ministries, busy schedules, sports, PTA, and even the Evil One for the attention of your recruits. Obvious errors or uninteresting graphics make it too easy for people to dismiss your invitation. Use the gifts God has given your congregation to write and present well.

Discuss

- *How does the quality of the materials make a difference?*
- *Who in your congregation might be gifted to help in this area?*

2. Pitch the vision. The vision and purpose of your ministry are what will capture the enthusiasm of new recruits. Have a logo, a look, a theme, and a slogan. In every Willow Creek Promiseland conference and on every Promiseland paper you'll hear or see the words, "The best hour in every kid's week." Find the words that catch your vision in an inspiring phrase. Make sure all your brochures, bulletins, flyers, and letters reflect it.

Discuss

- *How do slogans and logos impress upon people the vision or attitude of an organization (think of examples from advertising)?*
- *What impression do you want people to have when they think of your children's ministry?*
- *What could help you build that impression?*

3. Always include an immediate next step. The number one way to kill enthusiasm is to create it and then give it nothing to do. You cannot put out anything in writing that does not give people reply options. Make responding to your appeal easy. If you can use postage-paid response cards, do so. Give people a place where they can turn in response cards. Give them a phone number with an extension specific to your ministry and a message recorded in a warm voice that sounds like you actually love kids. Dedicate a specific e-mail address that's easy to remember (e.g., children@yourchurchname.org) in case the respondent loses the address. Print your logo, theme statement, and instructions for response on every card, in case it gets dropped or misplaced.

Discuss

- *What is the best way for people in your church or community to respond to an appeal for volunteers?*
- *How can you make that easier for them and more efficient for you?*

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Apply the Personal Touch

Ultimately, your best recruiting tool isn't on paper; it's people.

Every recruiting appeal eventually leads to a personal contact. No one gets connected to your ministry without a conversation. The personal touch determines how well recruits get introduced to the ministry and how likely they are to stay with it.

Take the Time

There's a direct correlation between the time invested in a recruiting process and how long the recruits will serve. Don't recruit when you're late for a church service. Take time. Make an appointment. Meet for coffee or dessert. This communicates two things: first, the person is important, and second, the ministry is important.

Master Your Message

Once again, the best recruiting is done to a vision, not a job description. Train people within the ministry to recruit personally and according to the 80/20 rule. One way to do this is to help each person work out a personalized, 100-word recruiting pitch: "Fred, the 60 minutes I spend each Sunday is the best hour of my week. I might get to teach a kid from a non-churched family how to pray. I might tell a kid from a broken home that God loves him. Or maybe I can take a kid who's scared and put my arms around him and tell him he doesn't need to be afraid because God is his friend. Fred, would you be willing to come one time with me and see what God is doing in our children's ministry?"

That's 90 words—79 percent why, 21 percent how—and it's far more effective than, "Hey, you wanna teach Sunday school?"

Pick Up the Phone

A telephone-recruiting drive can be effective, if done strategically. Decide who should call whom. Then prepare your callers. For example, one effective phone drive used callers who already worked in and felt ownership over the area of need. They were taught personalized 80/20 pitches and phone courtesy, and were asked to call only the parents who had attended a Sunday service themed around volunteerism.

In the invitation, don't use guilt or pleading, but say something like, "We ask all the parents who have children attending to help out. It involves coming in once or twice a month or weekly, whatever works best for your schedule. When enough parents do this, we're able to give our kids better care. It's also a great way to see what your child is learning. Is this a way you could help us out?"

Speak Well from the Front

When you do stand before the church to make a public appeal, take the time and energy to prepare the best message possible. Don't treat it casually. This is your greatest single opportunity to make parents feel good about where they bring their children, to get the congregation excited about bringing new families into the ministry, and to sow seed for your other recruitment initiatives to harvest.

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Always Include an Immediate Next Step

Again, make responding to your appeal easy. Hand out response cards and give people a place to turn them in. Give them a phone number with an extension specific to your ministry and a message recorded in a warm voice that sounds like you actually love kids. Dedicate a specific e-mail address that's easy to remember (e.g., children@yourchurchname.org) in case the respondent loses the address. Print your logo, theme statement, and instructions for response on every card, in case it gets dropped or misplaced.

Discuss

- *Why is having a personal touch vital to recruiting?*
- *What happens if you neglect these principles?*
- *How can you improve on these areas in your children's ministry?*

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Case Study of a Congregational Appeal

Consider the following real-life example of an up-front appeal.

In the following example, submitted by Lori Salomo, Lori used PowerPoint slides with photos of infants, followed by slides of those same children as adults. The following is a paraphrase of her presentation:

Kid Construction Company exists to help build faith, hope, and love in the hearts of children, so that when they've grown into a man or woman [*here Lori switched from an infant slide to the corresponding adult slide*], they'll be spiritually equipped and live lives pleasing to God. But to be committed to that work of spiritual nurture takes three things—vision, sacrifice, and a heart for God.

For instance, did the nursery caregiver of this little one [*infant slide*] know to pray that God would call him into a life of service and encourage him to be part of the body of Christ? [*Switching to the adult slide.*] How delighted the toddler's teachers would be to know that this little beauty grew up to have such great internal beauty. And who would have known that this little guy [*infant slide*] wearing these tiny shoes would one day grow up to be a six-foot-six dynamic worshiper of God [*here she showed the adult, hands stretched upward in praise*].

It takes vision knowing that your service and your influence to children through the Kids Construction Company will make a difference...and it takes sacrifice. Believe me, the sacrifice will be well worth it when you see what God will do in the lives of children you touch.

More than any other motive for serving others is the simple fact that God is worthy of your whole lives. Today you can be a person of vision, sacrifice, and worship. During the next month the Kids Construction Company will be inviting you to serve in our children's ministry during our next ministry year, which begins in September. Today you can let me know of your interest by filling out the bulletin insert and dropping it in the offering basket, or hand it to me in the atrium when you leave the service.

Discuss

- *What elements of this appeal were done well? What worked?*
- *If this was your church, how would you proceed over the next month?*
- *What other initiatives would make a good follow-up to this presentation?*
- *Brainstorm ideas:*
 - ◆ *What graphics or slogans might fit the Kids Construction Company?*
 - ◆ *What recruitment training would you give current volunteers?*
 - ◆ *What steps would be necessary to complete a month-long recruitment initiative?*

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Additional Resources

Books, downloads, and websites to help you with your volunteer ministry.

Building Children's Ministry: Children's ministry training resources from Christianity Today International and Willow Creek Association



www.BuildingChildrensMinistry.com

- ◆ "Interview and Evaluate Volunteers" by Jim Braniff & Donna Irwin
- ◆ "Develop a Volunteer Training Program" by Susan Shadid
- ◆ "Grow and Care for Volunteers" by Pat Cimo
- ◆ "Lead a Volunteer Orientation Meeting" by Jim Braniff

Building Church Leaders: Leadership training resources from Christianity Today International



www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com

- ◆ "Motivating Leaders" training theme and PowerPoint
- ◆ "Volunteer Development" training theme and PowerPoint
- ◆ "Finding (and Keeping) Happy Volunteers" article by LeAnn Campbell
- ◆ "Preventing Volunteer Burnout" article by Robert Morgan
- ◆ "A Training Plan for Volunteers" article by Shirley J. Good

Promiseland: Children's ministry curriculum from Willow Creek Association



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Care and Feeding of Volunteers: Recruiting, Training, and Keeping an Excellent Volunteer Ministry Staff by Barbara Bolton, Mike Bright, and Byron Cressy (Standard Publishing, 2001; ISBN 0784710007)



Children's Ministry Volunteers that Stick by Jim Wideman (Group Publishing, 2004; ISBN 0764426737)



How to Mobilize Church Volunteers by Marlene Wilson (Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1983; ISBN 0806620129)



Inviting Volunteers to Minister: Stories and Strategies from Seven Effective Churches (Strategies & Resources) by John Cionca (Standard Publishing, 1999; ISBN 0784709475)



Simply Strategic Volunteers: Empowering People for Ministry by Tony Morgan and Tim Stevens (Group Publishing, 2004; ISBN 0764427563)



The Volunteer Revolution: Unleashing the Power of Everybody by Bill Hybels (Zondervan, 2004; ISBN 0310252385)

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