

# Choose a Culture of Service over a Culture of Status

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## *A Culture of Status*

In a culture of status, only those with a certain rank or title can do ministry. If you want something done well and consistently, you have to pay for it. After all, titles typically come with a salary. Attendees with initiative reach out to volunteer but rarely get connected. Staff members say they “need” more volunteers but are also “too busy” to follow-up with recruits. Those same staff also feel threatened by high-capacity volunteers, fearing their job security may erode. Ultimately, the church ends up overextending its staff budget and reinforcing the idea that ministry is based on status, not gifting.

## *A Culture of Service*

Churches with high volunteer rates have developed an opposite culture. Everyone is invited to serve based on their gifts and passions. (And I mean everyone. Even those outside the faith.) Volunteer engagement is valued more than perfection while systems are put in place to ensure excellence and consistency. Staff members see their work as “equipping the saints,” recognizing that their ultimate value is in the teams they build, not the tasks they complete. Volunteering is promoted as a spiritual next step for all alongside small groups and classes. And volunteers are publicly celebrated as often as possible.

Eventually, pastors don’t have to beg people to serve. They simply have to ask.

The following steps can help you build a Culture of Service in your church

### **1) Reduce Your Dependence On Staff**

Not surprisingly, churches with low levels of volunteer engagement are also often overstaffed. They’ve trained themselves to pay for ministry. It’s hard to address a volunteer issue without addressing a staffing issue. Until you reduce your reliance on staff, you’ll never need to build strong teams.

### **2) Reward Team-Building over Ministry-Doing**

Do your staff meetings and evaluations focus on the quality of the team being built? Or do you focus only on ministry outputs? If you want team members to value volunteer development, integrate that priority throughout all your interactions.

### **3) Budget Heavily for Volunteer Development and Appreciation**

Your volunteers are the backbone for ministry operations. Though they aren’t compensated financially, they should be heavily developed and appreciated. Both of these require intentional relational investments. With that, staff should be resourced to invest in team members over meals. Additionally, large appreciations and trainings should be well-budgeted for. This is not a place to skimp. Anything short of your best undervalues your best people.

#### **4) Regularly Ask, "How Can We Engage a Volunteer?"**

Often, churches don't have volunteers because they haven't created opportunities for them. Train yourself to keep their eyes open for aspects of ministry they can give away. One church we know recently reclassified their mid-week administrative work (i.e. mailings, folding, etc.) as an opportunity to build a new volunteer team. Now 15-20 more people serve there every Wednesday.

#### **5) Move Volunteering from an Exception to an Expectation**

Many churches are refreshing their approach to church membership, recognizing it as a commitment to engage in next steps rather than simply a roster of names. Shift the way you talk about membership from the stage to include true involvement in the body of Christ.

#### **6) Stop Apologizing for People's Service**

We often look at tasks we don't enjoy as a chore. That mindset leads us to feel sorry for whoever ends up doing them. However, there are people in your church who absolutely love doing the things you hate. When you apologize to them, you actually de-value their gifts in the body of Christ. Instead, appreciate the variety of gifts God has placed in your church.

If you recognize the need to shift your culture, begin the conversation with your leadership team. Invite their input on what needs to change. Then consider these six steps as you shift from a culture of status to a culture of service.