

Synopsis Of *Rock Solid Volunteers: How To Keep Your Ministry Team Engaged*, by Larry Fowler (Executive Director Of Program And Training, AWANA)¹

Larry Fowler knows what every other ministry leader has discovered—it is hard to recruit volunteers and keep them engaged. In response to this, he wrote this book, which is based upon the Old Testament book of Nehemiah.

What Fowler offers is seven motivations for getting and keeping people involved. The thought is that to utilize these motivations will go a long way toward successfully addressing this perennial ministry problem.

Motivation #1: First Response, Prayer

The basic premise: When we face ministry challenges, disappointments, or even opportunities, our first response should be to turn to God in prayer. Nehemiah 1:4-11; 2:4; 4:4, 9

The benefits:

- God has decreed that he works in response to prayer, so we have the power of God unleashed. (See Isaiah 64:4)
- We provide an example to those volunteers with whom we are working—and they learn to turn to God for his grace and help. This creates an environment in which people throughout the ministry are seeking God and his help, which brings about greater fruit. (John 15:1-8)
- Volunteers are also encouraged if they know you are praying for them and if they hear you doing so. (Philippians 1:9-11; Colossians 1:9-14)

Motivation #2: Families Involved Together

The basic premise: “The more the family is [serving] together, the higher the motivation is to stay involved.” Nehemiah 4:13; Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:4

The benefits:

- When families serve together, it increases spiritual conversations at home and it also increases the opportunities for families to grow together. Such experience tends to be encouraging to volunteers.
- It also makes parents’ responsibilities to disciple their children much easier and more fruitful. Under this point, Fowler sets forth a wonderful model for

¹ For the most part this document is an overview of what Larry Fowler’s book teaches. However, much of the content has been paraphrased and some points of application have been added that were not present in the book.

discipleship and apprenticeships (a model that can increase the percentage of people who flourish and stay connected in ministry):

- I will do it; you watch.
- We do it together.
- You try it; I will watch.
- You do it alone.
- You do it; someone else watches.

How we get families involved:

- Begin by casting the vision for this kind of ministry.
- Evaluate ministries, making sure we are not so dividing family members and keeping them so busy through events that this kind of family involvement together in ministry cannot happen.
- Create opportunities for families to serve together.
- Begin recruiting family members of existing volunteers.

Motivation #3: Focus, People, Focus, Turn People Godward

The basic premise: Volunteers often get discouraged and/or lose interest when they lose a sense of focus for what they are doing and why they are doing it. To focus people on teaching, discipleship, doing a good job, or any other such goal is necessary, but it is not enough. People must be focused upon God. Ultimately we are doing what we do to glorify God by showing forth his greatness and making disciples who know him. Simply-put, as we say here at MEFC, we are to be joyful followers—those who love, worship, and follow God joyfully, as well as love others, and all to the glory of God. What is more, we also help others to become such joyful followers. Nehemiah 4:14; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; 10:31

The benefits:

- Volunteers are connected into the greatest and most satisfying purpose for which we can do anything.
- Volunteers are put in a good frame-of-mind by which they can grow in their knowledge of God and love for him, which will do more than anything else could to keep them engaged.

Motivation #4: Finding Personal Meaning In Serving

The basic premise: People are less likely to quit if they find personal meaning and satisfaction in ministry. What this means is that a volunteer must be encouraged and allowed to have responsibility in ways they can see the fruit and the impact of the

ministry. People tend to stay involved, if they can see what they are doing makes a difference. Nehemiah 4:14; Ephesians 4:11-12; 2 Timothy 2:2

The benefit: People can see that what they are doing matters and so they will tend to want to stay connected.

Ramifications:

- Do not be afraid of recruiting people to meaningful ministry and then allowing them to have responsibility in such a way they can see benefit.
- Do not think you are doing a volunteer a favor to do the ministry for them or to take responsibility away—as if you don't want to bother them. Often such thinking backfires and keeps people from seeing benefit and they lose interest.
- Have an equipping mentality. It is better for you to teach someone else how to teach and/or to lead another person to Christ than for you to do all the teaching or evangelism. Train others so they can see the joy of ministry.
- Help volunteers be reminded of how much a difference they are making. One way to do this is regularly to thank volunteers for what they are doing and pinpoint some of the reasons you are thankful.
- Recognize volunteers before others.
- As much as possible, help people find their “sweet spot” for ministry, that place where they will use their gifts, talents, and experience to the greatest degree. It is also helpful for them to serve in an area in which they have a passion.

Motivation #5: Equip For Work, Equip For War

The basic premise: All ministry is hard, it is work, and it is war. There are skills that need to be learned, challenges that always arise because we are all sinful people, and we face a great enemy, the devil. Because of all this, volunteers need to be given tools and skills to grow in their relationship with God and in carrying out their ministry. The more they are equipped in these ways, the more likely they will be able to deal with and withstand the challenges. Nehemiah 4:16-18; Ephesians 4:11-16; 6:10-20; 2 Timothy 2:2; 3:16-17

The benefits:

- Volunteers will gain the tools, the instruments by which they enjoy God's grace to the fullest.
- Volunteers will learn how to do their ministry and be equipped to a greater degree, which will make it more likely they will not get so discouraged they quit.
- We will create an environment in which more people will be attracted to get involved and serve, to respond positively to recruitment since it will be seen that such service is so fruitful, beneficial, and personally meaningful.

Ways to do this:

- Apprenticeships
- Ironman and Ironwoman teams
- Basic Support and growth in Bible Fellowships.
- Training Conferences (e.g. In Step With The Gospel Conference and AWANA conferences)
- Calling people's attention to on-line video training and materials.
- Calling people's attention to good written materials. (Here at MEFC see the materials on our web site, particularly under the Discipleship heading)

Motivation #6: Connections To Vision And To People

The basic premise: People tend to stay involved in a ministry, if they understand why it is important (they are connected to the vision) and if they are encouraged by and enjoy being with others (they are connected to people). Nehemiah 4:19-22

The benefits:

- Such connections tend to cut down on feelings of fear and isolation.
- Such connections tend to provide for mutual support and encouragement.

Ways to do this:

- When recruiting and training someone, regularly keep the vision before them of what they are doing and why they are doing it. See #'s 3 and 4 above.
- Plan ministry teams, prayer events, and get-togethers during which time people can connect to each other.
- Make sure every volunteer has a mentor, someone to show them the ropes.

Motivation #7: Provide Examples For Others

The basic premise: People learn principles and lessons best when they can see them lived out in others.

The benefit: Providing examples can increase the effectiveness of equipping and, as a result, the fruitfulness and contentment of those who are volunteering.