

## Ways to Recognize Volunteers

When dealing with people, two things are certain; first, people need **positive reinforcement** to work at their full potential; second, there are as many kinds of **reinforcement** as there are people. Rarely, if ever, will two individuals require the same reward or rewards of the same magnitude. Some need more than others; some need different kinds. Though some situations seem to be tricky, they can be handled in a sensitive and competent manner.

We tend to get wrapped up in one or two types of recognition. When no complaints are raised, we conclude that these types of recognition are sufficient for all participants. Yet in our society, it's considered improper to ask to be recognized or rewarded for volunteer services, so, when questioned about recognition preferences, volunteers often even deny the need for any recognition at all. Everyone needs some recognition in his/her work. Individuals differ in the kinds of recognition they need.

Here are three keys to volunteer recognition: sincerity, creativity, and specificity.

### **BE SINCERE!**

A plaque given to someone whose face the presenter "can't quite place at the moment" is not going to mean much to that person. A volunteer's sense of involvement with an organization owes much to personal familiarity with the rest of the staff. On the other hand, isolation and discontent breed in a situation where a worker knows only immediate colleagues.

Sincerity is being genuine by adhering to what is true. Sincerity demands that a supervisor tell a volunteer when he/she has done a job well, and should not recognize poor performances. Don't reinforce inadequate work!

### **BE CREATIVE!**

Consider what the individual or group would enjoy, rather than what has been done in the past. Use your imagination. Better yet, solicit ideas from a special recognition advisory group.

### **BE SPECIFIC!**

Generic recognition for vague success doesn't mean much. Personalize the recognition with specific details of what the person has accomplished. To really be specific, ask the individual to describe how he or she accomplished the feat. Attach the recognition to the unique skills, knowledge, abilities, and effort of the individual or group being recognized.

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*Volunteerism for the Next Generation*

