

THE COMMUNITY BUILDER

Volunteer or Indentured Board Member

The Sunnyland Homeowners Association is one in a million. They always make quorum for their annual meetings. They have more than enough volunteers to fill available board positions and for their committees. They have standing room only board meetings where the owners applaud their board members for their good decisions and hard work on their behalf... then you wake up and the three bears come home. It sounded good didn't it?

Well, there are things that communities can do to make it attractive for people to volunteer:

Develop a communication system.

A frequent complaint of members is not being kept informed. To draw out volunteers it is critical that they know what's going on. Also, some owners develop a suspicious nature about board motives when kept in the dark and resist being involved. Let them know what the board is doing, what the plans are for the year or even just the short-term future. A newsletter and/or flyer distribution or posting your updates on your website is a convenient and easy way to make the information available to those who want it.

Give credit where credit is due.

People love acknowledgment. Make sure that the directors, committee members and homeowners are given formal recognition for their efforts at your board meetings, a formal Thank you note, in the meeting minutes or a "community corner" in your newsletter...every opportunity where there is an audience. Point out homeowners with a particular skill, such as landscaping (they are obvious candidates for the Landscape Committee), or issue certificates of achievement at the annual homeowners meeting. Remember, all tasks have an end and many faithful volunteers doing more mundane tasks are often overlooked. It is a wise board that recognizes effort on behalf of the members.

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Provide social opportunities.

An association is definitely a business and should be run like any well-run corporation. However, because the shareholders are also residents, the association also has a very real social component. People tend to want to help those that they know personally. However, many may be shy and don't easily get involved. The association can promote several socials such as a spring cleanup part, an open the pool party, or a simple potluck. It will help create a sense of community and help provide an opportunity for volunteer recruitment.

Assign real jobs to do.

It's been said, "A committee takes minutes and wastes hours." There is nothing more frustrating than a job with no job description or substance. Every committee should have a charter, an outline stating specifically the mission for the committee, the result that is expected, the process for reporting to the board and what, if any, budget is available to help get the task done.

Get organized.

Have meetings scheduled well in advance, even better to schedule them on a specific day in each month. Have a proper agenda, run the meetings in a businesslike way, put a time limit on the meetings to ensure that you accomplish your goal. Endless meetings with no results are not conducive to encouraging successful people (the kind you want as volunteers) to become involved in the community. Your meetings should be decision oriented to get things accomplished during your time spent at the meeting.

Lastly, but certainly not least:

Be an encourager. It is incumbent on the Board President to take the lead in promoting volunteers. The successful leader motivates by persuasion and not authority. Unless the current board wants a life-long job, it's important to always be in recruitment mode, looking for your replacement.