

MAY I HELP YOU?

By Florence May

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The desire to serve is at the heart of the volunteer experience. It is with pleasure that I've signed on to write about the driving factors related to recruiting, managing and retaining the right people. The people who want to serve.

The right people? Yes, the right people. The people who choose to spend their free time working long hours for your event. The people who volunteer to do hard and often thankless jobs. The people who feel so committed to your festival or event that they come back year after year.

I love this topic. Maybe it is the 15 years I spent managing events with Visit Indy, Simply Hospitality and the United States Grand Prix. Or maybe it is the 16 years delivering online volunteer management systems for many of the largest and most complex events in North America.

Over the past year my company provided volunteer management systems for the 500 Festival, the Kentucky Derby Festival, the Republican National Convention, the Democratic National Convention, the Gilroy Garlic Festival, the US Mayors Conference, the Azalea Festival, multiple Olympic Trials and hundreds of smaller events. Over and over I study the trends that make certain events successful while others struggle.

My point? Size doesn't matter in the volunteer management world. All events share common challenges, the difference is simply scale. What does matter irrespective of size? Good leadership, teamwork and well thought out processes.

From Soup to (are you) Nuts?

I plan to cover a very wide variety of trending topics. Warning, whiplash is likely. But I will consistently provide management tools and tips gathered from working with the best volunteer managers in the event world.

So which volunteer management topics are trending?

- Festivals getting sued over volunteer management issues. Yes, you've heard about this. We will explore the risks.
- Events getting "beat up" in the media for using volunteers when they should have used paid staff. The Super Bowl was challenged on this topic last year. Should you be concerned?
- Leadership working with corporate outreach programs and struggling to secure a strong partnership. What are the factors that make a strong partnership? Why do these efforts often fail?
- Growing trend in events recruiting charitable organizations to manage and staff key operations ... for a donation. Are they volunteers? Yes, but with different needs and expectations.
- Email is still the most comprehensive way to reach all volunteers. Not all volunteers are using text and social media yet. But email deliverability is becoming a bigger challenge. How do you guarantee quality communications with all your volunteers?
- Event staff communicating with volunteers using text and social media are a growing trend but sometimes with unexpected outcomes. Are you developing standard operating procedures for popular communications tools for younger volunteers?
- Many events and festivals make it difficult to volunteer. Event managers are challenged to provide efficient communications and registration options for multiple generations. How do you evaluate and compare technology to ensure it is right for your event and volunteers?
- The competition for the right people is substantial. Appealing to younger

volunteers, corporate outreach programs and partner organizations requires event managers to provide a quality and well-organized experience. Do you have the right organization structure and processes in place to engage your volunteers?

- Are your volunteers coming back year after year? In many parts of the country, our long-time volunteers are retiring from community service. Younger volunteers aren't as inclined to volunteer with the same patterns as their predecessors. Do you have the right incentives in place?

We have a lot to cover. So much that occasionally there will be a column focused on the issue and a supporting article to explore hot topics in greater depth.

Yes, I am passionate about volunteers and all related topics. And I'm excited to share this passion.

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Florence May is the President of TRS – The Registration System. Leveraging world-class event management and large scale operations background, Flory is a popular speaker and writer on forward-thinking volunteer management strategies. She has served in leadership positions with Visit Indy, United States Grand Prix LOC, Simply Hospitality and as an US Army Officer during the Gulf War. She is married to a rocket scientist (seriously) with two daughters in college (donations are welcome) and a crazy labradoodle (my exercise plan).