

99 THOUGHTS FOR **VOLUNTEERS**

MAKING AN **IMPACT**
RIGHT WHERE YOU ARE

DANETTE MATTY



99 Thoughts for Volunteers

Making an Impact Right Where You Are

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DEDICATION

Eric, my vanilla ice cream cone with a mustache:

Thanks for encouraging me in youth ministry and cheering me on when I kept volunteering.

Jeanne, Rick, Rod, and Bruce, some of the paid youth pastors I've served:

Thanks for investing in me as a leader and loving me as a person. Over the years, by your words and actions, you've continued sending this message to volunteers like me: *"'You're not 'just a volunteer.' If you didn't do your job, I couldn't do mine."*

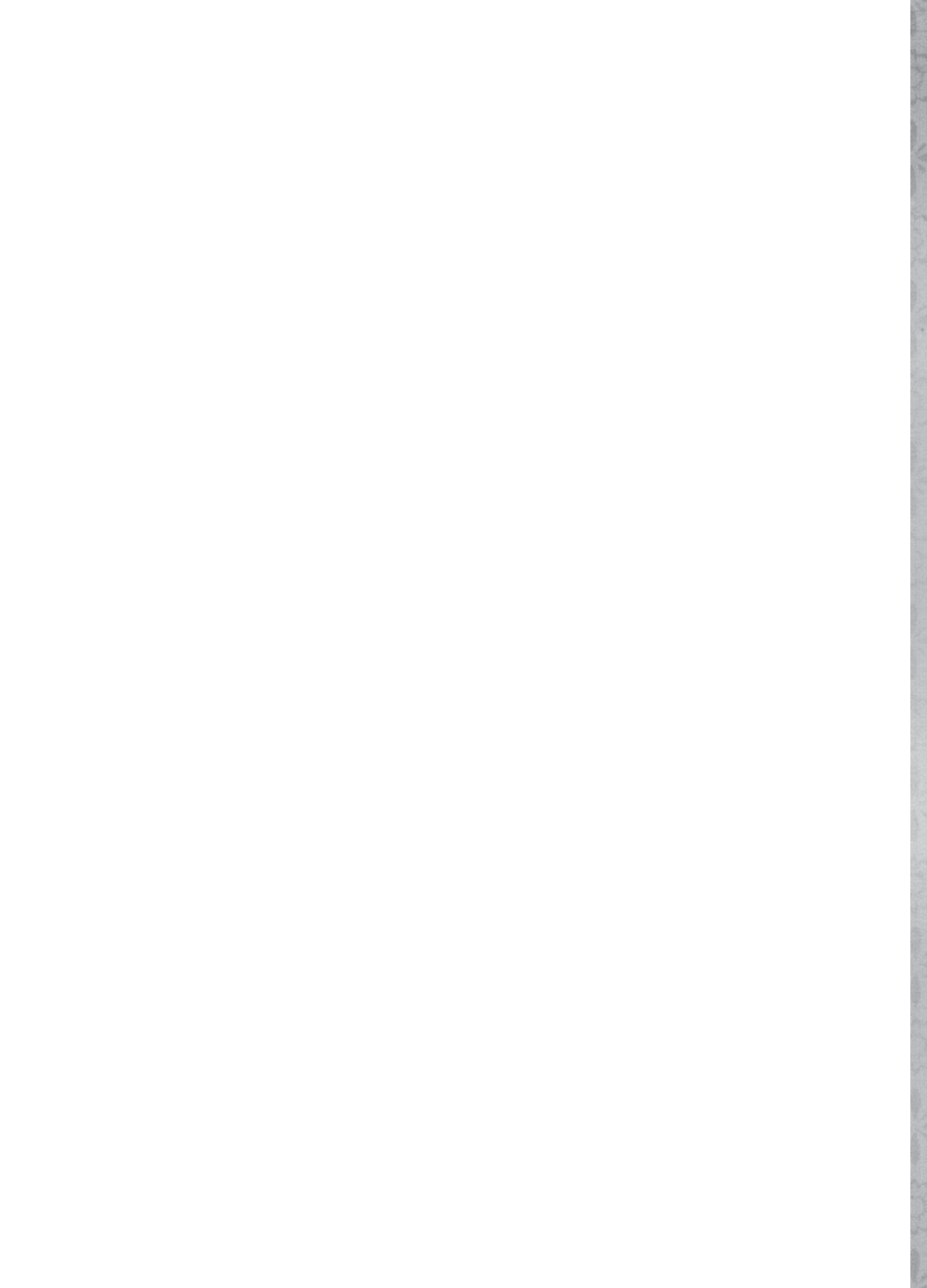


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A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Hi!

First, thank you for volunteering! Second, thanks for serving God by serving teenagers. I believe that no time ministering is ever a waste, especially to those under 20, even when we don't see the end results of our efforts. It's not that people over 20 are a lost cause; we're not! But with students, while you can't control all their choices, you get the idea that you at least have a shot at rerouting their wild energies and risk-taking propensities (Proverbs 7:7). You don't replace their parents, but because you're not Mom or Dad, you have this incredible opportunity to echo what great parents try to instill into their children. Even if you're barely out of your teens yourself, you can say things a loving parent should say and your words will carry more weight than you know.

Think about it: You don't have to be a paid youth pastor to be a caring adult with a powerful voice in the life of a teenager. What a privilege.

Whether you said yes to volunteer in your youth ministry in response to the call of God or the request of a desperate parent or leader, your “yes” has probably given you an emotional combo meal of excitement, fear, and purpose.

You might have joined an already thriving team of 15-20 leaders, serving a medium-to-large ministry in which you have one or two specific duties that allow you to excel. But if you’re like many volunteers, you could be on the ground floor of a brand-new or rebirthed youth group. Or perhaps you’ve been recruited to maintain a sometimes-kicking, sometimes-napping youth ministry. In either of those scenarios, maybe it’s up to you to do five or six things to keep the program running!

Depending on the size and dynamic of your church, you may be the only volunteer helping the main leader, or one of a handful of caring adults who just want to provide something for the two handfuls of teenagers in your church or local area.

And if your primary leader is new to this youth ministry adventure, you might feel like the blind following the blind! That reminds me of one Christmas break when all but two of us volunteers left town for the holidays—the others were all college students, including the youth pastor! Fellow volunteer Andrea and I led the youth service, taking turns doing announcements, leading the game, and speaking. We laughed later at how we swapped places during the night, running from the back to front of the small sanctuary—between the sound booth and stage—to support what the other was doing at any given moment. There were only eight kids that night, but we made it as fun and lively as if there were 30! We were pooped by the end—and glad when our vacationing co-leaders came back off break!

My volunteer journey began overseas in small military chapels. I was immature and emotionally messy, fresh out of a dysfunctional home and into the service (in 1980, this was the wisest thing I could've done with my 17-year-old life). I was stationed in Germany,

just learning what responsibility and adulthood smelled like. But I had one foot in the world and one foot in chapel, smoking, drinking, clubbing, and incomplete without a man. Church leaders were happy to have attendance and someone willing to do something, so they didn't vet me too carefully. I think they mistook my sincerity for integrity.

Early in 1985, when big hair and shoulder pads were in, I was stationed at Offutt Air Force Base, just outside Omaha, Nebraska. I got involved in the large youth and young adult ministry of Jeanne Mayo, who has loved, trained, and coached thousands of teenagers and young leaders, many of whom now serve all over the world. Jeanne was and still is a leader-building machine. You can pick up all kinds of wisdom and practical knowledge from Jeanne's treasure chest of youth ministry experience at youthleaderscoach.com.

Jeanne's youth ministry was made up of over 450 junior high, senior high, college, and career young adults—a hodgepodge of people both military and civilian, all attending from

the military base, the surrounding suburbs, and the inner city. Our core of about 70 volunteers gathered every week for a two-hour meeting that involved leadership training, soul care, and collaborative huddles within the respective age groups we led. Key learning revolved around developing intimacy with Jesus in our own lives, cultivating character, building healthy friendships, and helping others grow through mentoring and small groups—the things that remain relevant through cultural and technological paradigm shifts.

Jesus was captivating, and it was in this setting under Jeanne’s mentoring and the dogged commitment of a small group leader that I haphazardly bumbled my way to a Christ-honoring life. As I matured in my personal relationship with Jesus, I grew as a leader.

Our team learned and lived spiritual and leadership reproduction. It was youth ministry utopia! OK, nothing’s perfect, but it set a high bar for what the care and feeding of

volunteers could look like. My husband, Eric, and I knew even then that we were part of a very special legacy.

Fast forward into the '90s, after the birth of our first baby, when scrunchies and flattops were all the rage. Eric and I moved to a rural city to help with a church plant. The first night of the youth ministry yielded 11 warm bodies—including four volunteers!

I was like wide-eyed Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*: “Toto, dude, I don’t think we’re in Kansas anymore.” Welcome to real-world youth ministry, Danette. This second youth ministry experience, as I’ve learned through the years, was more typical than my first. This was a small church with a small budget (more like, what budget?), composed of a narrower demographic of teenagers, not the variety in the bigger community I’d just moved from. Yet in that tiny youth group (which grew by 100 percent within six months, I might add) in that Podunk town, we experienced life-on-life spiritual and relational growth, with no less

enthusiasm. A changed life is a changed life, no matter where you are.

And I wouldn't change it. In 25 years, I've volunteered for several youth pastors of different ages and experiences, all with varying leadership styles. And I'm richer for it.

So in case you occasionally daydream of something different (read: bigger, better, and with more recognition), let me encourage you: You can have an alive and kicking youth ministry, regardless of size. You can be an effective volunteer, no matter what type of leader you're serving. And with God's help, you can make a difference in the lives of teenagers.

Jesus believes kids are worth it—not just the little ones (Matthew 19:14, Mark 9:37). Thank you for believing it, too.

I'm cheering you on!

d

INTRODUCTION

I'm not the main youth leader. I'm an unpaid volunteer in a helping role. A great "number two" or "lovely assistant." And I'm OK with that.

I don't have control over the budget, if there is one. I may or may not have a say in the infrastructure of our youth ministry. The buck doesn't stop with me; it just zips right by me. (I wouldn't mind a buck or two now and then.)

I still want to be equipped. I want to serve not only our students but also my lead youth minister. I don't have to be in charge, but I'm not a just-show-up type of leader. I want to be the kind of volunteer my youth pastor wishes they could pay (I won't argue, I promise).

There are plenty of resources for primary leaders—whether paid or unpaid—who recruit, develop, and lead volunteer youth workers. But there's not as much for those of us who are being recruited, developed, and led.

My goal in *99 Thoughts for Volunteers* is to encourage and equip the unpaid youth worker assisting the person leading student ministries. This is for the volunteers who, when they do their job, make it easier for the lead youth worker to do theirs.

Full disclosure: My goal is to build lifelong youth workers. Maybe you aren't called or inclined to serve God by serving teenagers beyond a specific season of life—and that's OK, because you'll still gain a lot from this book. But if you're one of those who are called to be a lifelong youth worker, may God use these 99 thoughts to keep you going through every season.

CHAPTER 1

WHO YOU ARE: PERSONAL CHARACTER AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH

PHILOSOPHY AND PERSONAL CARE AS A
VOLUNTEER YOUTH WORKER

Volunteer...sponsor...lay leader...humble servant to the youth pastor...whatever you're called, it means the same thing: part-time hours, full-time passion...and no-time pay. But that passion squeezed between the hours and pay, plus your gift set, means you're an integral part of God's work in the lives of your students and the ministry you share with your youth pastor. Let's deflate the "just a volunteer" mentality attempt and inflate the truth of the primo skills and qualities that make for salary-worthy volunteers (even if it's just a pretend salary).

1: THANK YOU...WHETHER PEOPLE SAY IT OR NOT

You've answered the call of God, a desperate parent or pastor, or a combination thereof. You volunteered to help in youth ministry.

Thank you. You may not hear that as often as you deserve—not because people are ungrateful, but just because some people will

be quietly appreciative that you're "doing your job."

Don't be discouraged when others seem to take you for granted. It could mean you're so good at this youth ministry thing that you make it look easy! And why overdo it on the thank-you notes when it comes so natural to you?

2: PERFECT? NO. HUMBLE? YES

Do we have to be perfect to be youth leaders? That's a no-brainer: No.

But we should be humble, honest, and accountable.

Because of the privilege and authority God has given me, I give each of you this warning: Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us (Romans 12:3 NLT).

Humility will help you remain a good listener whenever a teenager is exercising critical spouting skills—I mean critical *thinking* skills—in the form of some diatribe about why cheating, pornography, or underage drinking shouldn't be a sin. Add a dose of self-control to keep your eyes from rolling too much.

Honesty gives you the ability to have nothing to hide. It's the sturdy bridge between humility and accountability.

Accountability to your youth pastor or a mature, trusted, same-gender friend will prevent hidden sin and self-denying hypocrisy. When you do come clean, your sin will be exposed and not exploded.

3: SUPERSTARS NEED NOT APPLY

Bluefish TV put out a funny video about small group leaders called "Flaws of Biblical Proportions." A three-person selection panel asks famous biblical figures what qualifies them to be a small group leader. At first, smug

candidates such as Moses, Samson, and David list their credentials. "Can't decide who gets the last brownie?" Solomon asks. "Cut it in two. Boom. Wisdom."

But when these model citizens begin to answer to charges of moral failures, their bumbling excuses are even more comical. "So I lied, I said my wife was my sister. They were gonna kill me," Abraham says as his eyes shift. "Why are we even getting into this?"

Finally, a regular Joe interviews for the position. He hasn't been to seminary, and he's not sure about his qualifications, but he loves God and wants to help people. The video's tagline is "God uses imperfect people."

As a volunteer, your ministry doesn't need a superstar or social worker. In time, your gifts will rise to the surface and you'll likely have opportunities to shine. But what your youth group really needs is for you to pick out one or two kids and connect with them. Call, text, or get together with them once a week. Show

WHO YOU ARE

up at their games or concerts or whatever they're into.

That job description should be a relief for most of us. For all our talents, we're busy in many areas. Regardless of what other bells and whistles we ring, the bottom line is that we don't have to possess extraordinary oratory, musical, or athletic gifts in order to impact students and their families. Those things are the icing. Your quality time is the cake.

Want to know what Youth Ministry 101 is? A caring adult consistently involved in a teenager's life.

Boom. Wisdom.

4: EENY, MEENY, MINY, MOTIVES

What motivated you to volunteer in your youth ministry?

Some people volunteer because they want to be buds with the leader. And they'll dabble in

YM to check that block. But they really just like hanging out or learning from the main leader.

Others join a youth ministry team because they want to be a leader. They want to develop a specific skill or add to their leadership résumé, and youth ministry seems the best track for growth.

Some simply want to be part of a team, and their friends volunteer, so they might as well do it, too.

And then there are those—probably most people reading this book—who simply and genuinely love Jesus and teenagers. We get this unexplainable, motivated charge when we're around kids. We want God to use us to propel students forward in their faith journey. And we get refueled when we see that happen.

This may surprise you, but I don't think the other motives are bad. In fact, there's something good about each one. You may recognize a couple of them in you. But that last motive is what we should strive for, even if

we keep a little of the other three. In all cases, if you genuinely believe in teenagers and want to help them grow spiritually, you'll likely dive in with more enthusiasm, last longer, and, consequently, become great at it.

*All a man's ways seem innocent to him,
but motives are weighed by the Lord
(Proverbs 16:2).*

5: MOTIVES MATTER FOR THE LONG HAUL

Neither leader-motivated nor role-motivated volunteering is 100 percent wrong. But if you're in it for the long haul, remember that youth ministry is about youth. If you have a passion to influence this generation for Christ and are willing to pay attention to and develop relationships with them, God will help you do those things. Ask God to help you see and minister to teenagers as individual people more than as a demographic clump.

If you volunteer for a while and it turns out you don't want to serve teenagers, that's OK. Give your two weeks' notice to your youth leader, step down graciously, and give two big bags of money to the youth ministry.

If you do stay, do your best to serve from God's heart more than your own, and then you won't have to question your motives.

6: WHEN IT COMES TO YOUR SPIRITUAL GROWTH, BE YOUR OWN BEST FRIEND

"God will always care more about you than he does your ministry."

—Jeanne Mayo¹

One of our volunteers co-leads a men's basketball group every Monday night—really nice guy, responsible, shows up every week faithfully. He mentioned how great he thought it would be to lead a basketball group for teen guys. I agreed, and because I lead our youth group's "Connect Groups" ministry, I said it

would be key to add a shepherding element to the group time, even something as simple as taking prayer requests at the end of the game. He stammered, “I guess I could do that. It’s not really my strong suit.” Because I value honesty over almost everything, I grinned and said, “Well, maybe this is your opportunity to step up in that department.” He smiled and agreed.

Funny how important we realize spiritual growth is for students, but how easily we neglect it in our own lives. Self-leadership in spiritual growth is two-fold.

First—and you’ve probably heard or read this—you can’t take people where you’ve never been. Others put it this way: You can’t take people where you’re not willing to go.

In his letter to Titus, Paul lists off a bunch of bullet-point teachings for this church leader to dole out to younger men. In the middle of the list, Paul says this: *In everything **set them an example** by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness*

and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned (Titus 2:7-8, emphasis added).

You see, we teach what we know; we reproduce who we are.² So we can teach on spiritual growth with creativity and relevance, and we should. But in the most mysterious yet very real way, what happens in our private spiritual lives will rub off on those who follow us.

Second, we must never give ourselves permission to become spiritually shallow. Of all the shaping habits of our lives, I believe none is more transformative than time alone with God. It's a game-changer—more specifically, a mind and heart changer. For the sake of knowing Jesus, understanding God's will, and being led by God's Spirit, make time and focus to read God's Word and hear God's voice. Keep yourself in a position to be transformed by God.

The woman or man of God you are outside of youth ministry is more important than the role you play in youth ministry. As my fellow volunteer friend Kelsey says, "It's more

WHO YOU ARE

important how you are when no one is around than how you act when all eyes are on you.”

“Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven” (Matthew 6:1).