"GRACEFUL DISMISSAL:" TEACHING VOLUNTEERS HOW TO QUIT THE RIGHT WAY

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EVERYONE WILL EVENTUALLY LEAVE YOUR CHURCH . . . INCLUDING YOU. SO TEACHING VOLUNTEERS HOW TO QUIT CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE IN YOUR CHURCH (AND THE QUALITY OF YOUR LIFE). IT WAS A HELPFUL PARADIGM SHIFT FOR ME TO BEGIN TO SEE MY CHURCH AND HER VOLUNTEERS THROUGH A MORE ETERNAL, KINGDOM OF GOD MINDSET. GOD HAS ENTRUSTED US TO HELP FULFILL THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH WITH OUR OWN TALENTS ALONG WITH THOSE WE RECRUIT, TRAIN, AND ALLOW GRACEFUL DISMISSAL.

Yes: "graceful dismissal." The coming and going of volunteers can be one of the most difficult things about ministry. I've had good friends — people I've mentored, held their babies, experienced true life send me a text like this:

"Hey man, thanks for sending the schedule for the next three months. Sorry I didn't block out any dates. Feeling super swamped and sensing from God I need to spend more time with family – I hope you understand." – Jim (Not his real name!)

How does this happen? What is going on here? How hard is it to serve at church two hours out of 168 hours in a week? How we, as worship leaders respond in such moments, is crucial. Over the years (and through God's help) I have recalibrated my expectations for volunteers and realized there are pastoral things we can do even as they leave us. Here are three things to keep in mind:

EXPECT QUITTERS

We must be ready for the possibility that anyone could quit at any time. Hold people loosely and be prepared for changes in life. This does not mean you live in fear or with a scarcity mindset, but we should *not* think things will stay the same. Have a plan in place for attrition and make sure you are ready to respond when people want to quit. This means we are constantly recruiting and training sound techs and musicians. Constantly.

GIVE PROCESS FOR QUITTERS

We are usually pretty good at telling new recruits what we expect of them on the front end of a commitment, but we don't often teach people how to give notice and leave the team. We must have gracious off-ramps systems and expectations for volunteers. Teaching people how to "quit well" can be part of your initiation process.

For example, "If at any time you need a break from serving either temporarily or permanently, please give your leader 6-8 weeks notice so we can identify new folks to help and allow for a smooth transition."

BLESS QUITTERS

There will be some exceptions to this, but in general, we should bless the socks off of those who are stepping down from our teams. It's important we recognize their contributions and let them know how much they are appreciated.

For one such volunteer, I wrote a thank you note and itemized a summary of all the hours they served and the number of people they impacted through their volunteer hours. Depending on the length of commitment, you could recognize them from the stage or throw a party. This speaks volumes and often people will return to service later, when the time is right for them.

Sometimes people want to quit prematurely because of a system, relational, or workflow issue. This means their reason for quitting may not be something on their end. *If* someone quits via text or email, I *always* make a phone call and ask them why and if there are any other contributing factors. Sometimes it's something small that can be remedied. That keeps them on the team when we solve the issue.

Ministry leaders set the pace for how we recruit, train, sustain our teams — and how we reflect the goodness of God's kingdom!