

Recognising and Discerning Gifts in Others

Today we have heard about and recognised the extent of gifts and talents that we have and that our volunteers have to share within our communities.

Volunteers, who find their niche, the kind of work they do, become very passionate about it.

Passion is defined in the dictionary as a 'depth of feeling toward anything that is accompanied by fervour, enthusiasm and zeal'. Passion is the fuel in the car; without it the car won't go. Passion supplies that extraordinary zest and quality of living that causes you to live above the humdrum or the ordinary.

Behind most great businesses there are passionate entrepreneurs and as leaders, it is hoped, that passion stretches to the people they work for and with, to their families and to their community.

My father was a passionate farmer and grazier, at the same time he was passionate about the work he did in the small community where we lived. When he died he was on eleven committees. His aim was always to better the community environment for us, his children. His love was the Board at the Soldiers Memorial Hospital. When the Matron rang, it didn't matter what he was doing, he always attended to it. He was never on a committee at our Catholic School but several times a term we would go into the school with shovels, saws, secateurs etc. on a Saturday morning to tidy up and improve the school playground. What an example he was to us. All of us older children went with him. As he would say, "it's our playground and we need to look after it".

Being passionate about our vision will motivate both us and other people whom we come into contact with.

Passion like this is contagious and helps to build strong connections. It joins people in a common cause and purpose and this is essential among volunteers.

Everyone has different passions, it could be sports - all the different games that are played, coached, refereed, organised. Or it could be gardening, owning a garden and entering it in garden shows, showing flowers at a flower display, just enjoying a garden. It may be St Vincent de Paul, the Salvation Army or the Red Cross - their shops, visiting people at home, at hospital, the nursing home, or one of the myriad other things that these people do!

We only have to look at the wonderful work that the volunteers did and are still doing to help folk get back on their feet after the fires in Victoria. On one TV program I saw how people were spending holiday time helping families devastated by the fires: putting up fences, making sandwiches, sorting clothes. Volunteers have come from all over Australia and other parts of the world.

Each of us has different motives, purposes, values, drives, impulses as to why we volunteer. The fundamental element is that we have this drive.

Our beliefs are different and the difference in our personalities will show our passion in different ways.

Personality is the total of all the behavioural and mental characteristics of which an individual is recognised as being **unique**.

We each have traits and characteristics that make us unique and special. We spend a lifetime changing weaknesses into strengths. We learn from these weaknesses and we use our God given differences to discover the secret of bringing harmony into our lives, the lives of our family members and into the lives of those we work with. We cannot change a person, that is not our role, but we can give them the information that they can use to better themselves.

I am now going to talk a little about four temperaments that make up personality.

Have you had the opportunity to read the Florence Littauer book *Personality Plus*?

She talks about four basic temperaments, while recognising the uniqueness in each of us.

A person who is melancholic in personality, that is generally creative people, may show their passion through art, music, gardening, working in art galleries, dressmaking, visiting nursing homes or people housebound, painting ladies nails, etc.; any activity where they can express their creativity. Their sensitivity to others and the sacrifices they make as volunteers for others is commendable.

Recognising and Discerning Gifts in Others

Another group may be sanguine personality, where they enjoy being with people, making friends and coming up with great ideas and having others enthused and ready to work with them. Work becomes fun! They are sincere at heart! They have the gift to inspire others to join them and they like spontaneous activities. Their enthusiasm and energy to start over and over again lift any black cloud with their sense of humour.

Choleric personality is similar to the sanguine personality in that they are outgoing and optimistic. A choleric person is goal oriented and has innate leadership qualities. They are self assured and have a take charge attitude. They're independent, active and self sufficient. They know how to lead and organise which stimulates activity. The choleric personality is always aiming, reaching, succeeding. While the sanguine is talking and the melancholy is thinking, the choleric is achieving. The choleric personality is the easiest temperament to understand and get along with as long as you do it 'my' way.

Another personality is the phlegmatic personality, the person who likes to take the middle road, is easy going and doesn't think too far ahead. The phlegmatic personality is usually well balanced, competent and steady. They are usually good listeners, good under pressure, compassionate and show concern, never in a hurry and happily reconciled to life. They are calm in conflict situations and can be objective in their opinion.

There are complementary and unique blends in the personalities, a combination which fits well together and complements what is lacking in our own, and in each other's nature. I won't go into these.

The other areas in the personalities are the weaknesses. Yes, we all have them and probably we can freely identify these more readily than the strengths. Unfortunately, sometimes, it is nature to dwell on the weaknesses rather than the strengths.

Understanding temperaments, that is character, disposition and tendencies, is the first step in understanding people. If we can't see the innate difference in others and accept them as they are, we will think everyone not like us is at least slightly irregular.

When we understand temperaments we begin to see why opposites attract. In each of the areas where volunteers work and there is a variety of personalities, interests develop and activities are achieved.

Questions to think about:

1. Identify qualities/gifts that matter most when looking for a volunteer.
2. What distinguishing quality does the volunteer need to have, to bring harmony to the group where they will be working?
3. Having identified the qualities/gifts how would you show recognition of these to the volunteer?

Attitude

How attitude spreads! My attitude impacts on what I do. If I'm **negative**, then this attitude spreads like wildfire among the team. If I'm **positive** and I let the team know that I'm positive about the situation then good will come of it.

Whatever we do, **attitude** will make the difference!

I recently read of a young man suffering with Downs Syndrome who worked at a checkout in a major supermarket.

Yes, we at the supermarkets can be very cruel, in the way we speak, smile or should I say don't smile to the checkout and packing personnel.

His job was to pack the bags of the customers as they came through his particular line. **He had however, grabbed hold of this truth of attitude.** He decided he would leave a signature on his work. He would do what he did better than everyone else around him.

He began to spend his evenings looking for quotes from books and the internet, and when he had found a suitable one, he would write it up, photocopy it, then cut each page up so he had hundreds of

Recognising and Discerning Gifts in Others

little slips of paper with a quote of the day written upon them. Then for the whole of the next working day he would put his *Thought for the Day* into each bag he packed.

A couple of weeks went by and the store manager noticed that one checkout line had three times as many people as all the other lines. She quickly tried to organise some more checkout operators and began to direct customers to these new open lines but met, to her surprise, great resistance, “No”, they protested, **“We want to get our thought for the day”**.

It didn't take long for that young man to become the store's most valuable employee.

I'm going to talk with you about attitude from a book written by Philip Baker - *Attitude of Amazing Achievers*.

“ATTITUDE - is not about what happens but what we think happens. It is not about how bad things are, it is about how we interpret our circumstances and whether or not we decide to learn lessons or wallow in self-pity.

Attitude not only gives us a better view from the gutter, but also gives us the power to get out of it, to walk tall, straight, with a skip in our step and a determination to savour the God given gift of life.”
(*Attitudes of Amazing Achievers* Philip Baker 2000)

Whatever we do, attitude will make the difference.

So when working with volunteers we need to have an **Attitude for Excellence**.

‘Doing the best you can with what you have’ - encouraging, from the volunteers, an excellence in their work. If it is not to your standard, what can you do to improve the situation?

If I have an **attitude of excellence** myself I can ask it of the people that I work with!

Next is having an **attitude of confidence** when working with volunteers.

Norman Vincent Peale became known the world over because of his landmark book on developing a positive, mental attitude. Many of you probably have read it. Maybe several times!

Often a person gets into a state in which they find themselves because the mind is filled with fear, anxiety, tension, resentment, guilt or a combination of them.

Questions to think about:

4. How do I encourage **excellence** from the volunteers in the field that I work?
5. You may have a person who tells you “I can't do that”, or “I can't organise that”. So what do you do? What is the process that you would take to achieve a good result?

Next we will look at the **attitude of generosity**.

We have the volunteers we have because of their generosity. They give of their time, effort, energy and friendship and others give of their money to help as well. Life is about what we can give not what we can get.

I think the greatest example we can give the students we work with is the generous example of the Special Religious Education (SRE) teachers and assistants who go into the schools every week to teach SRE. Some principals continually remind the students that the SRE teachers give of their time to come and teach them and do not get paid to come.

Then we have the **attitude of gratitude**.

Gratitude leads to other things. As I drive around the countryside to visit the generous volunteers, the SRE teachers and assistants, it gives me time to think and pray. I love the countryside where I travel, even in drought there is something very beautiful in the starkness. God has created this world, the beauty, the hills, the trees, the animals, the birds etc. Then I get to the school and see the students' eager faces and listen to their cheerful greetings, “You've come back”. The SRE teachers who happily share what they have prepared for the day.

Recognising and Discerning Gifts in Others

Gratitude

I drive a good car. Someone's skills put it together; someone's skills keep it in good running order. Yes, I do have a lot to be grateful for.

This day is about Valuing Volunteers.

I'm working side by side with the volunteers in a mentoring role. I've moved from a supervisory role. When a new person starts I will move back into the supervisory role with them but at the present I'm mentoring. So for me recognising gifts in each person is important. We all like to be valued. Thank God we all have different gifts to share. Recognising and discerning gifts in each Special Religious Education person and all volunteers is very important.

Everyone has gifts and skills. However it is the responsibility of the leader to be able to discern those skills and gifts and funnel them into an area where they will be utilised effectively and where both the volunteer and recipients will benefit best. This will create a win win situation for all.

Story

Ben was employed at a large shopping cooperative. There were five outlets - supermarket, clothing centre, produce, hardware and haberdashery. The cooperative was run by a board.

The stock-take was inadequate and in some areas overstated stock values. After stock-take the board recognised it was losing money. The building was old, dusty and dirty. It needed many repairs. There were many unhappy staff!

The board was not happy and Ben was asked to sack all the staff.

Ben asked the board to be patient and allow him to do major repairs and renovations to the building. The store was changed from a dark, dingy area to a fresh, vibrant store. Lots of work was particularly focused on the hardware area. Ben's next challenge was to review the staffing in each area. He interviewed each staff member, listened to them, their suggestions, likes and dislikes. Some staff asked to be moved to different areas, others requested moves.

In summary, not one staff member was sacked. Profit grew by thousands of dollars in the first year especially in the hardware area.

This was achieved not only through upgrading the buildings but more importantly by recognising the gifts and skills of each employee.

This serves as a good example of how we need to recognise and discern gifts in others particularly our volunteers.