



## **VOLUNTEERS, THE HEARTS OF EACH CLUB**

**The Modern Volunteer-** Busy American lives today make it seem harder and harder to invest one's personal time to volunteering. Incentives are a great way to help recruit and keep important volunteers to operate a club. There are club activities where no one expects anything in return, i.e. the annual banquet, fund raisers, work projects, and the occasional race, but if a club is highly active, hosting events almost every weekend, then that club needs to resort to a variety of incentives or requirements to generate a base of competent and reliable workers. Volunteers are what makes the clubs operate.

**Recruiting:** If the free ski area pass, or the love of the sport, or the child that races isn't enough to attract the volunteer, try the following: A great uniform (i.e. free winter clothing), offer access to ski equipment pro program prices, lift tickets in exchange for gate keeping or other race day jobs, and finally a free lunch or discounts on base lodge food. Many clubs require a work deposit, to ensure they will have enough hands to host an event, and in exchange for each day worked, a certain amount is deducted from their deposit. How about guaranteed first tracks on a powder day? That may take some negotiating with the ski patrol, ski school, and the owners, but that would get everyone's attention. Free or sharply discounted club dues for the kids are always a good incentive. These are just a few suggestions, ask around and share your secrets.

**Recognition/Retention:** There are many ways to recognize and thank a volunteer that can serve as a recruiting tool as well as a retention method. Here is a list of a few methods which should be part of every clubs operating policies:

**Match the volunteer to the task:** For the weekend volunteer coach, give him/her the right group to ski with by matching their skills with the needs of the athlete. A great free-skier is worth their weight, and one that is passionate about skiing and can pass that love on to the young ones may be invaluable. They may even solve your athlete retention problem. This will generate a sense of accomplishment for the volunteer and may be the most important tool you have to combat the volunteer that goes home every night feeling inadequate or underutilized.

There are some people who want an indoor job, or who want to work behind the scenes, or who want to help the athletes in some capacity, take the time to match the person to the job, this is critical.

**Provide Training:** One powerful statement a club can make is to have some funds dedicated to training their coaches, course crew and officials. Even if it is just a matching fund dollar for dollar, a trained volunteer feels you have their best interest at heart when you encourage them to attend a clinic. You offer to cover their group or job and when they return they will be that much better. They will have better skills, more tools in the bag, and more confidence on the hill, as they perform their task with more credibility and enthusiasm.

In addition, and perhaps most importantly, volunteers about be engaged in preseason technical/tactical discussions with the full-time "professional" coaches. As a part of the team,

they are on board with the same philosophy, implementing the same fundamental progressions, speaking the same language, and eager to show their new knowledge.

Official's training is offered throughout the fall by all regional, division and state associations. Key official volunteers should receive proper training to ensure that they have the skills to perform their task and this will also ensure retention.

**Provide Guidance and Reinforcement:** Too often volunteer coaches are given the uniform, a quick program description, including a few drill tips, and then left on their own. Two months later, the parents start to complain about the less than skilled coach, who seems unprepared and over his/her head. It all ends up back on the head coaches' desk, as he/she goes into damage control. Prevent this from happening by closely monitoring your volunteers, be part of their group, lay out a weekly program for them, and follow through with timely evaluations to help them improve. They will be better and they will return because they are growing themselves!

Frequently course workers are given only a brief introduction, with a few hurried lessons and then left on their own. This can lead to real problems during a race when coaches and athletes complain that the course crew didn't know how to prepare the course, in fact, they helped to create a poorly run race, and everyone leaves with bad memories. There are many clubs that host a full day of training for their course crews, from how to shovel or rake the snow, to setting safety fences, and to how to tear down at the end of the day. These are the clubs that earn the highest accolades for hosting the best events of the season.

**Share the Success:** When your competitors do well at the regional event, your volunteer coach should get the recognition first. The volunteer has few rewards, success is one of them and it comes in many forms. Find ways to acknowledge the hard work and sacrifices volunteers make.

This is just a brief overview of what can be done to recruit, recognize, and retain the volunteer. Coaches are encouraged to review other USSA sites for more tips on why the volunteer is so vital to the success of their program and to our sport.