

Five People Who Volunteer in Every Church Parking Lot

He is the face of your weekly welcome.

He is the first human interaction every Guest will experience.

He is fighting on the faded front lines of an automotive battlefield.

He keeps chaos at bay by the power vested in a reflective nylon vest.

He is the Church Parking Lot Volunteer.



Not that all church parking lot volunteers are men, it is just that most women are not tempted by the rush of power and vestiges of control found only by directing slow-moving automobiles toward already-obvious decisions. In fact, church parking lot volunteers are a unique breed of servant leader, a people set apart. They possess a keen ability to step right from the parking lot into the worship service, and remain blissfully oblivious to their distinctive “I’ve been outside all morning” smell... suggesting that they may not be set apart enough.

However, as a church leader, it would be foolish to classify every parking lot volunteer into one cliched, amorphous whole. There are at least five distinctive sub-types within this walkie-talkie wearing brigade, each with different needs and motivations.

Here are **five types of church parking lot volunteers and clear direction for leading each one:**

The Deputy

Marked by his wrap-around sunglasses, fingerless gloves, and Batman-type utility belt, the Deputy carries a flashlight to his post each and every Sunday, no matter that Christmas Eve is the only nighttime service all year. The Deputy insists on wearing an earpiece, even though he was asked to stay on a different channel from the security team after reporting yet another possible disruption/charismatic worshipper entering the building. The Deputy travels the tri-state area all week in his plumbing-supply, or similar sales role. But he has never recovered from that one week spent around the Sheriff's Office as a part of the Boy Scouts Explorer Program. Leading the Deputy requires the twin disciplines of patience and humor. Not taking yourself too seriously allows room for how serious he is, and playing the long-game of leadership will eventually earn his respect. Validate the Deputy's role on the team and praise his decisiveness as he regales you with yet another heroic close call story from "Malfunction Junction" – the name that only he uses for the four-way stop next to Guest Parking. But above all else remember this about the Deputy: he knows that deep down in places you don't talk about in church staff meetings, you want him on that wall. You need him on that wall.

The Squirrel

Maybe this guy is not the best person to have in the parking lot, but it is a Fifth Sunday and everyone else is at the lake. The Squirrel is indecisive, panics easily and usually ends up stopping or sending everyone, all at once. Sweating profusely and constantly spinning around, so as not to be overtaken by a hybrid, the Squirrel is a bundle of nerves when he comes back into the lobby. In fact, he is determined that your "15 Minute Rule" keeping him in the parking lot after each service begins, takes a year off of his life each Sunday. Leading the Squirrel requires you to be a cheerleader turned hostage negotiator every week that he serves. Be sure to tell him he's doing a good job, but do not give into his demands for a transfer to the coffee bar or handing out bulletins at the worship center door. The stakes may seem higher in the parking lot, but out there, at least the Squirrel's sweaty palms and shifty eyes are not involved in alienating your First Time Guests.

The Zealot

He is excited to serve. Maybe a little too excited for a Sunday morning. The Zealot proves that it is possible for a Welcome Team member to actually be too friendly. Traffic comes to a complete stop as he high fives each excited child and every confused adult in the crosswalk. Heaven forbid someone have their window down in the parking lot, as inquiries toward whether or not they are having a good day and updates on the morning's coffee flavor are inevitable. The Zealot loves his role, can be counted on to have the golf cart cobweb-free and ready to go, and loves nothing more than to give you a ride right up to the front door each week. He gets there before any staff member, and your drummer just now realized that The Zealot isn't in the band. Leading the Zealot is easy: just stay out of his way. He is the ideal volunteer, and can be counted on to take any task. Be thankful for the Zealot and treat him and his kind well.

The Rebel

You can tell your team has a Rebel because you cannot tell him apart from anyone else in the

parking lot. The Rebel refuses to wear your silly yellow vest and will only stand where HE thinks the traffic flow needs him most. This rugged individualist has been known to release a Nevada Test Site-type mushroom cloud of vape smoke just as service ends. Simply put, the Rebel doesn't care. He is not afraid to hold traffic in every direction in order to reply to a Small Group text thread on where to go for lunch. Leading the Rebel is the polar opposite of leading the Zealot. In fact, unless you have raised a teenage son or daughter, you are not actually qualified to lead the Rebel. You cannot tell him what to do. Nor can you hope that he will eventually figure it out. Leading the Rebel well keeps your daily walk with Christ honest, and your best bet is to keep sending him the emails and high-fiveing nothing but air each week. If you think you are up to the challenge, get humble and play two steps ahead of the Rebel, in order to make him think every idea is his idea. And you should just give up on him wearing that vest.

The Hostage

His wife made him sign up for this position, and he makes sure you know it each week. The Hostage shows up to volunteer in the parking lot just as the service is scheduled to start. Without a care, he will shrug his shoulders, linger in the coffee bar for ten minutes and then heroically slink in and join his wife in worship. Just know that the Hostage does not want to be there, and, instead of making sure your parking lot experience is great, his mind is occupied with working out a great escape plan. Leading the Hostage is actually quite simple, set up a direct line to communicate with whomever is holding him against his will. Need an extra 15 minutes for a pre-service meeting? Make sure his wife gets the email. Want an extra hand on Easter Sunday? Promise his captor that the Hostage will be returned unharmed, ready for family photos and afternoon ham.

You may not have a parking lot full of Zealots, but hey, at least you are building a team! Experts say your church will never get past a bad first impression, and the parking lot is where most first impressions are made.

Do you want to learn more about creating a great guest experience at your church?

Do you have a team full of Rebels and Hostages, and no real plan as to how to lead them?

Do you know that, bottom line, your church's First Time Guest Experience needs to get better?

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