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The Keys to Volunteer Retention

Strategies for Hanging On to Your Talent



Facilitated by
Jeffrey Russell

Salt Pond Bay Sunset
St. John - U.S. Virgin Islands

My Street Cred:



- Co-director of RCI with my business and life partner Linda.
- Active volunteer with four different non-profits over the years – including the United Way of Dane County.
- Linda and I were both VISTA volunteer in the 70's
- Have provided consulting services to with a wide variety of non-profits since 1990.

Our Agenda

- Exploring your experience: why volunteers leave or stay?
- Overview of the key drivers of volunteer retention
- 13 tips for retaining volunteers
- The “secret sauce” of motivating volunteers
- Conducting “Stay” interviews

Why do volunteers stay or go?



Turn to your non-profit professional neighbor . . .

- Share your GPS coordinates (name, agency, role, etc.)
- Discuss why volunteers leave: What are the key drivers of departures?
- Discuss why volunteers stay: What are the key drivers for retention?

Why Volunteers Go . . .

- Dissatisfaction with one or more important aspects of their volunteer experience.
- Better alternatives available that more fully utilize their experience, talent, and time
- The feel taken for granted.
- **It's part of their plan** – they never intended to volunteer for an extended period.
- **It wasn't part of their plan** – bad experience in their volunteer experience, unexpected volunteer opportunity elsewhere that might be a better fit, or unexpected family/life changes, etc.

Why Volunteers Stay . . .

- The more a volunteer becomes embedded in his or her work with your agency through a web of **connections and relationships** the more likely the volunteer is to stay and the less likely he or she is to leave.
- The **benefits, rewards, and environment** associated with their volunteer experience is perceived as worth the investment of their time.
- The volunteer feels that their **volunteer experience is meaningful** – enabling them to make a difference in the lives of others.

Retention Wisdom



A volunteer's decision to leave involves a combination of factors (not just one). When these align, they are likely to quit.

Lustrafjord
Norway

Goal of Retention: Community, Engagement, and Ownership

Community: The more volunteers are **embedded in their roles** and the more they see themselves as part of a larger community the more likely they will stay.

Engagement: The more **engaged** they are in their volunteer experience, the more ownership they feel.

Ownership: The greater ownership, the more likely the volunteer stays.

Retention Wisdom



Building community is the single most important action you can take to improve volunteer retention.

Lustrafjord
Norway

Effective Retention Practices

1. Recruit Right.
2. Onboard in the Right Way.
3. Make a Good Match and Give the Volunteer Choices!
4. Define Expectations – in Both Directions.
5. Build a One-On-One Relationship.
6. Give the Volunteer as Much Authority as Possible.

Effective Retention Practices

7. Build a Sense of Community.
8. Guide, Develop, and Support Them.
9. Train Agency Staffers on How to Work with Volunteers.
10. Conduct “Stay” Interviews.
11. Ask for their Feedback.
12. Show Appreciation.
13. Conduct “Exit” Interviews.



What's the best way to motivate volunteers

Cement Creek Meadow
Crested Butte, Colorado

© 2017, Photo by Jeff Russell

Evolution to Motivation 3.0

- ⦿ **Motivation 1.0** – Being motivated by a desire to survive. *It got us to where we are.*
- ⦿ **Motivation 2.0** – Being motivated by rewards and punishment. *It served us well in the industrial age – not so much today.*
- ⦿ **Motivation 3.0** – Being motivated by things inside oneself (intrinsic motivation) . . . finding joy in the task itself. *Appropriate for 21st century jobs that require complex tasks that involve creative thinking*

Drive! Tapping the Source of People's Passion

Daniel Pink argues that motivation research identifies three key components of an environment that brings out the best in others:

- ◉ **Autonomy** – the desire to direct our own life and work.
- ◉ **Mastery** – the urge to make progress and get better at something that matters.
- ◉ **Purpose** – the yearning to do what we do in the service of something larger than ourselves.

Motivation 3.0: For Routine Jobs

For routine/rote/repetitive jobs that don't require as much thinking, creativity, or problem solving, carrots and sticks can work. You can enhance motivation by also . . .

1. Offering a rationale for why the routine task is necessary and how it contributes to a larger purpose.
2. Acknowledging that the task may be uninteresting or even boring – and again link it to the larger purpose.
3. Giving those tasked with doing the work as much autonomy as possible in how they complete the task.

Stay Interviews

Conducting a “stay” interview is a powerful way to reduce volunteer turnover . . . by identifying issues *before* they result in a valued volunteer leaving.

Conduct stay interviews with . . .

- ❑ Star volunteers
- ❑ Volunteers with essential knowledge/experience
- ❑ Volunteers identified as those with even greater potential talents to give
- ❑ Individuals whose departure might cause other volunteers to leave

Conducting Stay Interviews

Review possible topic areas and the list of example Stay Interview questions.

What topics and questions might you include within your Stay Interview process?

What might a volunteer Stay Interview program look like?




Retention Wisdom



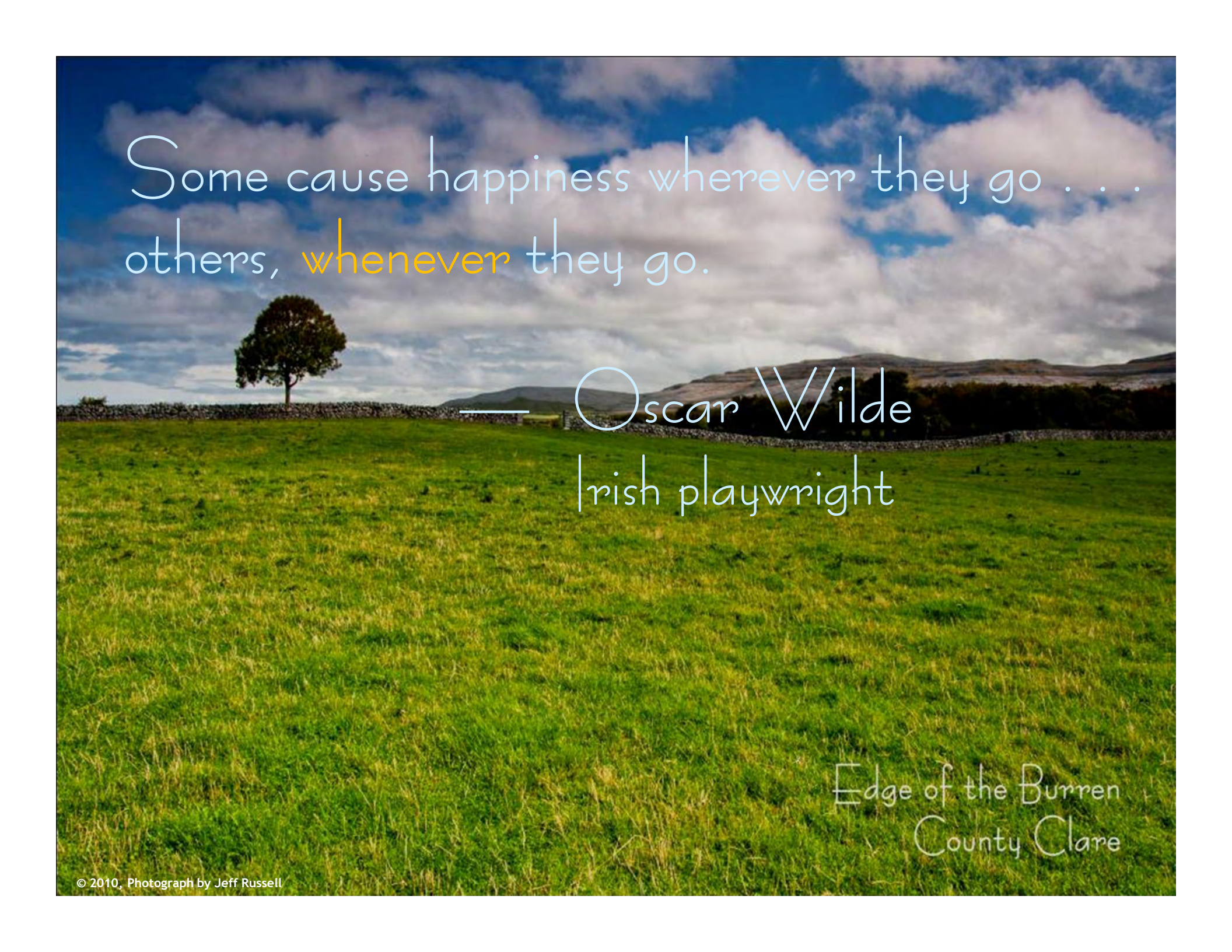
Stay Interviews help you
both retain a specific
volunteer and build a
quality environment at the
same time!

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The master doesn't talk, he
acts. When his work is done,
the people say "Amazing! We
did it all by ourselves."

Lao-Tzu
Chinese Poet and Philosopher

A landscape photograph of a green field with a stone wall and a tree under a cloudy sky. The text is overlaid on the image.

Some cause happiness wherever they go . . .
others, whenever they go.

— Oscar Wilde
Irish playwright

Edge of the Burren
County Clare

Lake Minocqua Sunset

Thank you!

The full PPT will be on our website next week.

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