

What should I do with the volunteer leader who always disagrees with me?

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Every team seems to have one—a dissident, contrarian, somebody who never agrees. My team had Rob. Rob, a youth volunteer and parent, loved Jesus, but I was never quite sure if he liked me. He excelled at poking holes in my plans and coming up with additional things I should be doing. Rob drove me crazy!

Until I started to listen. You see, Rob's full-time job involved critiquing, poking holes, and making things stronger. It's what he did every single day. And so, when he came to meetings, he believed he was offering us his gift and making plans better. It wasn't about me, or whether Rob liked me. It was about Rob's God-given gift to notice flaws and improve plans. Now Rob could, at times, have been a little friendlier about his criticism. But he made our youth ministry much better by foreseeing problems and gaps well before the rest of us!

Actively Invite Dissent

Strong teams require diverse opinions. Next time you are discussing a program or gathering, ask your team what is going well and what is challenging. This allows everybody to build on your team's strengths and creates a space where volunteers can voice concerns or, at times, disagreements. Make this a regular practice and you'll likely hear perspectives you had not previously considered!

Identify the Values Behind the Dissent

Some disagreements are mostly about programs or tactics, like deciding what game to play at youth group. But many disagreements are over competing values. What should we teach? Who should be included in an activity? What is the role of outreach? Discussing differing values with our team can help disagreement feel less personal and even provide a way to move forward together.

Focus on The Object of Disagreement

Repeated disagreement often feels personal. When a volunteer disagrees with you, focus on the specific event, teaching, method, or program that elicited the disagreement. If it's about something you did ("I can't believe you said..."), direct attention to the specific interaction ("I see how those words might have made students feel..."). Look for what you can learn from, or apologize for, so you help create a posture of continuous improvement and quick repentance and forgiveness in your ministry.

When disagreement becomes a sustained conflict, you may need to have some difficult conversations, involve a mediator, or even ask the volunteer to step down.

Every team needs a dissenter (or two!) to make them stronger. I'd be lying if I said I always appreciated Rob and his criticism. But actively inviting his perspective, understanding his values, and making space for critiques strengthened our youth ministry and helped us develop a friendship independent of the critical role he played on our team.

Check Out
This Resource
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[The Toxic Volunteer](#)



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