



COUNCIL FOR MILITARY SPOUSE CLUBS

Thrift Shop Volunteers:

In the last three years we have been hearing about a decline in the willingness and availability of volunteers to come in and help with Thrift Shops. The Good News is...it's not just you. The bad news is...lots of organizations are having trouble getting volunteers – especially if the commitment is long term.

Many clubs are concerned because their Thrift Shop is their big philanthropic money maker and if they can't get volunteers, they will no longer have the funds for their Community Outreach program or their Scholarship Program.

Because of this, we have put together a list of things to consider when faced with this problem:

1. What is the mission of your Thrift Shop??? Is it to make money for your club? Is it to provide low-cost items to your military community? Is it to provide a consignment option for your community to make money while saving items from going to the landfill? Is it all of these?
 - a. If it's not just about the income, think about hiring staff to run the shop. You will not make as much money, but you are still providing the service to the community, which is part of your overall mission. If the alternative is closing the shop and ending the mission completely, maybe it's OK to use the money raised to pay a Manager, Cashier, and Donations Specialist. Hire Mil Spouses to keep it in the family!
 - b. After hiring the staff, you may find that you can get more short-term volunteers to come in because they only provide help for a little while and don't have to make big decisions. The staff keeps things in line and the volunteers help with the manpower.
2. Offer more incentives for your volunteers and ensure you are accurately tracking all volunteer hours.
 - a. Set up \$5 off donated items coupons for every 10 hours worked. This can get tricky, because discounts can't be given on consigned items.
 - b. Set up a system for "first dibs" on items that are brought into the shop. If multiple volunteers are interested in the same item, make it fair for whoever can buy it. *Item sits on a shelf for 7 days and everyone who is interested in buying it adds their name to list or somehow gets a ticket for an item drawing. After 7 days, a name is drawn, and that person is allowed the option to purchase the item. You could even set it up that for every 5 hours you volunteer, you get another ticket to put into the "DIBS" jar for each item.*
 - c. If you take consignments, volunteers who work at least a set number of hours (i.e. 5 hours a week/ or 15 hours a month) get a bigger percentage (~5% more) from their consignments sold.
 - d. Volunteers can keep their items at full price for 2 weeks longer than normal protocol.



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- e. If you have a special sale at certain times of the year, set up early shopping for volunteers who have worked a certain number of hours within the time frame you set up. They would need to show their invitation to gain early access.
 3. Train and set expectations for your volunteers:
 - a. Set up quarterly training so people feel confident to help. Make sure you have clear guidelines (a volunteer handbook), so volunteers understand their duties and the Chain of Command.
 - b. Don't allow the "Good Idea Fairy" to come in and change things that were set up by another volunteer without permission from whoever is in charge.
 - c. Have the volunteers sign a contract so they know the expectations and consequences of not following proper procedures.
 - d. Set up shorter session opportunities. Some people want to help but can't commit to every Tuesday. If a volunteer can only work a couple of hours a week, utilize their strengths for specific projects you need completed.
 - e. Think about offering volunteer opportunities when the shop is closed. Vary the time you are processing items. You may find that you can hold onto all the donations/consignments until the evening or a weekend and have a group of volunteers come in and work through them. Allows for volunteers to help when they have childcare or if they are working and only free evenings and weekends.
 - f. Have a set price list for items (with some flexibility for brand names) so there is no discussion on the pricing and no cause for impropriety.
 4. Recognize your volunteers monthly through social media – give them the chance to share a post with their friends with a quote from them about why they volunteer. You may find you get more help because others want to join the fun!