



Luz Munoz, Madeleine Lenke and Nimia Gonzalez cross the finish line together. Sunshine State 1/2 Marathon.FOR PBRR'S

The Vital Volunteers: More Important Than Race Participants

If you're a runner, you probably looked at the title of this column, and decided you hated it, and hated me for saying it.

I can't help what you think; it's true. There's no road race without people to do the hard work of setting up, cleaning up and maintaining the speedy status quo between "On your mark, get set, GO!" and "What was my time?/Where are the bananas and bagels/When do we get our awards?" While a road race can take place with as few as two runners, you cannot run a road race with two volunteers. Volunteers are hard to find, and good volunteers have infinite value to a race director. Here are five thoughts on getting the best out of the volunteer experience:

1) **Offer as early and often as possible:** You may not be able to work every race, but a race director needs to know earlier than ASAP that you want to get involved, so you can be scheduled. Check the running club's website for upcoming races, so you know in advance what you want to work.

2) **Time and distance:** Make sure you arrive on time for your work assignment and that you know what you are getting involved in. Some races, like 5K and 10K events, are over pretty quickly (sixty to ninety minutes for the actual races), while marathons and triathlons can go four or more hours. Know before you go and commit. If you have a time limit, tell the race director.

3) **Make 'em happy:** Nothing makes a race director happier than a volunteer willing to do any task, whether it's working registration or a water stop, setting up traffic cones, slicing bagels or posting signs and banners. "It's not my job" is not in any race director's vocabulary.

4) **Runners are crabby** first thing in the morning...sometimes. But as a vibrant volunteer, you're the smiling face that makes it worth showing up (well, that and the post-race food and drink). When they get to your water stop or cross the finish line, step forward and look at the runners (put down the cell phone for the duration of the event...yes, you can) and be a cheerleader.

5) **Now you see it, but most don't,** and it's what really counts for most race directors: the cleanup. If you're not an early-riser, come later and help with the post-race breakdown of tents, trash pickup and removal of cones, tables and leftover food and beverages. It's not the prettiest part of racing, but it's often where good volunteers show that they are great volunteers.

And five thoughts on payback from being a volunteer:

1) **A fast track to service credit:** The volunteer time counts towards the high school requirement for community service hours. Colleges look for volunteer work experience on your application.

2) **You're hired!** It's not just colleges that look at your volunteer history. Potential employers tend to view an applicant's volunteer work favorably; it shows the applicant is willing to give and share of themselves, work as part of a team and tries new experiences, all with no expectation of anything other than the personal satisfaction of giving back.

3) **Need a new network?** Whether you're looking for a new job or want to start running, races are a way to meet a large group of new people. You can make connections based on your shared volunteer experience, exchange information and it just might lead you to a new career, more business clients or a fun training group.

4) **You're not running, but you're working out:** Race set-up and breakdown can be very physical; carrying boxes, signs, water pallets and tables is labor-intensive. But if you cannot lift and carry, there is still work for you. Registration requires minimal movement. If you enjoy working with food and feeding people, the post-race snack table is your place. You don't have to leave the family home and volunteer alone; there's a job for everyone.

5) **That saying about personal satisfaction:** Of course, we've all heard it; volunteering gives you a feeling of personal satisfaction. At a road race, it also gets you free food and drink, free T-shirt, an early workout, possibly a discount to the next race event and access to a network of people who can motivate you to get and stay healthy. Oh, and that personal satisfaction thing, too.

Volunteering is the ultimate exercise in democracy. You vote in elections once a year, but when you volunteer, you vote every day about the kind of community you want to live in. -Author Unknown



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