Volunteer Leadership Series

- Recruitment
- Interviews & Placement
- Orientation & Training



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Recruitment Redefined

A new way of thinking about recruitment. Trends in volunteerism. Why people do—and don't—volunteer. And what *really* motivates volunteers.

Many people think that recruiting volunteers is a matter of crafting a sales message and then putting the people who respond to work. We tuck those warm bodies into open volunteer slots and then move on.

The problem with that approach is that volunteers who enter a ministry that way don't stick. They aren't fulfilled, and they usually aren't effective. You end up right back on the same old treadmill, trying to replace people who you got to replace other people who themselves were replacements.

A certain amount of turnover will happen no matter what you do. But you can shrink turnover and increase volunteer satisfaction (yours with the volunteers, and the volunteers with their roles) by thinking of recruitment as *more* than a sales job. And by determining that just any warm body won't do for your volunteer ministry.

Think of recruitment this way: Recruitment is an invitation to discuss a volunteer ministry opportunity. It doesn't mean the person responding will necessarily get the position.

Notice that when you recruit with this definition in mind, the process is like a job interview, where a company selects from among a pool of talented applicants. It's not a desperate attempt to get somebody doing a job that needs to be done.

But you might be thinking: I AM desperately seeking people to do jobs that need to be done! I can't AFFORD to be selective.

Not only can you afford to be selective, you *must* be selective. To do anything else is to shortchange everyone in the process—the volunteers, your church, and the people who will benefit from the volunteers' involvement.

You *must* be selective.

Consider what happened to a youth minister who was short a youth sponsor and was then introduced to someone who wanted the position...

"The guy looked perfect for the role," says John, the youth minister. "He was good-looking, high energy, and related well with the kids. Plus, I had so many parents telling me he'd make a wonderful youth sponsor that I felt I had to try him out."

Mistake.

After a month of service, the new 27-year-old youth sponsor decided to date one of the senior high girls.

The good news is that John happened to walk into the conversation while the sponsor was telling the girl what time he'd pick her up for their date—so the date never happened.

"I was shocked," says John. "My heart went to my throat, my stomach fell to my feet, and I thought, "am I hearing this? I wanted to kill the guy."

Nothing on the background screening had indicated the new volunteer abused children. Or sexually molested teenage girls. Or even drove too fast in a school zone. And in fact, the volunteer never *had* done any of those things.

"He just met a nice girl and wanted to take her out," remembers John.
"When I told him he couldn't date the kids, he was baffled. He didn't see what the problem was. He didn't have a clue."

Would it have been worth John's time to be more selective about whom he placed in the youth sponsor role? Absolutely. And would he have been smart to sit down with the sponsor and cover the bases about what was—and wasn't—appropriate behavior? You bet.

But John was desperate for staff and wasn't sure he'd do any better if he kept looking. So he took a shortcut and bypassed the orientation and training—something he will no longer do.

"Nothing happened, but it easily could have," says John, who still serves in a position where he's responsible for equipping volunteers. "I learned a *lot* from that experience."

When you live in a world of too many jobs and too few volunteers, how can you turn down people who are willing? The harsh reality is this: Sometimes you have to go with the people you have

How can you turn down people who are willing?

available. The *good* people—the people you *wish* you had—aren't the ones signing up when you pass around the sign-up sheet.

What's wrong with people these days? Why isn't anyone volunteering anymore?

Trends in Volunteerism

The fact is that people *are* volunteering—just not in the ways you may remember.

Back in the Good Old Days, when relatively few women worked outside the home, you could sign up volunteers by simply announcing a need. Back in the Good Old Days, when the work week was 40 hours long and families played badminton in the backyard after dinner, men had time to get together on Saturday afternoon to do yard work at the church building.

But those Good Old Days are gone—if they ever existed at all.

These days you're facing trends that shape how much time people are willing to volunteer and how they want their volunteer commitments structured. Your community may differ somewhat, but in general, you'll need to consider these following 12 trends when you're creating your volunteer ministry.

• Work life is expanding—and varied.

How many people do you know who still work the hours of 9 to 5, Monday through Friday? Some studies indicate that only about a third of employees work those once-normal hours.

Part-time jobs, jobs that demand travel and long hours, service jobs with irregular hours, health-care jobs that require night shifts, extra jobs, home-based jobs that blur the lines between "family time" and "work time"—these are common today. So are long commutes that consume extra hours each day.

Many churches want to find people who'll commit for several months at exactly the time many volunteers are seeking short-term, one-shot volunteer assignments.

People staffing your volunteer roles will be juggling jobs, families, friends, and their volunteer duties. According to Independent Sector's Giving and Volunteering in the United States (Washington, D.C., Sept. 2011), 33.3 percent of persons who are employed part time volunteer, and 28.7 percent of persons who work full time volunteer. That means the majority of people staffing your volunteer roles will be juggling jobs, families, friends, and their volunteer duties.

Families are changing.

In many homes, grandparents are now raising their grandchildren. Single-parent households are far more common than they once were. The traditional definition of "family" is being stretched and redefined in many directions, and there are unique stresses with each definition. Woe to the organization that assumes there will be stay-at-home moms who will sign up to be den mothers, recess chaperones, or Sunday school teachers.

People seek balanced lives—and that may eliminate volunteering.

In an effort to live lives that include family, friends, work, and worship, many church members are intentionally opting to *not* volunteer for tasks. This isn't a lack of concern or unawareness. It's a deliberate decision to limit the number of their obligations, and for these potential volunteers, a "no" is a non-negotiable "no."

• There's increased competition for volunteers.

Organizations that were once well funded by government agencies are experiencing budget reductions. Every organization is trying to do more with less. The demand for volunteer labor is increasing, which means your church members might very well have full volunteer schedules at the United Way, a homeless shelter, or Habitat before you ever contact them about serving on a church ministry team.

• The motivation for volunteering is shifting.

In the 1950s and earlier, the value behind volunteering was commitment. When you signed on to teach Sunday school, you did so because you were expressing a commitment to God, the church, and the children.

Today the values behind volunteerism seem to be compassion (I want to help and make a difference) and community (I want to be part of something bigger than myself. I want to belong and to be in a network of caring people).

Motivation impacts everything in a volunteer setting, from how you invite volunteers to how you place them to how you recognize them.

Volunteers expect more.

Maybe they used to settle for that "good feeling" that came from helping others, but now they're expecting the organizations that use them to be professional, flexible, and responsive. Good enough isn't good enough anymore. Nobody expects average these days. If a volunteer experience is disorganized, frustrating, or wastes the volunteer's time, that volunteer won't be back.

• There's a changing pool of volunteers available.

As Baby Boomers reach retirement age and want to do something significant, highly trained and highly skilled people are becoming volunteers. The ranks of volunteers are also growing because of layoffs and corporate downsizing. Teenagers are entering the volunteer pool because of experience with school "service learning" projects and to bolster resumés for college applications and job searches.

Volunteers want to shoulder responsibility, not just tasks.

Many volunteers bring significant leadership experience with them when they show up to volunteer. They want to be actively engaged in

Volunteers are seeking meaningful, interesting work.

their roles, which means they want to use all of their skills. Electrical engineers won't be satisfied for long stuffing envelopes. Volunteers are seeking meaningful, interesting work.

• There are more volunteer options available in churches.

As churches grow in size, the number of "niche" ministries grows. It used to be that a volunteer could work in Christian education or serve on a board. Now a volunteer can help direct traffic, handle finances, play bass in the worship band, update the church Facebook page, or serve coffee in the café.

• Guilt is gone as a motivator.

"Because you should" isn't a reason people willingly accept any longer. Rather, volunteers are motivated for other reasons, and they're more willing to explicitly ask what benefits will come to them as a result of their volunteering. Volunteer managers must be able to answer the question "What's in it for me?" with clear, definite benefits that will flow to the volunteer.

Technology is changing volunteering.

It's now possible to write, edit, and produce the church's monthly newsletter without ever setting foot in the church office. Balancing the books requires an internet connection, not board meetings. And the list of technology-related volunteer roles—handling lights and sound, computer consulting, social media usage, and preparing PowerPoint presentations, among others—is growing rapidly. Some volunteer positions require specialized knowledge and thorough training.

The cost of training and maintaining volunteers is rising.

It's more expensive than ever to bring a volunteer on board at your church. The cost of a background check, the training needed to make a volunteer proficient in a role, insurance to protect the church and volunteer, and even the software for tracking volunteers is more extensive than ever before.

It's unlikely this trend will reverse direction anytime soon, if ever.

Please note that these trends aren't good or bad; they simply exist. They're reality. And as you plan ways to initiate a volunteer-equipping ministry or fine-tune the one that's already in place in your church, you've got to keep them in mind. Wishing there were more stay-at-home moms who want to donate a day per week to your project won't make it come true.

These trends aren't good or bad; they simply exist.

Why Won't People Volunteer?

Everyone who's attempted to staff a ministry with volunteers has a top-ten list of excuses they hear again and again. But the items on those lists usually boil down to two basic issues: a perceived lack of time and fear.

1. Address the perceived lack of time.

Fact: We all get 24 hours in a day, and 168 hours in a week. The amount of time available to volunteers and non-volunteers is precisely the same.

The concern about having enough time to volunteer really isn't about time. It's about the number of obligations a potential volunteer already has that make a claim on his or her time.

If a person is pulled in many different directions and rushes through a nonstop hectic schedule, it's going to feel as if there's no time to spare... and there isn't. One unforeseen incident sets off a domino effect that leaves the next ten appointments missed or delayed. There's no margin in this person's life.

Will this person dedicate enough time to the role to be successful?

For each potential volunteer, there is a critical issue you must settle before you place the volunteer in a role: Will this person dedicate enough time to the role to be successful? And can the volunteer provide the *right* time? Is the volunteer available when the volunteer job needs to be done?

A busy sales professional decided to join the Big Brothers. Following the necessary interview and screening process, a first meeting was set up to introduce the volunteer to a potential match. An agency representative was present, as was the volunteer, the 8-year-old boy who was seeking a big brother, and the boy's mother.

The agency representative laid out the agency's expectations again. The big brother and little brother would meet once a week for three to four hours, meetings would be confirmed by phone 24 hours in advance, outings would be inexpensive, and all parties would stay in touch with the agency. Everything was exactly as described in earlier communications with the individual parties.

Then the mother casually mentioned that the meetings would have to be on Mondays between 3:00 and 6:00 p.m. Weekends were already booked with activities, and her work schedule was set.

The connection between the boy and the volunteer never developed. For the volunteer, Mondays were busy—especially during work hours. He could meet with the boy on weekends and evenings, but not during work hours.

The volunteer experience failed to develop, but *not* because the volunteer lacked time. It failed to develop because the time the volunteer *had* available didn't match the requirement.

As you seek to match busy people with volunteer roles, what can you do to overcome the barrier of a perceived lack of time? Here are some suggestions...

Segment volunteer roles so there are more, but less time-consuming, roles to fill.

For instance, rather than ask a Sunday school teacher to gather supplies, prepare the lesson, and teach the lesson, you might have another volunteer do the gathering of supplies. Divide volunteer roles into contained tasks, and recruit more volunteers who each do less.

Connect the volunteer role with another valued activity.

For instance, if a potential volunteer wants to spend more time with family, suggest a volunteer role that can be accomplished by a family. If the potential volunteer wants to get more exercise, suggest that the volunteer mow a yard, weed a garden, or do another exercise-oriented task.

Suggest that the potential volunteer sign up for a one-shot project rather than an ongoing role.

An airline pilot whose flight schedule won't allow her to consistently lead a small group on Wednesday night might very well be willing to give a full day some weekend when she's off. Sometimes it's not the amount of time that's a problem; it's the expectation that the same hour will be available each week.

Short-term missions are growing in popularity because they're short term—and can be accomplished by someone who's not willing to completely change his or her life. Habitat for Humanity (www.habitat.org) and Group Mission Trips (www.groupmissiontrips.com) have found ways to recruit thousands of volunteers who do remarkable amounts of ministry in short-term settings.

• Create flexible volunteer positions that are less time sensitive.

It doesn't really matter if someone creates a form on your church website at 9:00 in the morning or at midnight. And if you're planning ahead, stocking up on animal crackers for VBS can happen anytime during the week before VBS begins. Be intentional about structuring volunteer opportunities so they have the maximum time flexibility possible. This won't be possible with some roles—such as leading a class that meets from 9:30 to 10:30 on Sunday mornings—but it will be possible elsewhere.

Create volunteer positions that don't require travel.

Especially for older volunteers who might be homebound or have issues with travel at night or in bad weather, look for volunteer tasks and roles that don't require travel. Some examples: making phone calls, creating follow-up packets for visitors, and creating craft packets from materials delivered to the volunteers' homes.

When "I don't have time" emerges as an issue in dealing with volunteers, don't assume you understand what the potential volunteer means by those words. It's worth probing to see if one of the strategies listed above can manage the issue and make it possible for the potential volunteer to sign up for a role.

2. Address the fear of volunteering.

Some people shy away from volunteering because of fear. Not necessarily fear of your organization or the specific opportunities you're offering, but, rather, three other things.

Failure—If a volunteer role is poorly defined or lacks training and resources, failure is an almost certain outcome. If volunteers sense they're set up for failure, they won't feel

Volunteers dislike crashing and burning on projects or disappointing themselves and you. It's up to you to design the volunteer role so you can provide reassurance that no volunteer will be sent out on a limb that will then be cut off.

excited about participation.

If a volunteer role is poorly defined or lacks training and resources, failure is an almost certain outcome.

Abuse—Abuse is a strong word and may overstate the case—but not by much. When a volunteer is given an impossible task, it feels like abuse.

Jim Wideman, in his book *Children's Ministry Leadership: The You-Can-Do-lt Guide* (Group Publishing, 2003), describes what sometimes happens to people who sign up to teach Sunday school. "In many churches, new Sunday school teachers are trained by getting a little lecture, handed a book, thrown in a classroom, and told to not come out until Jesus returns."

Jim describes what happens to new volunteer teachers this way: "We tell them they'll get some help, and in a couple years we do find them a helper. That's when we open the classroom door and are amazed when the teacher comes screaming out, quits on the spot, and disappears forever. So what do we do? We hand the book to the helper we found and throw that person into the room."

Small wonder someone in a church like that would be afraid to sign up to teach Sunday school. You can't quit, and there's no training. It's a volunteer's nightmare...and it's abusive.

A volunteer would only have to be mistreated that way once before deciding *never again*. And the only way to be *sure* it never again happens would be to avoid all volunteer roles.

By the way, volunteers consider it equally abusive to take them on and then give them nothing worthwhile to do. **Not being "good enough"**—On a typical Sunday morning, a church member will see people preach, teach, and lead music. There may be solo instrumentalists, a band, or a choir. There may be people ushering. Perhaps there are greeters and people staffing an information desk.

And depending on the size of the church and the church's emphasis on excellence in programming, the people serving in visible roles might be demonstrating professional-level skills. They're not just singing—they're singing remarkably well. They're not just playing piano—they're playing at a level you'd expect to hear in a concert hall. They're not just ushering, they look like the concierge at the five-star hotel downtown.

The unintended message: If you're going to serve here, you've got to have the skill and polish of a pro. In our worhip band, only music majors need apply.

Is that true? Probably not...or maybe it is true.

A church's desire to have excellent programming creates a smoother, more enjoyable worship service. But it also discourages potential volunteers who know they can't hit the high notes or deliver a top-notch lesson. It can seem there's no place for a nonprofessional to participate.

Here are ways you can banish fear when it comes to volunteering.

Define roles carefully—with a full position description in writing.

Position descriptions provide reassurance to potential volunteers in that they know what they're getting into—and that you've thought through what you want. Solid information tends to help people see a challenge as an opportunity or adventure rather than a threat.

Listen carefully to concerns about the volunteer role and the volunteer's fit with the role.

What's behind the concern? Has the volunteer failed in another volunteer role? Has a friend failed in the role you're proposing? Is there a question of trust about how thoroughly you've described what's expected? What history is the potential volunteer carrying into the discussion? If you detect fear or suspicion, gently probe to get to the root of it.

Remove uncertainty.

Volunteers can be less than confident about participating because they know they're being "sold" on a project. Sure, you're here now—when the volunteer hasn't yet been reeled in—but will you be around when there's a problem to be solved?

Let potential volunteers know what you'll do to help them in their volunteer efforts. Describe the support and involvement they can expect from you and other leaders. Then do what you say you'll do.

The Unspoken Barrier to Volunteering

There's another common reason people don't volunteer, though you'll never hear people actually say it: tradition.

In many churches, it's a tradition to simply sit in the pew. Few people ever volunteer for anything. It's a tradition to pay the soloists who sing on Sunday Another common reason people don't volunteer: tradition.

morning, the nursery workers who care for children on Wednesday night, and the caterers who've replaced the potlucks.

Inviting people to serve in ministry in a church culture that doesn't honor or encourage volunteerism is a challenge of Olympic proportions. And at heart, it's a spiritual matter.

If you're in a church where serving "just isn't done," consider doing the following.

Meet with the leadership.

Determine if your assessment is accurate. Is it true that most people won't volunteer, or is that true just of one ministry area? If the children's ministry area can't beg, borrow, or steal a volunteer but the adult ministry has a waiting list for involvement, the problem may be with the reputation or administration of the children's ministry area. Be sure you see things clearly and that you're fixing the right problem.

And if most members of your congregation *are* volunteering in service but only outside your church, that's helpful to know, as well.

Ask leadership to provide teaching about the biblical expectation for involvement.

If people truly aren't serving anywhere, ask for clear teaching about the biblical mandate to serve others.

Remove every barrier you can find to volunteering.

Some have been identified already, but consider these possibly hidden barriers, too:

Do paid staff members discourage volunteers? It can be done by failing to design roles that can be filled by volunteers or refusing to provide information that allows volunteers to function effectively.

Is there such competition for volunteers that it frightens volunteers away? If the new members' class is stalked by the youth pastor, children's pastor, and other staffers who are all pitching the importance of their different ministries, it may create an environment that actually repels volunteerism. To say "yes" to one staffer creates hard feelings with other staffers.

Is there a "volunteer-toxic" environment that combines a refusal to delegate with vague or nonexistent job descriptions? It may be so difficult to come on board as a volunteer that it's truly not worth the effort.

Are volunteers ignored? Find out when the last volunteer recognition effort was organized. If the year starts with "19-" then you've identified one problem to overcome.

Pray—and invite others to pray with you.

Is your church one that's discouraged—and, as a congregation, has no vision for the future?

Is your church one that's defeated? Perhaps your "glory days" of attendance and impact were 20 or 50 years ago, and those who remain see themselves as defenders of a glorious tradition. Your leadership has dug in and is holding on...and that's all.

Is your church dead? There's no spark of life anywhere you look?

Pray for your church and what God wants to do with you. Ask others— whose hearts align with yours about wanting to see people involved—to join you in regular times of lifting your church up to God.

Recruitment Revealed

There's a simple technique that will revolutionize your recruitment efforts. It's powerful, simple, and you can do it without having to invest in additional books, conferences, or consultants.

And you even get immediate feedback when this technique is used.

Ready?

Here it is: Ask people to serve.

It's that simple. Honest.

Ask people to serve.

One of the reasons most frequently cited by volunteers as to why they didn't get involved sooner is that nobody asked them to do so.

That doesn't mean they weren't aware of countless messages on serving. They may have walked past sign-up tables, sat through announcements, and flipped past the pleas for help written in the church newsletter and bulletin.

But nobody asked them, face to face, by name, to fill a volunteer role.

If it's increasingly difficult for you to get volunteers, consider how large a role person-to-person recruitment plays in your approach. It is far, far more effective than "paper-to-people" recruitment efforts.

What Really Motivates Volunteers

First, a disclaimer: You can't motivate a volunteer. It's simply not within your power. But you can discover what already motivates individuals and try to scratch those particular itches.

A disclaimer: You can't motivate a volunteer. Everyone has what Marlene Wilson calls a "motivational preference." If you can identify it, you can help each volunteer have a meaningful experience while volunteering through your program.

David McClelland and John W. Atkinson did groundbreaking research at Harvard University and the University of Michigan, respectively, which led to a theory that goes a long way toward helping you identify what motivates your volunteers. A brief listing of their seminal studies is given at the end of this chapter.¹

Fortunately, Harvard professor George Litwin and his research assistant, Robert Stringer, Jr., helped translate the McClelland-Atkinson theory and applied it to organizations in their book, Motivation and Organizational Climate. Marlene Wilson adapted these ideas to working with volunteers in her book, The Effective Management of Volunteer Programs, and the following synopsis appears courtesy of Harvard Division of Research, Graduate School of Business and Volunteer Management Associates.

McClelland and Atkinson were curious about why one person's favorite job was another person's least favorite and why some people liked to figure things out on their own while others wanted clear directions.

Starting with the premise that "people spend their time thinking about what motivates them," they conducted extensive studies checking out what people thought while walking, eating, working, studying, and even sleeping. They discovered people do think about what motivates them, and they identified three distinct motivational types: Achievers, Affiliators, and Power (or Influence) People.

Let's take a closer look at those three motivational types.

Achievers value accomplishments and results.

They like to set goals and solve problems. They want to know where they're headed and want things to happen in a timely way. They *hate* having their time wasted.

Achievers tend to be well-organized, prefer deadlines, are moderate risk takers, and are often articulate. They like "to-do" lists. They depend on their pocket calendars and electronic organizers. And if achievers have a leader who's poor at delegation, they'll go crazy.

If an achiever responds to a project they think is significant and they discover it's just a small task, the achiever's motivation immediately deflates. In fact, unless they're extremely committed to the cause, you'll lose them.

In churches resistant to change, where achievers have no room to grow and stretch, you'll find them coming in one door and going out another. You can utilize and attract achievers by learning how to use ministry teams effectively. Search for achievers with good delegation skills, and they'll form excellent teams around themselves.

• Affiliators are "people people."

They're sensitive, nurturing, and caring. Interacting with others and being part of a community is what motivates them. They care less about the work being done than about the people they're doing it with. They're easily hurt, so leaders need to know that affiliators will require more of their time. However, it's time well spent because affiliators make church a good place to be. They're the ones walking up to visitors and striking up conversations.

Affiliators are good barometers about how things are going in your ministry. They know how people are feeling about things. They're also good persuaders, listeners, and public speakers. They make excellent interviewers, members of listen-care teams, or leaders of small groups.

And they're great choices for projects like mass mailings. Get a group of affiliators together with a pot of coffee, and they'll have the mailing done before you know it—and enjoy the process because they chatted the entire time.

• Power People come in two varieties: McClelland categorized them as personal and social.

Both types like to think about having impact on people and outcomes. They think long-term and are good strategists. If you want to enact change, find some power-motivated people and get them on your side. If you convince them, they'll spend their time thinking about who they need to influence and how they need to do it.

Personal Power People use their power on *people* usually through manipulation and intimidation. They think in terms of win-lose, and if they perceive someone else is "winning," they instantly assume

In the church, personal power people can be toxic.

they're losing. They're comfortable with conflict—and tend to create a lot of it!

In the church, these people can be toxic. If someone has left your church bleeding, there was probably a personal power person involved. These are also the people who can quickly crush programs and new ideas.

Social Power People like to influence and impact others in a win-win way. Convince a social power person of your vision, and they'll move mountains to see your project happen. The reason they can do this is because they see power as infinite and self-renewable. The more power they give away, the more they get. Therefore, they aren't threatened by the success of others. Their goal is *your* success. How the church needs these people!

By the way, social power people are the best at dealing with personal power people because they aren't intimidated by them. *Never* send an affiliator to deal with a personal power person.

Please understand that most people have some characteristics from each of these motivational types, and an individual's primary motivational style may change over time and within differing situations. Marlene Wilson reports that she has exhibited all three styles.

When she was a homemaker while her children were young, she was an affiliator. When she became a program director, she shifted into achievement. She used to enjoy thinking about program goals or how to write a book or produce a video series. Now she sees herself as a social power person. She finds herself thinking, "How do I influence things that matter? How do I use whatever time and energy I have left to have the most impact on the things I care most about?"

You can motivate people with these three styles by placing them in appropriate settings. For instance, an affiliator may make a wonderful receptionist, so long as the job doesn't also require a great deal of pressure to get e-mail and data input done on a tight schedule.

And you can use insights drawn from these types to create appropriate recognition for individual volunteers, too.



^{1.} Seminal studies contributing to this paradigm include: David C. McClelland, *The Achieving Society* (Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1961); John W. Atkinson, *An Introduction to Motivation* (Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1964); John W. Atkinson and N. T. Feather, *A Theory of Achievement Motivation* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1966).

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