

# VOLUNTEER CLIFFS:

Every ministry has 5 obstacles (aka. "Cliffs") that prevent growth, decline discipleship & create frustration.

**"a leader's job is to fix the cliff – to build a ladder, and eventually, an escalator."**

**Skill Cliffs:** *"It's too technical, high-pressure, or complex for me to feel comfortable serving."*

**Pastoral Cliffs:** *"I don't feel known, valued, or spiritually stimulated. I.e., It's not relationally fun."*

**Communication Cliffs:** *"I don't really know what's expected of me in terms of scheduling, time, talent, or character. I don't know how to give feedback when things aren't working."*

**Synchronization Cliffs:** *"I feel tension between this ministry and other parts of the church."*

**Convenience Cliffs:** *"It's too inconvenient for me or my family to serve in this ministry;"*

## THE SYMPTOMS OF THE TOP 5 CLIFFS:

**SKILL Cliffs:** *"It's too technical, high-pressure, or complex for me to feel comfortable serving."*

Many ministries require training on certain software programs, instruments, or administrative systems. Sometimes these tools are overly cumbersome or difficult for volunteers to learn, creating a "skill cliff" – a skill set that very few volunteers can acquire. Yet, instead of simplifying the system or creating a better training program, many leaders simply beg for more money or "paid staff" – which never solves the real leadership problem.

In Small Groups, volunteers tend to struggle with *facilitation skills* more than *technical skills*. (For Eg). New leaders struggle with: *How to facilitate fun discussions with open ended questions; What to do with an overly extroverted / introverted / awkward person; How to phone call an absentee group member without coming off oppressive, guilt-tripping or creepy; How to lead a worship song without song-lyrics; etc.*

Thus, skill cliffs occur when...

- The leader fails to identify or simplify over-complicated tasks. (For Eg). Getting rid of a customized sound system that requires 12 different pieces of equipment to be turned on.
- The leader fails to clarify skill-sets that are necessary to the task and provide fun training and on-boarding classes. (For Eg). Providing a growth track to expose people to your ministries processes & procedures.
- The leader delegates tasks in such a way that leaves volunteers overwhelmed rather than delightfully challenged (For Eg). Forcing a new volunteer to teach a Bible lesson to a room full of 5<sup>th</sup> grade boys only moments after giving them a bullet pointed script.

**PASTORAL Cliffs:** *"I don't feel known, valued, or spiritually stimulated. I.e., It's not relationally fun."*

Every volunteer has "*Felt Needs*" and "*Real Needs*." Their felt need might be entertainment or looking for a date; but, their real need is: they don't have 4-7 close Christian friends or a ministry...they don't read their Bibles or attend church on a regular basis. I.e., a healthy and successful ministry always meets BOTH real and felt needs at the same time. Thus, Pastoral cliffs can still occur when...

- The leader allows volunteers to **do a task** yet doesn't *guarantee they are having fun*.
- The leader allows people to *show up to serve*; but, doesn't guarantee they are *making new friends or having meaningful connections with team-mates*.
- The leader fails to "host" attendees and actively show both *interest and value* to each person.
- The leader fails to fully know the spiritual needs of their volunteers: (For Eg). *What are their dreams? What are their struggles? What are their current pressure points? How are their families? If they*

*dropped off the team, would someone have a follow up appointment? Do they have 4-7 friends and a ministry? Have they gone through our growth track? How can we invite them to take a next step?*

- The leader fails to consider "span of care" ratios: (For E.g.), 1 Host Leader per 5 volunteers. Nobody wants to be a warm-body filling a role. No healthy person wants to stay a spectator. People need a leader who knows them, misses them when they're gone, celebrates them, and processes with them.

**COMMUNICATION Cliffs:** *"I don't really know what's expected of me in terms of schedule, time, talent, or character. I don't know how to give feedback when expectations are off.*

Every successful ministry or small group has a "secret sauce" – a recipe for success that may include food, setting, size, format, etc. Healthy ministries curate these recipes into *standard operating procedures*. And great leaders communicate these recipes well. Thus, when sensitive or controversial decisions are made, without adequate communication (like asking a volunteer to step away from a task), team-mates tend to run away from leaders who under-communicate.

Thus, here are some common situations that cause Communication cliffs...

- The leader tends to "shoot from the hip" (avoiding run-throughs, practices &/or schedules); in turn, this causes stress for other leaders who need more prep time to feel comfortable. (For Eg) a leader fails to have the "meeting before the meeting" (*in which you explain goals; wins; schedules; and unique expectations, etc.*)
- The leader makes job changes and/or schedule changes without adequate lead-time or explanation...often because they are disorganized or scared to have courageous conversations.
- The leader has courageous conversations but does them poorly. (Eg), they confront a difficult volunteer yet never follow up with them. Or, they confront them publically when it should have been private.
- The leader fails to explain the "secret recipe" to people with high-ownership. The leader marginalizes or ignores people who want to modify the recipe instead of explaining what the non-negotiable rules are for that ministry: I.e., The ministry lacks clear I.P.O.D.S. "*Imperatives; Preferences; Optionals, Don'ts*"
- The leader fails to explain what the "Win" is for each week. I.e., What's the ultimate goal of this group? And did we accomplish that goal this week? Are people being invited into the "*Why behind the What?*" Do people understand the mission of the meeting? If not, they are less inclined to come back.

**SYNCHRONIZATION Cliffs:** *"I feel tension between this ministry and other parts of the church."*

Some small groups and ministry teams have a tendency to wander away from the greater vision, values, or priorities of the church. And this tension tends to subtly sabotage both morale and volunteerism. Here are some common examples of synchronization cliffs...

- A leader recruits a volunteer to serve at the early service while their spouse serves at the late service – thus, this couple rarely attends church together. (I.e., Leaders fail to coordinate schedules).
- The leader tends to whine or complain about other ministries or departments not "supporting them." I.e., They openly compete or create tension with other ministries over facility spaces, announcements and/or equipment. (For Eg). "The media team won't produce enough videos for us to promote our event!"
- When ministries ask for "forgiveness rather than permission." (For Eg). Your small group worship leader rewires the entire sound board in the kids classroom, thereby angering both the kids ministry and sound team that serves on Sunday – creating tension rather than workable solutions.
- The leader has a conspicuous lack of affirmation, honor or communication with lead-pastors or ministry uplines. (For Eg). Your small group leader doesn't fully seem to agree with the churches' methods, statement of faith or has an unhealthy obsession with [fill-in-the-blank] doctrine that doesn't seem to fit with the spirit or ethos of the church.

- The leader poaches volunteers or siphon's bandwidth from other departments of the church without processing first. (Eg., The youth ministry requests an inordinate amount of announcements, promotional brochures or videos instead of generating their own video and graphic budget.)
- The leader never attracts and connects attendees to the greater vision of the church. (Eg). Your small group leader never invites people to commit to the greater mandates of the church (the new campus launch; or, the critical upcoming fundraiser).
- The leader avoids negotiating with or serving other ministries in the church: A ministry wants child-care yet, resists the complexity of "church required background checks." Or, they schedule meetings that openly compete with bigger church events (without discussing it with pastors). Or, it could be something as small as, your small group designs custom tee-shirts, but decides to reinvent the churches' logo on the tee shirt without asking permission from the design dept.

All of these things signal a lack of unity which is a critical component for the blessing and anointing of God. They create pockets of tension and in-alignment... like a football player who refuses to block or run their specified route, it causes tension between "Team-Interest" and "Self-Interest."

**CONVENIENCE Cliffs:** *"It's too inconvenient for me or my family to serve in this ministry;"*

This cliff occurs when...

- There aren't enough people on the leadership team, creating burnout: The ministry team doesn't have a designated "host/party thrower" (who intentionally makes everyone feel valued); they don't have a hospitality team (who makes sure everyone has food / fun amenities); they don't have an administrator (facilitating the schedule); they don't have enough trainers (who help recruit and onboard new volunteers); I.e., It's a lone-ranger leader who simply "does it all;" or, "demands it all" simply because they don't understand how to recruit and delegate. (For eg, in a Small Group) The Leader is also the Host Home, who is also the hospitality (meals/desserts), who is also worrying about worship and child-care.
- The leader expects too high of a commitment: (For Eg., Some small groups require too much homework/reading; Or, some ministry teams allow their volunteers to miss church (For eg.), a kids volunteer serves *both services*, instead of "Attend one / Serve one" which causes them to become isolated, depleted and detached from the church. I.e., the expectation must be reasonable.
- The leader doesn't cast a motivationally sufficient vision for why the group exists. People are always asking, (either consciously or subconsciously) *"What's in it for me?"* or *"what's the goal?"* Thus, when leaders fail to adequately share the benefits of committing to group goals, (or explaining the "rewards, testimonies & WHYS" behind the group's mission), people's commitments tend to fade.
- The leaders fail to deal with the "other cliffs." Whenever a small group struggles with the *other 4 cliffs*, people tend to leave by saying: "it's just not convenient for my season of life." Thus, "Convenience" is often a catch-all diagnosis for the other four cliffs.

***"The leaders who solve the most problems  
will experience the most fruitfulness and resources."***

So, how do we avoid these Volunteer Cliffs?

# THE 7 JOB DESCRIPTIONS

If you want to play pro-football, it takes 11 players on the field at any given moment. You can *try* to play with no blockers or only one wide receiver. And you might even get lucky & score a touch-down. But, over time if you want to win games, you need a *full* team. And in a similar way, ministries need to fill seven job-descriptions (or "functions"), many of which are uniquely focused on certain Volunteer cliffs.

Keep in mind, you could probably accomplish all 7 job descriptions with only four people. But, for a ministry to grow, you'll inevitably need to empower more people. In both Small Groups (below) and Ministries teams (opposite page), the "leader & co-leader" focus on *all* the cliffs. The "hosting team" focuses on Pastoral Cliffs. The "hospitality team" on Convenience cliffs; and the "admin team" on Communication cliffs.

## The 7 Job Descriptions on a **SMALL GROUP TEAM:**

**THE LEADER** – who's prepped the game-plan, the schedule and overall vision of the night. They connect people to the vision and heart of their lead pastors. And they always make an "Ask" (ie., they invite people into deeper levels of spiritual commitment at each event).

**THE CO-LEADER** – who assists the leader; they help lead the "pre-meeting" run-through; they help facilitate the discussion; bring clarity to the chaos.

**THE HOSTING TEAM** – Usually 1 to 4 people (including the home-owner) who come early to set up the environment (the chairs, the signage, the cleaning). And when guests arrive, they make sure everyone is greeted and having fun. They guarantee that every attendee is either making new friends or having meaningful connections with current friends. They are people magnets who show interest and value to everyone who shows up.

**THE HOSPITALITY PERSON** – who cooks, administrates food & beverages (or makes requests/assigns food responsibilities), and provides party favors & cleanup.

**THE ADMIN ASSISTANT** – who logs attendance; provides handouts; communicates schedule; facilitates email/texts/ event changes.

*(Optional)*

**THE CHILD-CARE LEADER** – who oversees baby-sitters, collects money to pay baby-sitters; overall safety of kids.

**THE WORSHIP LEADER** – who preps accessible songs and handouts with lyrics.

### The Key Idea:

*"Most teams fail to thrive because they're attempting to operate with only a few of the 7 Jobs filled."*

## The 7 Job Descriptions on a **MINISTRY TEAM:**

As mentioned before, each of these job-descriptions focus on a specific Volunteer cliff. Don't get hung up on the terminology (Host, Hospitality) as every ministry can have its own lexicon (e.g, directors, captains, room leaders, etc.) Yet, it's the universal concepts that matter.

**THE LEADER** – who's prepped the 3 to 6 month goals (in sync with the vision of the Lead Pastor). They host leadership team meetings to give clarity to their lead team. And they connect leaders to the vision and heart of their lead pastors. They make it feel like the overall visionary leaders are present with the group. They make sure that organizational I.P.O.D.S are clear (*Imperatives, Preferences, Optionals, and Don'ts*) are well taught. The leaders concerns themselves with *all* of the cliffs.

**THE CO-LEADERS** – They are responsible to lead at specific campuses, church service times, zones or responsibilities. They help lead team-rallies (before each service) – sharing vision and motivation for the day's tasks; They also debrief the team & help record and report "wins and losses" – providing weekly feedback to the leader. I.e., They make sure that organizational I.P.O.D.S are executed. And give feedback when they need to be expanded and/or enforced. (Focus on All Cliffs)

**THE HOSTING TEAM** – These are people-magnets who make sure every volunteer is greeted and having fun. We don't merely want people to feel like "warm bodies" who are accomplishing tasks. Rather, we want people to feel valued. And while they serve, everyone should be making new friends or having meaningful connections with current friends. Every ministry team, (from the kids ministry to the ushers) should have the appropriate number of hosts. Their ultimate goal is to take care of Pastoral cliffs – to look out for the spiritual highs and lows on their teams – to be spiritual leaders and mentors on mission.

**THE HOSPITALITY TEAM** – From throat-lozenges for worship-singers to hand-warmers for our parking team. Every ministry needs a hospitality team – a group devoted to adding comfort and removing distractions. For some teams, this will take the form of food; for other teams, cleaning and straightening. We've had a valet team (for our worship team members who don't have time to move their cars). We've had an omelet making team (for our early morning load-in volunteers). And many of our ministry teams have had their own in-house child-care. But the point of this person is to *help the players focus on the game...* not their shoes, their gear, their leg-cramp, or their Gatorade (ie., work on Convenience Cliffs).

**THE ADMIN TEAM** – who logs metrics; communicates schedule; facilitates email/texts/ special service requests; Every ministry has weekly admin tasks: (folding programs, printing schedules, posting media, recording data). Many of these tasks can happen throughout the week. And there are a lot of people who may not even "like" kids ministry YET, would *love* to serve on a kids admin team (Convenience / Communication Cliffs).

**THE SUBSTITUTE TEAM** – Every ministry has "no-shows" or last minute breakdowns that cause stress. Thus, every ministry needs a list of "on-call" people who have the ability to alleviate this stress. Every team has a predictable "attrition rate;" thus, the sub-team prevents a cancellation from becoming a crisis. (to the leader, to the experience and to the unscheduled substitute who comes in at the last minute)

**THE RECRUITMENT / ONBOARDING TEAM:** Ministries are always getting more complex. They start out like a small medical tent and turn into full blown hospitals. And thus, the playbook and onboarding procedures will always get more complex. That's why, there needs to be a consistent leadership pipeline – a group who recruits, trains, and systematizes the onboarding process. I.e., Every ministry needs its own Growth Track. In essence, this team focuses on *Skill cliffs & Communication Cliffs*.

## **For Group Discussions:**

After reading the hand-outs which describe the Volunteer Cliffs & the 7 Functions...

### **Phase 1: Information Gathering Brainstorm:**

- Designate a note taker in each group;
- In light of the 5 Volunteer Cliffs (and the dozens of tasks each represents) Ask the 4 Helpful

Questions: *What's working? What's not working? What's Missing? Or What's Confusing?* i.e., Brainstorm, Debate, and Categorize the behaviors of the five cliffs into these 4 categories (the 4 Helpful questions) These are designed to give your team insight on the strengths/weaknesses of your ministry. Start with "What's working" to keep morale high :) And remember: Not all ideas are accurate. So, towards the end, ask: What are the over-arching themes? I.e., What's the number one aspect of each category?

### **Phase 2:**

In light of Phase One, what 2-3 changes, if you made them today, would make the most positive difference? To accomplish this, perhaps brainstorm a list of 5-7 ideas and then narrow them down to the top 2 or 3.

### **Phase 3: The Homework / Take-aways:**

What are some practical things that each team mate can take away from the table? Assign tasks to each person at the table that will help move your ministry towards its goals.