



Episode 74: Best Practices of Organizing Volunteers

Featuring: Mingo Palacios & Mariann Eitzman

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Transcript:

Mingo Palacios: [00:10](#) Hey everybody, thanks for tuning in to the PD Podcast. You know, from time to time we get the luxury of traveling around the country and actually bringing our podcast to conferences and events that are happening all over the country. This conversation took place at Thrive Conference. It's an incredible one hosted by Bayside Church. Enjoy the episode.

Mingo Palacios: [00:30](#) Hey everybody. Welcome to the Purpose Driven Podcast. My name is Mingo and today we are at Thrive Conference in Sacramento. I was going to say San Diego, but we're in the Thrive Conference in Sacramento, Bayside Church today. I'm sitting with

Mariann and she is the Director of Volunteer Administration. She is the wizard, the volunteer whisperer for several hundred volunteers here and I thought it'd be so great to have a conversation hearing from her about some of the best practices that they do as they organize and coordinate several hundred people, not just in one event but through out the years serving people inside their committee from the church. So Mariann, great to have you here.

Mariann Eitzman: [01:14](#)

Thank you.

Mingo Palacios: [01:14](#)

Yeah, absolutely. So Mariann, we were like just a few minutes ago just talking about some of the things that you do intentionally to make sure that everybody's on the same page when it comes to executing a great event. And we talked about the importance of experience, how important that is, and it really does start with really your heart, but then the first person you drive that vision to is the volunteers. So would you mind unpacking that for me?

Mariann Eitzman: [01:41](#)

My number one goal of any event, any ministry, any team is a great experience and the great experience starts with volunteers. And at a conference it's volunteers: the attendees, the vendors, the speakers. If everyone has a great experience, they talk about it and they share it and they leak it on their social media and they take pictures and they can't wait to tell people. If anyone has a bad experience, they take a picture, they post it and they tell everybody to go away.

Mingo Palacios: [02:12](#) Yeah. Yeah.

Mariann Eitzman: [02:12](#) So how do you start that? I have 1200 people volunteering here. If they're having a great experience and they're filled with joy, it permeates.

Mingo Palacios: [02:20](#) It's like joy times 1,200, right?

Mariann Eitzman: [02:23](#) Yes.

Mingo Palacios: [02:24](#) And I love that you said it was the opposite direction also. Like, if somebody's having a bad experience, it can be that bad experience times 1200, right?

Mariann Eitzman: [02:32](#) Or as many followers they have on Facebook or Instagram or Snapchat. Then all of a sudden the word gets out that the food or whatever happened and you run over there to check it out and it's already been changed but too late. It's on social media.

Mingo Palacios: [02:47](#) You said one of the things that you do prior to an event, which I think is so great and I don't think it's done enough, is you bring everybody to your house.

Mariann Eitzman: [02:55](#) Yes.

Mingo Palacios: [02:55](#) You do the hospitality, all that you expect your team, you actually put it on display first. Why don't you run us through that?

Mariann Eitzman: [03:02](#) So, for all the volunteers at this conference, I have 35 team leaders and each one is going to watch over, love on, direct volunteers. I have them at my house before the conference Monday night I poured into

them, we prayed it up. There is value in the information so they attend because I've got the maps, I've got the drills, I've got all the schedules-

Mingo Palacios: [03:25](#) All the logistics.

Mariann Eitzman: [03:25](#) But at the same time I'm give them a great dinner. There is water flowing I decorated and if I do it on the front end, they all come and they're very interested and I pump them up and I pour into them. If I do an appreciation at the back end, they're all tired. They want to go home and see their families. So I find that I've got to set the tone and then I've got to talk to them. I'm a fixer. I want to just say, "Hey, you're here, go do this." But I find that I have to stop myself. Greet each volunteer, look them in the eye. They're a real person and then get them on their way. So I need to coach that with my whole team and I need to tell them it's not natural for me. It may not be natural for you, but a lot of times at a conference we're reacting and we're trying to make it the best we can. So my coaching is a great experience and number two, respond well. Whatever happens, take a moment and respond well and make sure-

Mingo Palacios: [04:23](#) Whether it's good news or bad news.

Mariann Eitzman: [04:24](#) Respond well.

Mingo Palacios: [04:25](#) Okay, good.

Mariann Eitzman: [04:25](#) And even if it's bad news, "Parking, we can't find any parking!" This is the response, "Isn't it amazing that God brought all these people here?"

Mingo Palacios: [04:35](#) Yeah, that's good. You just instantly elevated the scenario.

Mariann Eitzman: [04:39](#) Right. "I can't find a seat anywhere I want to see it, last night. I want to sit outside on the lawn. I can't find a seat." "Is this not awesome that God made this night so perfect that everyone went to sit outside?" I mean, it makes people stand back and go, "Oh, I never thought of it that way. You're right."

Mingo Palacios: [04:57](#) Just flipping the reality because unfortunately everybody comes with expectations of what they're going to experience. Right? And so I love that you, those two keys, just first that you bring and set the culture first and you don't do it in a big conference room. You do it in your home. So that's welcome to my life. Welcome to the interior, right? You matter this much to come into my personal space. The second one is respond well. So, so, so good. Now when you've got, just looking out at the expanse here, you filled up and parking in about 12 minutes. You've got a plump program. You've got more tickets than you guys probably have seats going out.

Mariann Eitzman: [05:40](#) Correct.

Mingo Palacios: [05:41](#) What are some of the best ways as people who are listening maybe are throwing their own events, when they run into snags beyond the respond well, what are

some of those key things that you as the director, what do you do to keep yourself level as the chaos kind of like it builds on itself because it's all moving and it's all good. Oh, great. coffee delivered. That's tremendous. What are some of the things that you do that keep yourself level for our other event directors who might be listening?

Mariann Eitzman: [06:13](#)

Okay. Number one, all those directors I had at my house, I told them, "You're not alone. I have your back and anything that set you off or pushes your button, you come find me, you text me, you call me, or you radio me." And I hope everyone has somebody like that. I hope that everybody has a champion. And I myself, I'm wired, the more that's going on, the calmer I get and I'm a very happy person. I've got a lot of joy in my heart. Jesus is there. I've got a lot of spirit and I think you've got to look for that in a leader of many. So my gifting obviously is I like to organize people and I love people. And I think anyone that is working with volunteers, you've got to love Jesus and love people and if people bug you after a while, it's not the right fit.

Mingo Palacios: [07:05](#)

You should rethink the way that you're serving.

Mariann Eitzman: [07:08](#)

Yeah, not the right fit.

Mingo Palacios: [07:08](#)

Yeah that's good.

Mariann Eitzman: [07:08](#)

And you need to be honest with that because there was somebody once I worked with and I said, "You know what? I think this isn't the right fit for you. I think

there's a better place for you serving the Kingdom."
And he admitted I was right and we all need to be honest. Don't just get the job for the job. And you feel like, "Okay, I've got to serve." So I obviously love people. Chaos doesn't phase me.

Mingo Palacios: [07:32](#) So know yourself well.

Mariann Eitzman: [07:34](#) Yes.

Mingo Palacios: [07:35](#) And be honest with what is being asked of you and according to what you're willing to bring to the table.

Mariann Eitzman: [07:39](#) And I have a tip.

Mingo Palacios: [07:41](#) Yeah.

Mariann Eitzman: [07:41](#) When it comes, don't say, "Oh no, now this." No, you throw your shoulders back and you say, "Challenge accepted."

Mingo Palacios: [07:49](#) Yes! I love it!

Mariann Eitzman: [07:51](#) And I tell all my leaders this. When they ran up to me yesterday, this problem, that problem. I go, "You say, 'challenge accepted' and I want you to text me when it's challenge defeated."

Mingo Palacios: [08:02](#) That's awesome.

Mariann Eitzman: [08:03](#) I want to see what you and God do with this.

Mingo Palacios: [08:06](#) This is so good.

Mariann Eitzman: [08:06](#) And how is this a blessing? And I had one guy come back to me and he goes, "Oh my gosh, you know, I'm former military. You may not know that." I go, "I didn't know that." "You said challenge accepted. It made me stand up. I took it on. It was my challenge."

Mingo Palacios: [08:22](#) I love that, yeah. So good. So you're looking to empower every person that crosses your path.

Mariann Eitzman: [08:27](#) Exactly.

Mingo Palacios: [08:27](#) It's so good. Now you told me you had this really great secret little thing that you do when it comes to learning best practice for yourself. What do you do?

Mariann Eitzman: [08:35](#) Okay, so I work at a church.

Mingo Palacios: [08:38](#) Yes.

Mariann Eitzman: [08:38](#) A church is a faith based nonprofit. There's a whole nonprofit world out there. All nonprofits are run by volunteers. We're never going to have enough money to hire enough staff. The only way the nonprofits work is their volunteer program. I picked two nonprofits a year and I serve with them.

Mingo Palacios: [09:03](#) And you don't come with your credentials out.

Mariann Eitzman: [09:05](#) No. They don't even know anything about me. So for example, last year I served at the hospital for six months and I also served downtown, the City of Sacramento, all their Farm to Fork events, including when they shut down the tower bridge and fed 900 people dinner on the bridge. And it starts with me

signing up online or however they gather the information to going to their trainings, to learning everything to being boots on the ground all the way to the end. And I learn a lot of great best practices and the other side of the coin, I see a lot of things that catch me and I go, "I hope that's not me" or, "I hope that's not my program" or "I hope they're not encountering this when they check in at Bayside." It really reminds me the good and the bad and it keeps me right there on the line where I need to be.

Mingo Palacios: [10:05](#)

I love it. For our listeners, if you're not at that level where you're realizing that there's opportunities that you can learn by serving other organizations, I don't care how busy you are, you need to make time to learn from not just other churches, but other organizations. Like you said, nonprofits exist everywhere. They've all got systems that you can learn from. They've all got methods and practices in play and you can probably score some of the best and some of the most informative things that would tell you or teach you what you do and don't want to play in your own house. I think that's genius.

Mariann Eitzman: [10:40](#)

Through it, I've met a lot of directors, volunteers and talked to a lot of people and then it's been awesome. And the City of Sacramento, the volunteer coordinator and I, we are actually invited to be speakers at Points of Light Conference this year. So, the one that was started by President Bush years ago, it's in Atlanta and we're speaking on engaging volunteers quickly

and getting them going. They hardly had anybody for a faith based track.

Mingo Palacios: [11:13](#)

Wow.

Mariann Eitzman: [11:13](#)

Points of Light contacted me and they said "We're doing our service united we do every year and it's Habitat for Humanity, YMCA, Red Cross." It's also all their corporate sponsors, UPS, Disney, FedEx and they said, "We don't have a faith based track. We're thinking about building." And I'm like, "Why aren't you?"

Mingo Palacios: [11:36](#)

Yeah, what a great table to be invited to.

Mariann Eitzman: [11:38](#)

Right? And there is Salvation Army and Reading Partners and there are all these faith based nonprofits out there. And I think there's a lot of partnership we can work with and I love doing this.

Mingo Palacios: [11:49](#)

So good Mariann, for anybody who is listening, maybe some of our younger listeners who want to be actively involved, but maybe the ecosystem that they're serving in isn't as healthy or isn't as spunky as the one that you run, what would you give them as advice?

Mariann Eitzman: [12:08](#)

My advice, and I worked with a lot of 20 somethings and 30 somethings and I love them all, they're awesome on my team, my advice to them every time its own it. And model how you want to be treated and how you want to be talked to but own it and don't let your age keep you back. And I have a young guy right

now at this conference and he's running a whole team for me. I could see yesterday he was hesitant about giving out the different directions and I saw him doing a lot of stuff that his team could have been doing. And I said, "Oh no, you're here for a reason and you're here to be a leader and I want you to own it. I want you to love on your team, but I want you to give them jobs so they feel there's value why they signed up. And when people sign up to serve, they want something to do. So own it, model it, love on them, cheer them, be their fan, go for it." And already this morning he was amazing.

Mingo Palacios: [13:06](#)

I love it. Mariann, you're like five batteries all tethered together, like thrown into a ball of foil. Lighting a fire everywhere you go. I seriously love your heart. Thank you so much for sharing with our audience some of the keys that you bring to the table when you direct masses of volunteers. We're lucky to have you and Bayside is blessed to have you. Thank you for being with us today.

Mariann Eitzman: [13:08](#)

Thank you.

Mingo Palacios: [13:08](#)

We appreciate you Mariann. We'll talk to you soon.

Mariann Eitzman: [13:08](#)

Thanks.

Mingo Palacios: [13:33](#)

We hope today's insights left you feeling inspired and propelled towards your greatest potential. Thanks again for joining us for another episode of the PD Podcast. Until next time.

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