



MARTIN J COWLING

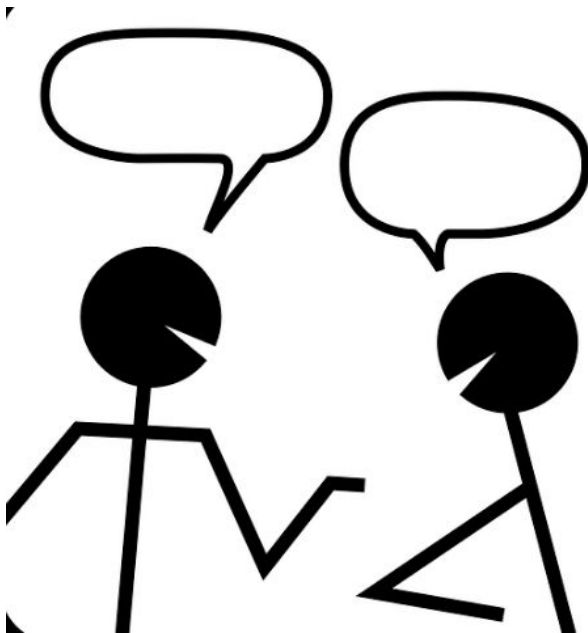
— CHANGE, LEADERSHIP, IMPACT —

***CARING FOR VOLUNTEERS
BACKBONE OF OUR CONGREGATIONS***

23 July 2026



Why are you here?
What is your biggest challenge right now?



Nehemiah 1

The words of Nehemiah son of Hakaliah: In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, ² Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem.

³ They said to me, *“Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.”*

⁴ When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven...

Nehemiah begins with a broken reality

People are in great trouble and disgrace.

Wall of Jerusalem is broken

Gates burned with fire.

Nehemiah listens,, mourns, prays, plans and builds

This is our world: broken, burnt and in trouble

We in our congregations and ministries listen, pray, plan & build

Nehemiah's pattern

Nehemiah mobilises the people to build...

1. **Nehemiah created belonging**
2. **Nehemiah created boundarie**
3. **Nehemiah gave real backing**

Why volunteer care matters now

- Formal volunteering has declined in community
- A UK survey: 36% of church leaders said volunteers most pressing current need
- Number of members volunteering fallen from 30 to 20%
- $\frac{2}{3}$ of UK churches report shortages in children's ministry, and 1/2 in youth ministry
- Burnout is real: Same committed people carry too much for too long

Belonging: What keeps Volunteers Engaged ++

Nehemiah

1. He used shared language: **we** & **us**.
2. He turned a broken city into a shared cause.
3. He gave people a place on the wall.
4. He showed progress
5. He organised work side by side
6. He connected households.
7. He gave groups relevant work

What people want today

- | | | |
|----|---------------------------------------|-----|
| 1. | Being respected | 90% |
| 2. | Care about the cause | 83% |
| 3. | Satisfaction in the role | 81% |
| 4. | Seeing impact: | 77% |
| 5. | Enjoyment/fun | 66% |
| 6. | Relationships, connection & belonging | 62% |
| 7. | Skill growth | 44% |

Belonging What keeps Volunteers Engaged ----

1. They feel guilty if they say no 37% est
2. They don't want to let people down. 33%
3. They fear being judged: 31% women/ <10% men



Poor Boundaries in Volunteering

High demands / low resources	28–32%.
Poor leadership	25%
Conflict:	20–24%
Lack of inclusion (feeling left out, ignored, favoritism, politics)	17–24%
Poor communication	14%.
Lack of fit/match	10%.





What belonging, boundaries, and backing are missing

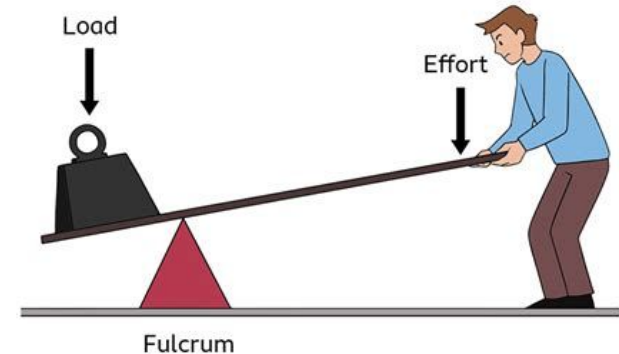
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|---|-----|
| 1. Quietly leave | 33% |
| 2. Loudly leave | 7% |
| 3. Stay but as negative/difficult | 20% |
| 4. Stay as a passive-aggressive | 20% |
| 5. Stay, doing minimum, remain silent-ish | 25% |



^^These are guesstimates based on retention research, surveys, and real-life experience with volunteers

What do we need to do: Backing

1. Prayer for our people, leaders & work
2. Listen: Measure Satisfaction & act on feedback
3. Communicate value and impact of volunteering
4. Get leadership right
5. Match roles to people (fit)



What do we need to do: Boundaries

1. Communicate clearly
2. Respect
3. Stop using guilt and pressure
4. Deal with conflict
5. Improve belonging
6. Make roles flexible, human-sized



So the wall was completed ... in fifty-two days.

Better success quote

The even stronger ending is:

“When all our enemies heard about this... they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God

Creating Actions



Whats Next?



I'm not asking you to fix everything.

I'm asking you to pick at least **one** concrete change in one area this year.

Okay?



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THANK YOU

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