“Why can’t we get more volunteers?” It’s easily the number one challenge of PTA’s today. Here are five likely culprits and a brief antidote for each.

**Cause 1: Parents Don’t Feel Truly Welcome**

You say you want help, but do your actions match your words? What does a brand-new parent experience when first connected with someone in your group? Is she personally welcomed at your meeting? If she checks a box on a volunteer form, does someone call her and give her a (good) job to do and a mentor to help her get the lay of the land? Or is her first experience with your group being hit up for money?

*Antidote:* Have a volunteer position or committee solely focused on welcoming new parents to your school and new volunteers to your group. It’s that important.

**Cause 2: Fear of the Black Hole**

Many parents worry that if they volunteer one time, they’ll be sucked into a vortex from which there is no escape. They help out at one event and next thing they know, their days and evenings and weekends are all gone. Honestly, too often this fear is actually true.

*Antidote:* You have to make it more than OK to volunteer just a little bit—even publicly celebrate that idea. Stand up at open house (or in your newsletter) and specifically recognize the Black Hole. Let people know that your group is all about volunteers who do what they can, when they can, with no guilt. And make sure that’s true.

**Cause 3: Artificial Schedule Demands**

Who says that 7 p.m. on the second Tuesday each month has to be sacrosanct? Why do volunteers have to be available at 10 a.m. on a school day? How many potential volunteers are turned off or in effect turned away because their schedules don’t match yours?

The days when everyone had to attend the meeting for your group to be productive are over. Schedules are far less standardized today than they were years ago.

*Antidote:* Use technology and flexibility to your advantage. With cell phones and texting and email and home computers, you have to change your group’s systems to support volunteers who can’t (or don’t want to) fit your traditional schedule.

**Cause 4: Your Goals and Results Are Too Small**

Volunteers, especially the best, most energetic ones, are attracted to success and big wins and challenges. If your group has a track record of doing a few “just OK” things and that’s what you have scheduled for next year, that really won’t draw in the masses.

*Antidote:* Start talking now about one or two big goals. Think about eliminating (or transforming) a few of your modest efforts and replacing them with one much more grand offering.

**Cause 5: It’s Just Not Fun**

It sounds shallow, but this may be the biggest cause of all. If your group is too bureaucratic or if your meetings drag on for hours or if drama and politics dominate, then you’re going to have a heck of a time bringing in parents.

*Antidote:* Lighten up. Tell a joke. Go out for some fun after your meetings. Celebrate volunteers and your good work. Smile.

Making small strides in a few of these areas can make a big difference for your group. If you do good work now with eight volunteer leaders, imagine what you can do with 14 or 20! Don’t get too caught up in the 300 parents who aren’t helping out. When you work on your group (and then make those changes and results visible), volunteers usually follow.