

Have you ever gone to hear the symphony? Wonderful wasn't it? Think about it though, it's a dictatorship! Everyone must do just as the conductor asks when the baton moves. But, it is a benevolent dictatorship. That is the way a Crew Leader should run his or her home repair assignment.

You don't need experience as a contractor; rather, just a homeowner who knows what it takes to get the job done around the house. This time, you'll do it with the help of about 25 people, which means you need to bring your people skills as well as home repair skills.

First and foremost, you must remember that your crew members volunteered! There should be no "demanding" on this job. The first thing to do is determine what skills your crew members have and make their assignments accordingly. If you remember that, you will be OK. For instance, never assign a good carpenter to scraping and painting - they'll hate it! Instead, make sure that he or she is on the job early to get the bad siding removed, the fascia and eave replaced, and the door hung so when the painters get to that part of the house, it's ready for them. The carpenter will hand over the work to the painters with pride and they will sense it. The painters will do a better job because they sensed the pride of workmanship that went before them.

If you have sub-captains, make sure they are supervising the things they know about. Nothing will get you in more trouble with your volunteers than having someone inexperienced supervising them. It is a good idea to put someone in charge of overseeing clean up, carpentry, scraping and painting. Make sure they are the best in each category.

Try to get someone to handle lunch, beverages, etc. -- not to just decide when to have it, but to perhaps lobby to get the company, church, or club to fund it. You cannot imagine how much it will mean to your volunteers when they find out the company supports what they are doing and has provided their lunch. You may also want to do the same, via another coordinator, to purchase matching T-shirts for your crew.

Let your volunteers know, in a positive way, that if they commit to show up, they need to show up. Remember, the work falls to the volunteers who are present. Not a real joy for the steadfast when others are absent! Reward the ones who come and work hard. Words of praise are not expensive and they bring a feeling of accomplishment and satisfaction. Spread them around!

One of the most important things you can do as Crew Leader is to see that each volunteer takes time to visit with the homeowner. Many have tales to tell! This may be the most rewarding part of your volunteers' job.

All homeowners have been asked if it will be OK for the volunteers to use their bathroom. Make sure your volunteers know it is OK to do so. (This is a good time to visit if the homeowner is inside.) Please be considerate and bring toiletries (e.g., paper, soap, etc.) If you have an exceptionally large crew or multiple crews in the same area and you want to rent a portable unit, you are certainly welcome to do so; but, those arrangements must be made by you and at your expense. Be sure to confirm their prompt removal.

Your presence on the job site is important. So, if you need more paint or lumber, designate a runner to make the trip to the VHRP warehouse. The warehouse volunteers are experienced in home repair and know that if you request more materials of a specific nature (within reason), and you really need it, they will fill your order.

Finally, assess your crew and the job at hand. Do not attempt to do work that you don't have the skills or the time to complete. Leave the least important things until last so that you can complete the most important parts of the job. We find that the homeowners appreciate the things that are done well; not the things that were started and never finished.

Try to plan your work so that you finish in one day, if that is the amount of time your volunteers offered, or two Saturdays if that is their commitment. A third or fourth Saturday becomes drudgery for all and should be avoided if at all possible! Good planning and supervision can control this; but, not if you decide to do additional work that was not originally agreed to. This is your choice.

Most importantly, RELAX and have an enjoyable and rewarding experience. If you had the desire and confidence to accept the job of Crew Leader and are fortunate to have a great crew, you have the ability to keep it together to the end. You will be amazed how well the job will come together and you will also be amazed at how hard your volunteers will work to get the job done! Make sure the volunteers have fun or they won't come back. Let people work in groups – don't put someone in the back of the house scraping paint by themselves. Make sure no one is under or over-whelmed by the task at hand. Mix skilled and lesser skilled volunteers together.

Remember to praise them all and to give the homeowner a hug or a handshake for us. Pat yourself on the back for a job well done!