

Motivating Your Members

If your members seem apathetic, bored, and minimally involved with the business of the group, then you can increase their motivation by keeping in mind an important principle of human behavior: people act to satisfy their own needs and desires, not the needs of organizations or other people.

APPEAL TO THEIR NEEDS, NOT YOURS

Thus, to motivate members, emphasize the benefits and satisfactions they will gain, not the benefits to you or the organization. A person's reason for joining a group will tell you that person hopes to gain by becoming a member. For example:

- Many people join groups to meet other people, make new friends, and feel they “belong” somewhere. They are motivated by the opportunity to plan social activities or to become involved in a project that has high “people contact.”
- Other people join groups to learn new things or to achieve something unique. These people might stay involved by researching a new issue for the group, helping to plan an educational program, or taking on a project that has never been done before.
- Some of your members joined because they believe in your group's purpose or cause. These are the ideal members to ask to recruit new members, to make a presentation at a meeting, to publicize the group, or to write articles about the organization's accomplishments.
- Others join a group to have fun. These members might be perfect to act as “hosts” when guests are present, to staff a booth at a fair, or to help plan social functions.
- Some people have become members because the group relates to their major or future career. These people may be motivated by projects that bring them in contact with faculty or with professionals in the general community.

HELP ALL MEMBERS BECOME ACTIVE

It is very easy to focus your attention on the members who already seem the most dedicated to your group. But, as a result, other members will feel neglected and will drop out. Part of your job as a leader is to help all members of your organization to become active participants by understanding their motivations, and matching them with the tasks of the group. As a result, the needs of both the organization and the individual get met.

It may take some time before you know what your members want, and it isn't always possible to create a perfect match between a member and a project. However, here are some helpful tips that will serve to motivate your members regardless of the case.

1. Be courteous at all times.
2. Be fair: don't play favorites.
3. Involve members in the group's goal-setting and decision-making activities. It is easier to get people to help if they have had a hand in deciding what has to be done.
4. Treat people as individuals. Refer to people by name.

5. Ask people to do useful, challenging work. “Busy work” soon becomes boring and cause people to lose interest.
6. Encourage members to propose their own projects. People know their own capabilities and limitations and can let you know how they can best contribute to the organization.
7. Recognize the limits that people are working with. These might be time constraints, financial limitations, or personal attitudes. Identify the constraints and help people to work them out.
8. Utilize special talents of members that may involve experience in their majors or hobbies. This increases commitment to a project.
9. Keep members informed through newsletters or phone calls. Be sure to include everyone in meetings so that they feel part of the “team.”
10. If someone is working on a project, give plenty of positive feedback along the way. Publicly let it be known that a good job is being done and is appreciated.
11. Give lots of support. If someone has offered to take on a task, be sure you provide the resources necessary for that member to do a good job. Check in on a regular basis to make sure everything is going well.
12. Show confidence. Although you should be available to offer assistance, your attitude should demonstrate that you believe your members will do an outstanding job.
13. Make use of the work people have done. It’s very discouraging to work hard at something, only to have it ignored.
14. Allow people the chance to “goof.” Don’t expect that someone will always be right. Help them to learn from mistakes.
15. Provide a chance to have fun. This may mean taking time out to laugh at something or getting together for a social activity. This also creates a sense of belonging, a very powerful motivator.
16. Allow people to provide you with feedback. Solicit their suggestions on how a task can be changed or done more effectively.
17. Reward completed work in some tangible way. This could be as simple as a certificate of appreciation or as elaborate as an awards banquet at the end of the year.
18. Reward especially outstanding work with a position or title. For example, someone who has worked very hard on a membership drive could be asked to become Membership Director.
19. Have a friendly contest (for example, who can recruit the most new members) and give a small prize to the winner.
20. Allow people to do a variety of tasks. Give them the chance to change and grow as they participate.

As a leader, you need to be continually aware of the interest level of your entire group, not just the active core. This handout has presented some ways to increase the motivation of all the people in your organization. Increasing motivation doesn’t require doing everything listed in this handout. But, deciding to make use of one or two of the ideas discussed here may help to raise the level of involvement and interest demonstrated by your members.