

Recharging our batteries

I recently came across an article about motivating company employees. I immediately thought of all the organizations that have asked me for the magic formula to motivate volunteer members.

The article goes on to say: "I can charge a person's battery, and then recharge it and recharge it again. But it is only when one has a generator of one's own that we can talk about motivation!"

The question for us is this: How do you install a generator in a member? The people in your organization are your greatest resource in getting any job done. But they have to want to do the work in order to be most effective. Sure, the chairman or president can hound the directors or the committee members until the job is completed, but again, who is motivated?

Chuck Bokor



Most people, according to research, remain volunteers because they

1. like to help others (55 per cent),
2. enjoyed the work (38 per cent), or
3. had a personal interest in the activity (37 per cent).

One way to keep volunteers coming back is to redesign the roles and responsibilities of their jobs to get a greater feeling of satisfaction. Here are some ways to enhance the job of a volunteer.

1. Remove the "bureaucracy" of the job (but make sure that the volunteer remains accountable). For example, allow the volunteer to give the go ahead without having to go through the system first. Certainly many decisions have to be made at the board/executive level, but letting go of some controls will give the members of your group a greater sense of responsibility and achievement.
2. Delegate the role of spokesperson to the volunteer. Having the membership committee chair and/or members announce the campaign results in the newsletter or on radio grants more authority and recognition to the job.
3. Give certain individuals specific or specialized tasks, enabling them to be experts in a field, e.g. public relations, lobbying. A sense of greater responsibility, growth and advancement may result.

There's more to it than merely asking volunteer members to do more work. Motivation comes from the satisfaction of knowing that you are responsible, that you've actually helped, that you've learned something new. These feelings do not come from the chair, the leadership or a motivational guest speaker — they come from within. A leader's role, however, is to set the scene to allow those feelings to happen.

Chuck Bokor is leadership specialist with the Rural Organizations and Services Branch of the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food.

