Motivating the Middle

Fighting Apathy in College Student Organizations

A presentation by Kelsey Jackson inspired by the work of T.J. Sullivan

Objectives

- Understand different levels of engagement in members and what motivates each level
- Discuss how certain events, practices, or habits may negatively impact motivation and engagement
- Identify ways to move towards strategies of engaging members where they are vs where you want them to be and how to set more realistic expectations of member involvement

What's the Problem?

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Theory of Thirds

Every College Student Organization Has Thirds

TOP THIRD

BOTTOM THIRD

MIDDLE THIRD

Let's Get Motivated & Reduce Apathy!

_____

_____

_____

_____

What Motivates Each Third?

TOP
THIRD
{

BOTTOM
THIRD
{

MIDDLE
THIRD
{

You already know what motivates the top-third -> keep doing that

Motivating the Middle

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

11. _____

12. _____

13. _____

Motivating the Bottom Third

The "Good Enough Member Strategy"

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Being a supportive Top Third

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Next Steps:

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Questions?

Motivating the Middle Reflection

Sullivan, T. J. (2011). Motivating the middle: Fighting apathy in college student organizations. Tucson, AZ: Wheatmark.

1. Take a list of your current members and divide it into thirds. Who are the top-third members who always show up and do a ton of work? Who are the bottom third who either cause problems or have a very weak commitment to the group? Who falls in the middle? (It's OK if it's not perfect thirds)

2. Take a look at each name you've marked as a middle-third member. What are some positive ways this member contributes? What other priorities does this person have? What are some creative ways you can reduce the stress your middle member feels when the priorities conflict?

3. Middle members tend to love certain parts of your organization and like others less. For each middle member on your list, what do they enjoy the least? How can you give them more of what they love and less of what they dislike?

4. What is the major, chronic issue that faces your organization? How could you approach that issue in a new way using the Middle Member Strategy?

5. What are some lower-pressure, supporting roles your organization could create that would appeal to middle members with more limited time to devote?

6. What can the officers and other top-third members do to bring middle members into decision-making processes more effectively?

7. How can you minimize the tension between the top third and the bottom third? This tension stresses out middle members the most.

8. What are the 5-7 minimum standards you could put in place (Good-Enough Member job description) and enforce for those bottom third members who want to retain their membership but do as little as possible?

9. When a new member joins your group, how can you best determine (or best guess) whether they will become a top-, middle-, or bottom- third member?

10. Is there a certain group whose commitment level predictably drops? Seniors? Former officers? Why is this happening? How can your organization remain relevant to these members?

11. How do you make your top-third members feel appreciated for the work they do when they see middle- and bottom-third members contributing less? How can you convey the sense that the equality of their experience should not be determined by the commitment level of the bottom third?