

Texas Credit Union League

# VOLUNTEER

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## Credit Union Conversions

A Board Perspective

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### Motivating Factors



# Motivating Factors

By Linda Webb-Mañon, TCUL Communications Director

**F**or the last several weeks, I have been taking Spanish lessons and my teacher is from Costa Rica. During our lessons, we often get into discussions about the differences between our cultures and customs. He observes that people in this country put so much pressure on themselves to achieve. We work long hours, often skipping lunch. Family time is squeezed into our hectic professional lives, and even children are busy as their parents enlist them in numerous activities to set the stage for future success. This is vastly different from life in Costa Rica and many other Latin American countries, he notes. This of course is not to say that one way is better than the other; just different. And it's also not to say that all Americans are the same. People are driven by different factors. However, they share a common trait: in order to excel in school, a career, child-rearing, marriage, volunteer work, or anything else, people have something that motivates them to succeed.

Of course, everyone has known those who don't seem to possess much motivation. Whether we call them slackers, clock-watchers, couch potatoes or goof offs, there are just some people who seem to lack the socially acceptable characteristics of a motivated person. In a work environment, these people can pose challenges.

For example, in a business where employees work as teams on projects, an extremely "laid back" person can be very frustrating for other staff members, especially high achievers. Likewise, in a board room, where the future direction of the credit union relies so heavily on the decisions of the board, productivity can be hindered if one or more board members is too laid back to focus on the issue at hand.

Psychologist and professional speaker Susan Fletcher, PhD, says that while you cannot stereotype, people who are more "laid back" do tend to be more difficult to motivate.

"They seem to operate on a different timetable and are choosy about what motivates them," she says.

If you are having a motivation issue among peers on your board, Fletcher offers the following suggestions:

- Assess each board member to find out what makes him or her tick.
- Encourage board leaders to take on the responsibility of adopting a "team" approach with their board.
- Give forced-choices for responsibilities - this is particularly important for those who aren't as motivated, because if you give too many choices, he or she may not contribute what is best for the organization.

- Set up an accountability system that is not very complicated.
- Put people in pairs so there are check-in points to encourage progress.
- Develop old fashion competition that fosters healthy motivation.
- Build on sources of motivation that are already present.

Regardless of personality types, Fletcher says it's easy to lose motivation. Incentives, she says, can play a key role in keeping people motivated. For some, the incentive could be an internal desire to help or learn, or perhaps a special interest or passion for a particular issue or cause. And of course there are others who are motivated by monetary rewards. Fletcher points out that whether there is motivation by monetary things or because of internal desires, the motivation often is short lived.

"When monetary incentives are used, believe it or not, over time there is never enough. While there is an initial surge of motivation, it wears off," she comments. "With internal motivation, there can be the same thing. It is not uncommon to hear someone say that they lost interest or desire for something, even when it is the result of internal motivation."

So what can you do to help sustain spans of motivation? Fletcher offers the following suggestions:

- Have variable "reinforcers." Most things that reinforce or reward behaviors fade out if overused. Changing the types of "reinforcers" mixes it up a bit, so the motivation can be sustained over a longer period.
- Know what motivates someone.
- Change the reward often, so that the value of the reward doesn't wear off.
- Distribute "reinforcers" at a variable rate. When rewards are expected, then motivation tends to increase just when the reward is expected. To sustain motivation it is important to have rewards at an unexpected pace.

"Think of the Texas Lottery's slogan, 'You can't win if you don't play!' People remain consistently motivated to play because they never know when to expect the reward," Fletcher says. "Their motivation doesn't decrease because they expect to win every time. Even with the odds against them, many people sustain their motivation to play."

The fact is everyone experiences peaks and valleys. The important thing to remember is that success is based in large part on being motivated. Regardless of our intellect, skill or experience, if we lack motivation, we aren't going to get very far. ■