MOTIVATION FOR PARTICIPATION

By Bobbie Severson

One of the precepts of cooperatives is that members participate in the democracy of the co-op. The challenge is how to motivate people to engage. This is no small feat. An apathetic membership can have long term negative consequences to the co-op. “Back in the day” cooperatives may have had more physical presence in the community in which the members resided—the milk plant or the co-op store. Members tended to be similar. Perhaps the members’, the directors’ and the managers’ kids attended the same school. Today there are more differences between members and leadership maybe several states away. Consolidation and mergers mean that co-op facilities are further away and less visible to members leading to feelings of less ownership than previous generations. The question becomes, how can we better engage or re-engage cooperative members?

First, consider the circumstances of each member. People will only do what they want to do. They prioritize their needs for themselves, their families and their businesses first. Everyone must choose between competing interests for their time and energy. By choosing to do one thing means by default to not choose another. Motivation to engage can be vested an emotional response. For example, “I am proud to attend an annual meeting where my farm will be recognized.”

My director called and personally invited me to the annual meeting. I don’t want to disappoint him.”

“What, another loss again!”

Life long learning is critical for success of farm operations in the future. Perhaps highlighting what they will learn at a co-op event, information to be exchanged, take-a-ways that are important to the business at home is one means to draw them in.

How much to engage members is a challenge. Today there are numerous ways and platforms to engage members. Deciding how to engage and the issues to discuss is important along with identifying the barriers to engagement. Time is a limited resource for both cooperative employees and members. When is the best time? How much time should be devoted to any one activity? Social media platforms can be a cost effective way to engage members. Does the member had adequate broadband and hardware to support this platform.

Second, perhaps it is time to “rebrand” the cooperative. Many cooperatives were formed in the early part of the 20th century. Few members are around today to remind present members of past market failures the organization set out to correct. The agricultural community bemoans consumers misunderstanding of farming practices, noting that the consumers are 3 to 4
Cooperative membership has become very important in agriculture lately. The old world of having a market for a good quality product produced is gone. With the volatility in the agriculture sector, the insecurity and fear of losing a market is more present than ever. Co-ops provide ownership and a secure market for your product which is something that even banks look for as part of their security packages. Members of co-ops must remember the importance of knowing what is going on within their co-op. This can be done through attending meetings, talking to your director (in person or many times on phone or email). You have a responsibility to your business to understand the financial stability of your coop and be involved at any level, even if it is just attending a meeting and asking questions. Many coops are grassroots organizations where member opinions and suggestions DO MATTER. Be involved.

Bill Banker
MESSAGES FOR FUTURE EMPLOYEES...

Students are in the process of securing internships for the coming summer and graduating seniors are investigating opportunities for full-time employment post-college. Companies participate in job fairs both on and off campus to attract talented persons to fill positions that will build the success of the organization. The question arises, what attracts a person to a particular company or position? At the 68th NECC Cooperative Leaders Forum, the attendees weighed in on the question. Their insights may be helpful to attract people to your organization.

STUDENTS SAID:

- “A chance to work with farmers and help producers.”
- “A cooperative’s unique structure and opportunities make it a desirable place to work. The cooperative’s involvement and support of farmers in the industry also align cooperatives with my personal and professional goals.”
- “Internships make it interesting.”
- “Ability to be on a farm, working with farmers. Good pay and benefits. Excellent work/life balance.”
- “The business structure, values, motives, working as a team for the greater good of the group, culture, purpose, values of the co-op and how active they are.”

FROM THE EMPLOYEES’ PERSPECTIVE:

They said:

- “It’s personally fulfilling to work for a co-op, to be involved and to make a difference in the lives and prosperity of others. Collectively we do feed the world...how cool is that!”
- “Knowing the farmer-owners and seeing the impact of the success of the company directly on them.”
- “Profit is important, but its not the only reason to do business. Growth and education of the customer...more like family. Enjoy developing staff to see their success. Important to me is our mission to help farmers and rural America to grow and succeed by helping our customers growth and development.

“As a student, what would inspire you to seek employment in a cooperative?”

What satisfaction do you derive from working for a cooperative?

NECC COOPERATIVE INTERNSHIP RECOGNITION AWARD APPLICATION

DEADLINE NOVEMBER 15, 2018

Deadline for applications for the NECC Cooperative Internship Recognition award is November 15, 2018. Students enrolled in a Northeast college or university who successfully completed an internship with a NECC member cooperative are eligible to apply. Up to 5 students will receive an award of $1,000 each. Award recipients are expected to attend and will be recognized at the NECC Cooperative Leaders Forum, February 28, 2018.

Contact Bobbie Severson at rmh27@cornell.edu or phone 607.255.1987 with questions.

Applications can be found at: http://cooperatives.dyson.cornell.edu/necc/index.php

CORNELL COOPERATIVE BUSINESS MANAGEMENT CLASS (AEM 3260) PROJECTS

Experiential learning is a means by which students take what they learn in the classroom and apply it to real world challenges and opportunities. Last year student groups in the Cornell University Cooperative Business Management class worked with cooperative businesses on issues such as cost parameters of the co-op, member equity, bylaws, leadership development and member engagement. Cooperatives are invited to submit project ideas or proposals at this time for the spring 2019 semester. The participating cooperative would designate a specific person as the organization’s student ‘contact.’ The contact tends to meet virtually with the student group once every one to two weeks from the beginning of February through the early May. At the end of the semester the students will write a report and present their findings to the class. The participating cooperative is invited to the class presentation. For more information and to suggest a project, contact Bobbie Severson at rmh27@cornell.edu or phone 607.255.1987.
Your invitation to be part of the:

CORNELL UNIVERSITY STUDENT INTERNATIONAL AGRIBUSINESS STUDY TRIP

March 29—April 7, 2019
Catalonia Region, Spain

VISIT AND EXPERIENCE:

- Catalan wineries & sparkling wine (cava) cellars
- Farm operations, food processors, wholesalers, retailers
- Agri-tourism businesses
- IRTA agriculture research center
- Catalan agrarian cooperatives (wine, olive oil, fruits and vegetables, dairy, livestock)

The Catalonia Region of Spain is bordered by the Pyrenees Mountains to the North and Mediterranean Sea to the East. The region includes the provinces of Barcelona, Tarragona, Girona, and Lleida. Its location and geography provide climatic, topographical, and soil conditions that support a variety of crops.

THE DETAILS:

- Participants must cover their own costs, estimated at $2,800.
- Participate in all trip activities including discussion session with students.
- Cornell University will book flights and make hotel accommodations
- Passport required

For more details:

CONTACT TODD SCHMIT
ASAP!!

EMAIL: tms1@cornell.edu
PHONE: 607.255.3015