

YOU AND YOUR ORGANIZATION

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Voluntary organizations have always been an important part of the American scene. They develop, change, and continue on to grow or die. But important in all voluntary organizations are the members who make up the group. They play the most important role of all, for they are the force that can make or destroy the organization.

This program topic is designed to assist the participant to:

- look at voluntary organizations and how they function,
- understand that change is a part of all individuals and organizations, and
- learn some methods for adapting to changes that occur.

Voluntary Organizations

Some of the functions of voluntary organizations include:

1. Helping the individual find him/herself in relation to other people. As many functions are taken from the home to the larger community, voluntary groups help fill the need for "belonging" which was once largely filled by the family.
2. Getting jobs done in the community. The need for community service continues to increase. In a complex community, well planned programs are needed. Organizations can be the instrument for getting the job done.
3. Asking questions. If the right questions can be asked, appropriate answers may be found. Raising public issues and helping people think

through alternatives are important functions of groups in today's world.

As a group, think about these functions. Does your group carry out these functions? Which function seems most important? Are there any functions that your group does not do? Why?

Understanding Change

The only thing you will be sure to face as the years pass is change. *Discuss the many changes you've seen take place in your lifetime. (May want to talk about changes in individuals, in daily life, in homes, in costs, in communities.)*

Change is continually occurring both within ourselves and within our organization. Small external events leading to change take place and accumulate almost every day in all areas of our lives.

Think about the future. Can you envision some changes that might occur? *Get the group to think about the future. Have them name five things that might change in their lives in the next five years? Discuss what they would do if... a spouse dies or leaves, grandchildren move, best friend moves, their source of income is lost, community begins to grow or decline, etc.*

We never get away from change. Change takes place in ourselves and in organizations regardless of whether we are well, on vacation, or actively involved. And, it seems that every change leads to an increased rate of change.

How we react to change as members and leaders is crucial. Sometimes, we are actively involved

in making the changes. At other times, we can only react to the changes taking place.

Why do we resist change? *Ask participants to discuss why they resist change.*

1. Habit - What we do over and over every day becomes a habit and is comfortable. We are reluctant to substitute new actions that are not part of the routine.
2. Unknown - Most of us have, at least to a certain degree, a fear of the unknown. If a change creates a condition which appears orderless, uncertain, or unpredictable, we often want to resist it.
3. Illogical - If the change is illogical, people don't want to make it. People also resist what doesn't make sense to them, especially if it is another person's goal.

Researchers tell us we don't like change because of memories, nostalgia, fond remembrances of the past, and insecurity.

What are some reasons for accepting and supporting changes? *Discuss.*

- A. Involvement - Generally, we tend to accept things in which we are involved. When we help plan, help design and develop change, it becomes a part of us and we are committed to its success.
- B. Approval - If we receive a reward for changing our behavior or by accepting new ways or new systems, we are more likely to move in the direction of change. But, if we are rejected, we usually don't want to move in the direction of change.
- C. Security - It is easier for us to accept change if it adds to our feeling of security. No one will argue with an increase in salary or decreases in taxes, for instance.
- D. Logical - Finally, we are more apt to make a change that seems logical and is related to our personal goals.

We must realize that associated with every new idea or change, is a corresponding change in attitudes, values, beliefs and behavior of the people who are affected by the recommendations that you make. Nonmaterial changes are more difficult to grasp or understand. Often they are overlooked or their significance is underestimated.

Recent changes

Discuss with participants some of the changes that have occurred recently. Depending on the group, you can discuss organizational changes, changes in population, happenings in the county, etc. For purposes of this topic, some changes that have occurred in extension-related programs are noted.

Changes in the Extension Service

- * smaller amounts of money appropriated at state and county levels
- * decline in agriculture and agriculturally related programs
- * agents who do not make the job their entire life
- * cutback in numbers of agents working in counties
- * other changes (*List others.*)

How have these changes affected the EH program?

Changes in Extension Homemakers

- * Name change - The organization has had several names over the past 70 years. *Name some of them. Why do you think the name has been changed each time?*
- * Change in dues - National dues have changed from one cent per member, to five cents, to \$1, to the new \$12.50 in 1995. At the state level, we have increased dues from 25 cents to \$1 to \$3. *Have dues changed at the county and club level? Why are dues increases important?*

* Committee emphasis - The organization started with about five committees and grew to 10. Recently, the number of committees was reduced to three issue committees and three organizational committees. *Name the current committees? Why do you think the organization has gone to issue committees?*

* Programs - As opportunities for learning increased, EH programs changed from farm-oriented and basic homemaking skills to broader issues affecting today's families.

* Decline in membership - Currently, we are declining statewide by about 300 members per year. *Discuss what has happened with membership in your county/club? Why are we losing members?*

How have these EH changes affected you? your club? the extension service?

Change: Accept or Reject It??

Organizations must change in order to stay viable. What works today may be obsolete tomorrow. How can you plan to keep your club fresh, vital, and important to the community?

If you could look into a crystal ball, you could probably see three fates as options for your group. It can stay the same, but the people involved may keep changing. It can go through a period of decline, losing members and limiting its program. Or it can change and grow.

Discuss with group the three options, noting pros and cons. You might also want to review the organizational cycle outlined in the participant leaflet. Where does your club/group fall? Are there other options?

Most organizations go through cycles of rapid growth followed by plateaus, followed by more growth. But even the best organization will sometimes suffer brief periods of decline. Leaders must keep the organization fresh during periods of stability, keep control of the organization during periods of rapid growth, and

keep up the confidence and convictions during periods of decline or change.

Suppose your group is just perfect the way it is. You know what you want to do and how you want to do it. How can you keep the enthusiasm and vitality? How can you make the changes being implemented work for you?

Even if everything is working well, you should stop from time to time to evaluate the group. Every five or ten years think about your mission and your future. Ask yourself: Why are we doing this? Why are we not doing something else? This provides a way to test current ideas and gives you the opportunity to end any programs that are no longer of interest to members.

What do you do if your organization suddenly shrinks in size? Look at why it has happened. Have people gone to work outside the home? Have members died? Is the program no longer of interest? How do you avoid discouragement when your group faces a decline in membership or program interest? Try to make a negative a positive.

First, realize that at any time, your organization is just what you choose to make it. If you want it to succeed, you will find a way for it to succeed.

Take inventory of what you have now. Who is involved and why? What do members get out of belonging to this group? How could other people get the same satisfaction out of belonging?

To regain morale and momentum, pinpoint the problems and then find the solutions. What matters is how you use the knowledge you gain from this. Talk over the problem with members, community leaders, or advisers. Emphasize that the purpose of looking at problems is to find ways to make the organization better.

Things to think about: *(Discuss the following items with members. Outline a plan for your future.)*

Why did members join? Are members still interested in the mission of the organization?

Are members interested in organizational change for own needs or for the future generation?

What are members doing to market the organization and its program?

Don't recycle your old decisions. Do not keep saying, "If only we had..." or "Why didn't we..." Learn from your mistakes, but do not dwell on them. Learn what you can and then go onto the job of building for tomorrow.

Have courage of your convictions. Be consistent. Review your mission statement before you do your planning. Is it still viable? Trust yourself and your members. If you believe your goals are worth it, you will be able to achieve them.

Keep your sense of humor and your perspective. Every mature organization, like every mature person, will have some setbacks and disappointments. If you want to achieve goals, you'll have to take risks. Seize opportunities to reevaluate, reorganize, and rejuvenate the organization. Keep your vision; stop the unsuccessful work and revitalize the effective parts of your organization.

Some groups may be much larger than and very different from the ones planned by their founders. You may need to stop occasionally and get control of the process. Make the work and the organization make sense. Growth is good only so long as it is growth you can choose, control and understand.

Basic Needs of People in Groups

To continue to get loyalty, interest and best efforts from the members of any group, leaders must take into account that there are certain basic needs of members which need to be met. (*Look at these needs and outline ways you are meeting member needs in this time of change.*)

Members need:

- * a sense of belonging. The group provides an atmosphere where no one objects to the presence of others. Members need to feel they are sincerely welcome and that they are wanted as people, not just because they have money, will work, etc.
- * to be involved in planning the group's goals.
- * a belief that goals are within reach and that they make sense to the individual.
- * a feeling that what the group is doing is worthwhile, that it contributes to the welfare of members and neighbors.
- * to be involved in making the rules of the group.
- * an understanding of what is expected of members so that they can work confidently.
- * responsibilities that challenge, that are within range of abilities, and that contribute toward reaching the group's goals.
- * to see that progress is being made toward the goals that were set.
- * to be informed.
- * confidence and trust in their leaders.

Resources

Culler, Carol and Tillson, Greg. "Be Prepared for Change." Family Community Leadership.

Flanagan, Jean. "Change--The Only Constant," **The Successful Volunteer Organization.** Chicago: Contemporary Books, Inc. 1981.

Seita, Trudy. **Change: How to Meet It and Greet It.** 1991.

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