

Motivation

**A Study of the Motivations for Members of a Volunteer
Organisation**

by

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Aims

The primary aim of the report is to gain an understanding of the motivations of St. John Ambulance members towards the voluntary contribution they give to the organisation. By understanding some of the motivations it then looks at some of the things that can be done to ensure that members expectations continue to be met, as well as identifying key points that could be used for the recruitment of new members. It also aims to address some of the issues that can have a negative impact on the motivation of the members, and what steps can be taken to reduce the demotivation factors.

Introduction

This is the result of a group discussion on the aspects of motivation within a St. John Ambulance volunteer environment. The exercise was undertaken as part of the "Personal Development Programme" from the Management-1 section. Much of this report is based upon the collective contribution from members of the adult division of Rugby St. John Ambulance, through the group discussion and also from comments from the members during other situations. Some of the ideas posed by the group have been compared with other sources to see how the membership of the division compares with the findings of others.

What is Motivation?

Motivation is what drives a person into doing something.

Much of what we do is driven by the thought of a potential reward, or a consequence of not doing something. The rewards or consequences can be obvious tangible benefits, such as financial reward; enjoyment; or the risk of these being taken away through losing ones job. There are also other benefits that are less obvious, but which still motivate people to do something such as an internal satisfaction, or feeling of achievement. This report concentrates on volunteers within the organisation where the financial incentive doesn't exist, whilst enjoyment is certainly one of the motivations, it doesn't apply to all the activities we do, so leaders within the organisation need to look at some of the less obvious benefits to ensure that the members are motivated towards the needs of the organisation as well as themselves.

Grazier provides a useful reference indicating that the expectation of a benefit is a major reason that somebody would be motivated to do something. "Each day brings with it an endless list of decisions to be made. The process of making those decisions is driven, in large part, by the hope of a benefit or the fear of a consequence."¹

Group Discussion

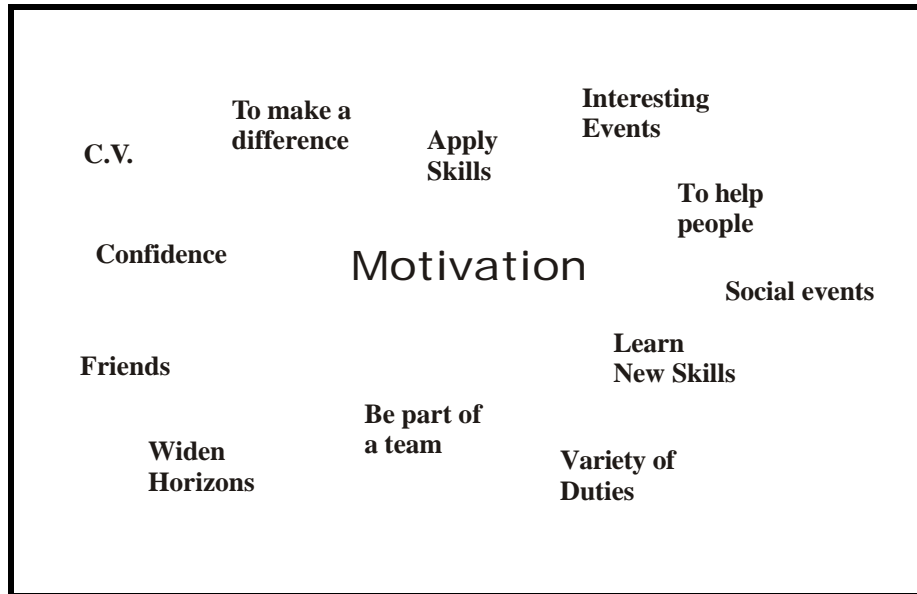
The group discussion took place on the 23rd September 2004, at the divisional headquarters for Rugby Division. There were 10 members present contributing to the discussion. A brainstorm was held involving the whole group to obtain a list of motivational factors; this was posed along with the questions "Why are you members of St. John Ambulance?" and "What is it that keeps you coming along to the division?"

¹ Grazier, P. Team Building, http://www.teambuildinginc.com/article_teammotivation.htm, accessed 9th November 2004

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The results of the brainstorm were noted on the penboard and used for further more detailed discussion. The topics covered are shown below:



There were a number of key points raised for each of the topics.

Be part a Team - One of the motivations for the group was working with a team. Whilst working as a team may sound like something you would want to quote on a job application it can actually be a psychological requirement of the individual. One consideration would be the sense of belonging, and camaraderie that comes with working as part of a team.

One of the aspects is that being part of a team can give the feeling of belonging. "People need to belong, to be liked, to feel a part of something."²

There is also an enjoyable aspect of working as a team, the shared experiences and an opportunity for direct social contact.

The implication of this for a motivational perspective is that forming members into a team when engaging in the duty activities can have a positive impact on the members. A point also mentioned by the members it that it is sometimes a benefit for the members of the teams to change, and so working with other members can provide additional motivation for the individual.

Widen Horizons - St. John Ambulance provides lots of opportunities to try new things and see new things. The members identified this "widening of horizons" as a motivational factor. When engaged in social conversation is common to hear members discuss the different opportunities and situations that they have had through St. John Ambulance.

Friends - All of the members of the division had made new friends through their membership of St. John Ambulance. A feature of St. John Ambulance as an organisation is that the

² Accl-team, Team Building, http://www.accel-team.com/work_groups/informal_grps_01.html, accessed 24th September 2004

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membership is made up of individuals from completely different backgrounds. As a result it provides an opportunity to make friends with those with different occupations; interests; family structures; educational backgrounds and economic situations. The one common factor being that they are all willing to give up their time to volunteer with St. John Ambulance. This differs from friendships made in work that where the friends tend to have the same interests, and are from a similar educational and social class.

In some cases members have met their life partners through St. John Ambulance.

Confidence - There are a lot of activities within St. John Ambulance that allow individuals to develop their self-confidence. This could be confidence in applying first aid, confidence in presenting in front of others or just more confidence in life.

The h2g2 community relates to the importance of confidence. "It could be argued that of all commodities available to us humans, both real and imagined, material or ephemeral, confidence is the *the* glittering prize."³

C.V. - One benefit of membership of St. John Ambulance is that it makes members more attractive to potential employers. It is not just the first aid knowledge, which is an obvious bonus, but also that the members regularly work as a team and learn other skills as part of the roles. Therefore members may be recruited because they are looking at enhancing their C.V. but it can also motivate existing members to try and better themselves on their C.V.

Some of the qualities that are encouraged to develop within St. John Ambulance include: Leadership qualities (not just limited to unit leaders); team working; presentation and training skills and remaining calm when under pressure. These are skills that develop through normal activities within St. John Ambulance, through training in the form of leadership courses or the Personal Development Programme.

To Make a Difference - Many of the members mentioned the ability to make a difference as a motivation to their membership of St. John Ambulance. The most obvious way of making a difference to others is through administering first aid to those in need. Whilst this can apply to all treatments including very minor ones, it is the more serious injuries (particularly life threatening ones) that have a greater effect. It was also mentioned that even those who hadn't helped with life-threatening injuries felt motivated by having the necessary skills and experience should the need arise.

Whilst St. John Ambulance is a national organisation much of the volunteer work is organised at a local level in the local town, or county. This means that members are directly helping their local community, which can have a positive impact showing more tangible benefits compared with a purely national organisation.

Apply skills - A lot of people, outside of St. John Ambulance, learn first aid but get very little experience in actually applying those skills in a real situation. This means that they may forget much of their training, or may not have the same level of confidence about their abilities if the need arises. By going out on "duties" members of St. John Ambulance get to apply those skills in a real situation. This makes the effort spent learning the skill to be much more worthwhile.

Interesting Events - There are a number of interesting events that members would not get the opportunity to go to except as a member of St. John Ambulance. This includes some local events (e.g. The Royal Show and Concerts), and also events involving members from around the

³ h2g2, Building Confidence and Self-esteem, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A841358>, accessed 8th November 2004

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country (e.g. The British Grand Prix). These major events tend to be on a less frequent basis compared with the regular activities of the unit, but can be very memorable.

To help people - Similar to "make a difference" just helping someone else can have its rewards. In particular a distinction was made that the direct care roles within St. John Ambulance provided direct help to individuals. This gives additional rewards in that the member can immediately see the benefits to the person that has been helped.

Social Events - Most volunteer organisations and often companies tend to use some form of social event as a way of raising moral, and motivating people. These social events can be held frequently or sometimes just a single event for the year (such as the annual Christmas meal). If formal events are not arranged then it is often the case that a group of people may organise one anyway. Social events are a good way of getting to know each other outside of the workplace and help to improve team working as well as motivating people.

The social activities could also be part of a training or work type activity. For example a decorating party where after a days hard work the members are rewarded with a meal in a sociable setting. An example of a "social activity" incorporated into a training activity could involve a trip to a museum. One such activity run for Rugby division was a visit to St. John's Gate (museum of the order of St. John), and trip to London.

Learn New Skills - Whilst learning first aid is a motivation to joining St. John Ambulance, there are also lots of other opportunities to continuing members. This includes further first aid related qualifications, such as ambulance aid, but also other skills such as team working or leadership.

Variety of Duties - Although interesting duties have already been mentioned, it is also the variety that keeps them interesting. Even some of the more enjoyable duties could become boring if they are done week after week, whereas having the opportunity to go to a variety of different events can make the less interesting ones more appealing.

Additional Motivations

Whilst the group discussion produced most of the points in this report there are some other areas that can act as motivations within the group. Whilst these have not been specifically mentioned in the group discussion they are things that may have been mentioned by group members in other settings, or are the authors post discussions thoughts about motivational aspects within St. John Ambulance.

Job Satisfaction - A sense of personal satisfaction can be gained through doing something well. This is the same as that gained through paid work, where the person gains satisfaction in addition to the financial gain. This could be related to taking a personal pride in the members work.

This can have a bigger impact if acknowledged by providing recognition back to the member through praise. "Most of us love to receive recognition, as it is one of our most important needs."⁴

Personal Achievement - There are a number of different activities within St. John Ambulance that can be a personal achievement. This is similar to the concept of a challenge referred to by Grazier "Many people will say that their most rewarding team experiences resulted

⁴ Grazier, P. Team Motivation Ideas to Help Your Team Be It's Best, (Team Building Inc 2003)

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from some sort of challenge. I've heard the stories often of mediocre groups that responded to a challenge with heroic success. The challenge itself was the motivator."⁵

Demotivation Factors

If the items identified by the group improve motivation then it can also be the case that the opposites could demotivate members. It is not necessarily the case that the opposite of every motivational aspect acts to demotivate members, as different people have different interests. Indeed it may even be the case that a motivational factor for one could demotivate another. This is not covered in detail here but it is something that needs to be considered by unit leaders that aim to motivate members of their units.

Suggestions For Motivating Members

Based upon these findings it is possible to hypothesise some suggestions to help motivate members. These may need to be adapted based upon the different views of members. It is also important to consider that several different factors will generally have more of an effect than one on its own. "Another conclusion from the list of reasons why people volunteer is that few people are motivated by only one thing. More often it is a cluster of motivations that eventually make them select their opportunity over yours"⁶.

Duties - Having a variety of different events can help in keeping members interested in the events. Also consider why the members want to cover the events, local fetes may fit in better with some members desire to be helping their local community, rather than large commercial events run to make a profit. Whilst there may be pressure to cover events the personal feelings of the members needs to be taken into consideration so that they do not feel as though they are being pushed into doing something that they don't enjoy. This is a fine line and the benefits and responsibilities of the organisation need to be balanced against the needs of the individual members. Whilst individual units may not have much control over different duties it may be possible to share duties with other units in the surrounding areas.

Create a good team - Being part of a team that works together well can make a lot of difference. Whilst much of this is down to individuals in the group, the unit leader can take steps to encourage good team working. Team building games and activities can be used to encourage team working.

Mentoring - When new members join it can be beneficial to provide mentoring whilst they are new into the organisation. This allows them to ease into the organisation and build up their confidence. This would be best achieved by having a single person as a mentor, although in reality this may be hard to achieve in a volunteer role. It may therefore be better to have a few specified members with the appropriate qualifications, experience and team working qualities.

Social and Informal Activities - Social activities can provide an enjoyable way to keep members interested. These could take many forms including activities run during unit meetings as well as the more traditional events such as bowling or a meal out.

⁵ Grazier, P. Team Building, http://www.teambuildinginc.com/article_teammotivation.htm, accessed 9th November 2004

⁶ Ellis, Susan J., *The Volunteer Recruitment (and membership development) Book*, (Energize Inc. 1996)

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Member Opportunities - Members should be provided with opportunities to improve themselves and to attain personal achievement objectives. This could be through formal training, self learn (such as the Personal Development Program), or in taking responsibility through running unit meetings or other activities.

Conclusion

There are a number of steps that the unit leader can undertake to help improve moral within the unit. These should become part of an ongoing plan to keep moral up within the unit rather than using a run once approach.

Whilst some ideas have been suggested different people expect different things and therefore the activities need to be tailored to individual needs. One way of gauging individual needs is to run a group discussion similar to the one run for Rugby St. John Ambulance. The session can help get ideas from the members, but also helps to improve moral itself by highlighting things that were taken for granted and by showing that the members are being taken into consideration.