

MSCF Minute



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Two Challenges and a Solution

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CHALLENGE 1:

Anyone who has attempted to engage their members in the work of the union knows there are many challenges. A recent article published in the March issue of the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* highlights one of these challenges. The study, which tasked participants with trying to get people to take a survey for no pay, concluded that people respond better to face-to-face requests than e-mails. This seems common sense. What was surprising, though, is the disparity in the level of engagement: 70% of people approached in person completed the survey, while only 2% of those approached via e-mail completed the survey.

The challenge, of course, is that most of us don't have the time to communicate in person with each of our members and so we rely on e-mail. After all, we have full-time jobs and our work with our students remains, as it should, our top priority. Nonetheless, our reliance on e-mail is an obstacle to engagement, and is not one that is easily overcome (and yes, I get the irony that most of you will be reading this only if you read the e-mail it was sent in. So I am, presumably, talking with a

minority of you about how to engage the majority of our members).

CHALLENGE 2

This challenge is what I call "the guest speaker paradox." Odd thing (or maybe not), but shortly after the half-way point in a semester it becomes increasingly difficult to keep my students engaged. They've seen my shtick, heard my pleas and threats (bluffs!), and are beginning to feel overwhelmed by the cumulative work their various classes demand. I bring in a guest speaker, though, and suddenly a sparkle returns to their eyes, they sit up straighter in their seats, and they are once again engaged – at least for that period. Similarly, if I go to a different class as a guest speaker, I find myself energized by the level of engagement of the students, even when presenting the same material and ideas that I struggle to engage my regular students with.

So it is with engaging the faculty of a college. Our colleges are filled with dedicated, professional educators who are proud union members. Nonetheless, local leaders often have difficulty energizing faculty or having them engage in the

important work of our union. Why? They've seen the shtick and heard the repeated (and repeated and repeated) requests. The work of the union begins to feel like a burden, like yet another paper due for a class you once found so compelling. Hard to energize with the same old shtick.

A SOLUTION

There is no silver bullet, but there is a fairly simple way to supply a jolt of energy to your campus: upon request, the Membership Engagement and Recruitment committee, along with union leadership, will send an engagement team for a one-day visit to your campus. A couple weeks ago, I made such a request for St. Cloud Technical and Community College, and the results far exceeded my expectations.

The engagement team, which included committee chair Gretchen Long and field reps Matt Ryg and Chip Dykstra, arrived early and met with local union leadership. They were then paired with local faculty and spent the day walking the campus. They talked with faculty in their offices, in hallways, and over lunch. They listened to concerns, discussed the value of the union, and heard what

our local members had to say. They also spoke with "fair-share" members and left campus with four new membership cards. In one day, they were able to carry out all those crucial face-to-face encounters that, because of teaching load, would take local leadership a semester or more to complete.

Most importantly, the team energized the faculty. As I walked through the campus in the week following the visit I saw faculty wearing MSCF buttons and saw "I am MSCF" stickers on office doors and windows. It was a reminder that facilitating the work of professional educators is the work of the union, and the work of the union is the work of professional educators. Sometimes, we just need a guest speaker to remember this.

Campus Successes

We completed a second successful visit at Lake Superior College on May 1. A third is scheduled at Hennepin Tech - Brooklyn Park on May 10. We hope to visit every campus by the end of fall semester.

For more information or to schedule a visit, contact Gretchen Long at grlong30@gmail.com or 612-220-7549.