

holding on to 4-H leaders

Glen Hass

Voluntary 4-H leaders are responsible for organizing and coordinating activities that help 4-H members develop. Their support and guidance provide the basis for members' development. Voluntary 4-H leaders are the key people in organizing 4-H Club activities and ensuring that the aims and objectives of the 4-H program are met.

4-H leaders who re-enroll for a number of years are more effective in meeting these goals and objectives. Unfortunately many leaders discontinue their 4-H involvement after only 1 or 2 years of service. This means that each year many new leaders must be recruited and oriented to the 4-H programs. Possibly we should: (1) recruit new leaders whose personal characteristics are similar to those who serve as leaders for long periods of time, (2) improve the methods used to recruit individuals for a leadership role, (3) increase the satisfaction 4-H leaders obtain from their role or through leadership training, and (4) improve their attitude toward and knowledge of the 4-H program and an understanding of their leadership role.

What We Did

To better understand these problems, we studied what specific relationships existed between leader re-enrollment and:

1. Leader personal characteristics.
2. Leader attitudes.
3. Leader attendance at leader training events.
4. Leader attitude toward and knowledge of 4-H and attendance at the leader training event.

Data were obtained from a mail questionnaire sent to 546 4-H leaders who had enrolled in the Saskatchewan 4-H program in 1974 for the first time.

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Using stratified sample techniques, leaders were divided into experimental and control groups. One-day leadership training events were attended by 4-H leaders who comprised the experimental group. Material presented at these events explained the aims, objectives, philosophy, and structure of the 4-H program, as well as the role of the 4-H leader.

Another mail questionnaire was distributed the following year to the 505 leaders who responded to the first questionnaire. A total of 408 leaders returned the second questionnaire. Data were collected on their attitude toward 4-H and their knowledge of the program. Information was also collected on their reasons for re-enrolling or discontinuing as a leader.

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These data were used to develop a profile of first-year 4-H leaders, compare 4-H leaders who re-enrolled and those who discontinued, and determine the effect of attendance at a leader training event and the leader's decision to re-enroll or discontinue.

What We Found

First-year leaders averaged 39.8 years of age, had completed 10.4 grades of school, were married, and averaged 3 children per family. About 66% had children presently enrolled in 4-H. Thirty-five percent had been 4-H members themselves. Sixteen percent had parents involved as 4-H leaders and 7% had parents who had been 4-H members. Leaders were active in community functions, with 85% involved in other organizations, and 52% participating in some adult education.

There was no significant relationship between a leader's decision to re-enroll or discontinue and the following personal characteristics:

1. Age.
2. Sex.
3. Education.
4. Number of children.
5. Number of children in 4-H.
6. Number of children graduated from 4-H.
7. Experience as a 4-H member.
8. Parental experience as a 4-H member.

- 9. Parental involvement as a 4-H leader.
- 10. Involvement in other organizations.

Non-significant differences were also noted between Lindeman's primary and secondary incentive categories: (1) experiences contributing to individual development and (2) the individual's ability to help others.¹ This was also true in regard to belief in the goals of the 4-H program.

Discontinuing leaders mentioned dissonant factors as reasons for their discontinuing far more often than situational factors.² Sixty-eight percent of the leaders discontinued because they felt a lack of leadership ability, a lack of understanding of 4-H purposes, or a lack of knowledge in working with young people. Only 32% indicated they discontinued because of situational factors, like health, lack of time, or leaving the community.

retention (Leaders who re-enrolled indicated a greater agreement with the aims, objectives, and philosophy of 4-H, a belief in how well the organization meets these, and the ability to explain their role as a 4-H leader. They also indicated more satisfaction from being a 4-H leader and enjoyed the importance attached to being one. There wasn't significant difference between their ability to explain the philosophy and structure of 4-H and the importance of 4-H as a youth development program, although both groups indicated they believed in its importance.

The findings did show a significant relationship between attendance at a leadership event and the decision to re-enroll. Seventy-eight percent of the leaders who attended a leadership training event re-enrolled, while only 56% of the leaders who didn't attend decided to re-enroll.

What It Means

Personal characteristics should be considered when recruiting people to lead, but shouldn't be used to predict continued involvement as a 4-H leader. Experiences that contribute to individual development and the opportunity to help others are still important in the motivation of leaders. If leaders receive satisfaction for both types of incentives, they're more likely to re-enroll.

Leadership training can provide this support. Increasing the leaders' knowledge about the aims, objectives, and philosophy of 4-H will increase their consonance and reduce their dissonance with the 4-H program.

Leadership training that provides the leaders with the opportunity to learn more about their role as a 4-H leader will increase the enjoyment and satisfaction they receive

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as a 4-H leader. They're also more inclined to feel that serving as a 4-H leader is important. These actions should increase the likelihood of leaders re-enrolling.

Footnotes

1. E. C. Lindeman, *Leadership in Action* (New York: Oceana Publications, 1961).
2. E. P. Hollander and R. G. Hunt, eds., "An Introduction to the Theory of Dissonance," in *Current Perspectives in Social Psychology* (New York: Oxford Press, 1967).