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3/08



It's a
New
Day

As associations try to keep pace with a changing world, it's time to think about the traditions that got them where they are and what traditions will prepare them for the future.

MEMBERSHIP

Shiny, happy members

Did you know that your association's members are winners? You should, but in case you didn't, a new research report by the William E. Smith Institute for Association Research reveals just that. Using data on association membership from the 2004 General Social Survey of approximately 1,200 American adults, the report shows that association members earn higher salaries, like their jobs more, and are happier people than those who do not join associations.

Researchers concluded that association membership itself did not lead to success, but that success in one's profession increases the likelihood of joining an association. Here's a closer look at some of the report's findings.

Association Membership

20%
increase
in association
membership

From 1974 to 2005, the percentage of individuals belonging to an association has gone from 13 percent to 33 percent.

MEMBERSHIP BY JOB CATEGORY

31% managerial and professional position

6% other positions

Managers and professionals are five times more likely to belong to an association.

Income

The report revealed a surprisingly large earning difference between association members and nonmembers. There is a 52 percent gap between the groups. The average income in the general working adult population is \$51,442, while association members bring in an average income of \$72,100 and non-association members bring in an average income of \$47,503.

When this number is corrected for differences in job category, position, education, and family and social circumstances, the difference is still more than \$10,000 per year.

All \$51,442

Association member \$72,100

Nonmember \$47,503





Happiness

Are association members happier people than nonmembers? One word: Yes.

45% association members are “very happy”

36% nonmembers are “very happy”

Researchers used the 2000 South Capital Community Benchmark survey—a national survey of nearly 30,000 households that asked about varying types of civic involvement, including association membership and subjective life satisfaction—to do this comparison.

Job Satisfaction

Aside from income, researchers also measured job satisfaction—a major force for American workers. The data reveals that, in general, American workers are quite satisfied with their jobs. In 2004, almost 89 percent of adults who worked 10 or more hours per week said they were either “very satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied” with their jobs; only 11 percent were “not satisfied.”

Once again, association membership strongly correlated with job satisfaction. Seventy-two percent of association members were “very satisfied” with their jobs, compared to 49 percent of nonmembers. After correcting for job, education, gender, race, and other factors, a 19 percent gap in job satisfaction between association members and nonmembers remains.



Conclusions

The report’s findings state that associations don’t make a person successful. Rather, being successful leads a person to join an association. Motivated and talented individuals tend to want to belong to groups that give them opportunities to advance. However, it is up to the association to provide the right environment for members to keep them participating. Arthur C. Brooks, who led the study, suggests these services that associations should provide to attract winners:

- **Career advantages.** As an explicit career-enhancing benefit, associations can act as conduits between senior executives and ambitious young members.
- **Continuing education.** Associations should focus on predicting what their members need to learn and to offer appropriate educational programs.
- **Community.** Particularly in jobs that require frequent moves at the beginning of an employee’s career, a tangible industry or professional community may be socially valuable.
- **Opportunities to serve.** Motivated association members may desire opportunities to serve both their associations and their related charities.
- **Accountability.** Entrepreneurial members are attuned to accountability and measurable results in their lives and careers, and they will expect evidence that associations are accountable to members and the industries or professions they represent.

Source: “Where the Winners Meet: Why Happier, More Successful People Gravitate Toward Associations,” 2008. Published by The William E. Smith Institute for Association Research, established and funded by Smith Bucklin Corporation