

What Is Motivating For Emerging Leaders?

Gary Quehl and William Bergquist

I believe that people are healthier and happier if they are personally involved and connected to a thriving, dynamic community. Emerging Sage Leader

Individuals tend to be motivated in one of five ways to become civically engaged. They include *altruism*, the desire to give back to society and serve the greater public good; *self-interest*, doing what we want for our own benefit; *achievement*, being successful in situations that require excellent or improved performance; *affiliation*, wanting to be with people who are enjoyed; and *power*, the desire to have influence on situations or on others.

Achievement

Each of the five motivations is embraced by emerging sages, and *achievement* heads the list. As a motivator for civic engagement, organizational achievement is expressed in two principal ways. One is a desire to improve the community:

I am inspired by knowing that I am part of something larger than myself. One of my core values is community. Being able to be involved and help my community become a better place for my family, friends, and the next generation inspires me. I feel I am making a difference by taking steps toward my ultimate goal of working myself out of a job.

In twenty years I will be able to look back and see I was part of building something tangibly good in our community. I am doing what I said I would do. I will leave our community a better place.

The other important achievement motivator is to care for the natural environment:

I'm motivated by my care for the planet and for the people I'm living with. I'm inspired by a desire to live the way we must – sustainably. This involves having a global understanding and being consciousness while acting and investing locally.

I'm very excited and interested in creating sustainable communities. Nevada County is a wonderful Petri dish. We've done work trying to create a sustainable economy and creating sustainable agriculture. What about sustainable social systems? There's lots of possibility here.

Altruism

The second greatest motivator for emerging sage leaders is altruism. This is expressed in three principal ways: seeking to help others, wanting to “give back,” and pursuing social justice:

I have dedicated most of my professional life to serving the poor... Much of this comes from my spiritual and philosophical beliefs. I believe in the power and importance of civic engagement, which is absolutely essential for the creation and maintenance of a healthy community.

I think my mother's example is huge. It was made abundantly clear to me from the beginning that I was very lucky, and with that came some burdens. My family, schools, and community reinforced that I have been blessed and need to pass those gifts on. Another source of motivation and inspiration is my religion. There's a hymn that we sing, “We'll build a world...” It's about making a difference, about making this world we live in the best that it can be.

Mostly it is when I encounter injustice, when someone with power or money thinks they can do something without the acclimation or acceptance of the community. Another motivator is when I think there is a realistic possibility to defeat an injustice, that you can beat people at their own game and help make things better for our community and world.

Affiliation

There is a third motivator for emerging sage leaders:

It's not "civic life" that motivates me. Rather, it's when people get engaged to do something positive that I'm inspired to participate. I want a seat at the table because I like to see something positive resulting from people coming together in common cause.

It really is about personal satisfaction and relationships. Outside of myself, this would especially include my kids. There is so much satisfaction in living in a community like this that values wellness, relationships, and quality of life. And we have great things being accomplished by extraordinary people, for example our two dynamic young women mayors.

Power

And there is the motivation of person power:

I enjoy the process and the negotiations that take place in attempting to come away with a good solution. Part of this has to do with my ego, for I enjoy being in the limelight and receiving compliments from people for what I do.

What is the Motivation I: It is Not About the Money

It is not all about money for emerging sage leaders. It is much more about giving back to the community in which they have chosen to live, and in most instances raise a family. They talk about getting involved in the community and sharing exciting experiences with other emerging sages. They discovered the Grass Valley and Nevada City community and now continue to create it, which fulfills their need for personal achievement and social connection. For them civic engagement is an escalating process: each experience is fulfilling and feeds the desire to do more. Further, in most instances the volunteer work being done correlates with the paid positions

and responsibilities of emerging sages. A judge or educator, for instance, works with at-risk youth during “free” time.

This blending of paid and unpaid work on behalf of a specific passion is quite remarkable. In many contemporary American communities government workers feel under-funded, unappreciated, and over-worked; and frankly, “burned out” in their formal jobs. They lack restorative energy and have little interest in adding further burdens to their lives by devoting more unpaid time to the same civic cause: “I’m already sacrificing a lot . . . so why do even more?” By contrast, the emerging sage leaders see themselves being involved in both formal and informal roles on behalf of Grass Valley and Nevada City. They envision government as assisting and encouraging rather than providing all of the human services needed in Twin Towns.

Many emerging sages believe the role of government agencies is to facilitate the work of others—especially through nonprofit organizations that increasingly are risking to take on tasks traditionally provided by government. They see the need for government agencies to work across boundaries between themselves and others to solve community-based challenges. One outcome of this distinctive perspective on government is that Nevada County is blessed with over 600 nonprofit organizations that are staffed by talented persons, both paid and volunteer. This unique condition enables the citizens of Twin Towns readily to find a non-government agency that is currently—or potentially could be—addressing a problem about which they care. They can join this nonprofit group and help to bring about improvement, whether a concern about safe bike paths or preserving the Native American history of the region.

What is the Motivation II: On Behalf of Personal Growth and Community Sustainability

The motivations of emerging sages seem to reside in the need for both personal growth and the desire to contribute to the community’s sustainability. The challenges of civic engagement yield wonderful learning and skill enhancements that are great for resumes, but emerging sages rarely mention this benefit. At the community level their powerful motivation is to build an all-encompassing, sustainable community. And this isn’t just about the economy; it’s about culture, social justice and compassion, and preserving the distinctive beauty and vitality of Grass Valley

and Nevada City. Emerging sages possess a pervasive sense of urgency because the challenges being faced in the community, state, and nation are onerous. They will not be easily resolved, and must be confronted by multiple community-wide responses: “I am motivated because never before has there been such a need for change in the community.” “I have already seen tangible evidence that change can happen and that our community can benefit from it.”

Motivation for civic engagement also resides in the feedback that emerging sages receive from others in the community. This feedback is often immediate and heart-felt, in part because the Twin Towns are not large and many people know one another. One of the emerging sage leaders describes the experience of going to dinner with his wife and having young people that he has served coming to the table and thanking him for what he has done to make their lives better. The emerging leaders also feel “blessed” by relationships they have established with persons who share similar interests; they talk about having fun with their collaborators while finding shared gratification in the tangible results they achieve together.

More than with the senior sage leaders, emerging sages are able to look long into the future and envision a community that is significantly better than it is now. They know in very tangible ways that their community impacts the quality of life they envision for their children. This sense of sustained community improvement is particularly moving in the case of those emerging sages who are able to trace their families back in Grass Valley or Nevada City as many as five generations. These men and women of “place” clearly understand that work done years ago by previous generations is now benefiting them. So it is natural for them to work on behalf of their own children and future generations.

What is the Motivation III: Squandering Time and Opportunity

Of course, there is another side to this story. The hard-driving emerging leaders have to face the ongoing challenge of there being too little time and too much to accomplish. They worry about squandering precious time that they do have available, and they believe their civic work must produce timely tangible results that are worth the effort. They also talk about not squandering opportunity; they live in a small community and are connected with others who are committed to the same important causes. This is something that people living in large, impersonal cities rarely

have an opportunity to experience: “I don’t want to squander this chance that I have to make an impact on something that is important to me! I must move forward with this work. What else would I be doing?” One emerging sage leader describes her motivation as simply being part of her DNA: “How can I *not* do that?” Much like the senior sage leaders, many emerging leaders talk about this seemingly inevitable and inexhaustible drive toward civic engagement. It’s in their genes!