

The Road Trip Approach to Member Communication

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In my last newsletter I highlighted the importance of member to member communication. Active communication between members is often the first step to active engagement with the cooperative. One tool to foster member communications is a customer appreciation trip. One corn belt cooperative began offering a free trip to customers that reached a threshold of patronage. The original goal of the trip was simply to provide a bonus to key customers. The member to member conversations which occurred during the trip was an unexpected benefit. As the conversations progressed alternative visions for the future path of the cooperative began to emerge. Through active listening, the manager gleaned important insights into member needs and their perception of the cooperative's performance. It yielded the benefits of focus group interviews without the complexity of setting them up.

Why not consider a key customer appreciation trip at your cooperative. An interesting approach would be linking the threshold with the stock patronage distributed. That would reinforce the concept that both the cash and allocated equity portion of the patronage distribution are valuable. The destination does not have to be an exclusive resort. It could be a farm show or sporting event. The key is to build in some time for networking and conversation. Some of that conversation will concern the cooperative and those conversations may provide new insights. Conversations tend to clarify views. Members with clear views are much more likely to share those views with a board member or manager. Engaged members are loyal members and loyal members create strong cooperatives.

If you come up with a great concept for a trip and need to fill that last seat on the bus, keep me in mind!

9-3-2015