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Repeat Customer Success in Extension

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Repeat Customer Success in Extension

Abstract

Four multi-session research-based programs were offered by two Extension specialist in one rural Missouri county. Eleven participants who came to multiple Extension programs could be called "repeat customers." Based on the total number of participants for all four programs, 25% could be deemed as repeat customers. Repeat customers had increased attendance and participation (attending at least 60% of the class sessions) as well as developed relationships with other participants. One key to keeping participants involved is to schedule future programs to begin shortly after the current program ends to keep engagement and excitement levels high.

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Introduction

O'Neill (1993) said the following.

A marketing principle called "the lifetime value of a customer" says it's easier to sell to someone who has used your product or service before than to someone who doesn't know you. Extension's "product" is research-based information and our "repeat customers" are clients who come back to subsequent educational programs after being satisfied with their first.

Program information

In one rural Missouri county, two Extension specialists delivered four research-based programs in 2012. First was the Matter of Balance (MOB) program from Boston University, which is an 8-week program that emphasized basic physical activities and fall prevention. Funding for this program was offset by a Human Environmental Sciences Extension Development (HEED) grant. Two weeks following that program, a Stay Strong, Stay Healthy (SSSH) program was offered. This was a 12-week program that taught proper strength training technique and enhanced strength, balance, and flexibility, and is based on the Tuft's StrongWomen program. Six weeks after the conclusion of that program, a Chronic Disease Self-Management Program (CDSMP) was taught, which is a 6-week

program developed by Stanford University. A second SSSH class was also offered at the same time as the CDSMP. The target audience for all three programs was older adults.

Two Extension specialists, who are trained in all three programs, taught the programs. Both instructors taught MOB and CDSMP together, and each of them taught one of the 11-week sessions of SSSH.

Participation

There were 15 participants in MOB. Twelve participants completed at least 60% of the sessions (five of eight sessions). The first SSSH started with 20 participants. Three participants dropped out for health reasons. Thirteen participants attended at least 60% (seven out of 10) of the sessions. The CDSMP had 13 participants, and 10 attended at least 60% (four out of six) of the sessions. The second SSSH class had nine participants with four completing at least 60% of the classes.

Four participants attended all three programs. Four participants attended SSSH and CDSMP. Three participants attended MOB and SSSH.

Eleven participants total could be deemed as "repeat customers." The total number of participants for all four programs was 44. Eight of the 11 "repeat customers" in SSSH all attended at least 60% of the session (three dropped out due to health reasons). Six of the seven "repeat customers" in MOB attended at least 60% of the sessions. Six of the eight "repeat customers" in CDSMP attended at least 60% of the sessions. Based on the total of all four classes, 25% were "repeat customers."

In the surrounding counties, participation had previously been low in MOB and CDSMP. Multiple programs have been cancelled due to low enrollment. For a rural area, the participation and attendance in these three programs would be considered successful.

Program Successes

Bairstow, Berry, and Driscoll (2002) listed six categories that influence program success:

- Relationships
- Cultural considerations
- Language
- Time
- Local resources
- Measuring success

Relationships were the dynamic that contributed to the most program success in this Missouri county. Bairstow et al. (2002) said, "relationships are crucial to program success." In addition, a positive experience by a participant in one program leads to positive word-of-mouth and attendance

for other future programs. We have found that the key to keeping participants involved is to schedule and plan future programs to start shortly after the programs they are currently participating in to keep their engagement and excitement up about continued learning with MU Extension.

Parker, Powell, Hermann, Phelps, and Brown (2011) found that in order to enhance the quality of education for older adults, educators should consider incorporating methods that involve multiple senses, interaction opportunities, and complement education with handouts for use outside of the program or at-home. Ota, DiCarlo, Burts, Laird, and Gioe (2006) said that by combining multiple adult learner techniques and strategies, Extension educators can create programs that will enhance the learning of participants.

MOB used video education, instructor-led activities, discussion, and handouts; SSSH used instructor-led activities, discussion, and handouts; and CDSMP used discussion, brainstorming, problem-based learning, instructor-led activities, and handouts.

The successful participation and attendance in this Missouri county could be attributed to the following reasons: (a) participants were familiar with the instructors and felt comfortable with them; (b) the varied teaching techniques in the three programs were well-received by the adult learners; (c) the social nature and friendships that develop helped encourage attendance; and (d) participants became more inspired to improve their health through these programs.

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