



It's easy to be fearful, better to be grateful

By Barry VanderKelen

Gratitude can be a powerful response for nonprofit groups during these challenging times. The recent economic forecast for San Luis Obispo County suggests that the local economy won't improve significantly for more than another year.

It is easy to become fearful about being able to respond to growing needs for programs and services. Why shift to gratitude? How can the shift be made?

To answer these questions, I spoke with Delia Horwitz, a San Luis Obispo-based organization development consultant with The Collaborative Edge. "Fear leads to protectionism and territorialism," Horwitz said. "Being grateful lets people see options and choices rather than barriers."

Horwitz explained that gratitude changes a person's brain chemistry. "People move to a higher brain center. Maximum creativity and synergy come from people who are in that higher functioning place."

Horwitz uses an analogy of making

barley soup.

"If you don't have any barley and are living in fear, you will be upset that you can't make the soup. However, if you are grateful for what you have, you might see that your rice will substitute nicely for the barley. New solutions are created by recombining existing ingredients."

Interestingly, someone can choose to be grateful.

"Looking at your situation in gratitude is a habit," Horwitz said. "People can change their thoughts; they can choose to focus on the glass being half full rather than being half empty."

The attitude of an organization is the collection of the attitudes of its members — board and staff. Volunteers, donors, and clients mimic the attitude of the leadership.

"Organization change takes time," Horwitz explained. "It normally takes 30 days for a habit to take hold."

She recommends starting small, and building upon each person and each success.

One of the simplest ways to begin is to start every staff or board meeting by asking, "What's working?"

People can respond by giving examples of who is living up to the organi-

zation's values; they can celebrate good news; or they can appreciate the hard work of one another.

"Thinking this way may be new, and new things can be difficult," Horwitz cautioned. "Negative thoughts will pop up and you can choose not to follow them."

Eventually, people in the organization will focus on what is possible.

"The organization will shift its thinking from either you or I win, to in order to win it has to be me and you," Horwitz said.

She points out that organizations can reduce staff turnover —one of the most costly events—by being appreciative of current conditions.

"Numerous studies show that staff rank feeling appreciated and valued high on what is important in a job. This is especially true for Gen X and Y people, who will leave an organization in search of a supportive environment."

On this day of Thanksgiving, let us all commit to becoming grateful for the many gifts we have received. Let us say thank you to the tireless staff and volunteers who make our organizations so strong. And let us look for the opportunities that are presented to us but we can not yet see.

Resource Use

- Support nonprofit leadership
- Board development/training
- Strategic planning

Nonprofit Business Column of The Tribune

The San Luis Obispo Tribune publishes a column every other week in the Business section dedicated to the business practices of nonprofit orgs. Barry VanderKelen, Executive Director of the San Luis Obispo County Community Foundation writes the bi-

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