

Getting Good Marx on Value



Kathy Simons (2018 WTS-LA Chapter President), Photo by John Livzey, 2017

Groucho Marx famously said that he didn't want to be a part of any club that would have him as a member. Bolstering his well-honed image as the witty, too-cool-for-school outsider—you've got to love Groucho—he was actually illustrating a profound point about organizations and the motivations for joining them. Fortunately, people join professional organizations like WTS-LA for the polar *opposite* reason of Groucho's "creed." Our members join specifically to find like-minded, like-skilled, motivated women and men that share in the belief that a level playing field benefits all. But Groucho has a point, as he often did. What actually does motivate people to join WTS-LA or any organization? What specifically convinces an individual to act, to take that extra step online or at a meeting? Of course, the answer is both simple and complex.

One size does not fit all. Everyone is different. And what motivates one person can completely discourage another. Sometimes people act for the most silly, mundane reasons. In college, I joined a literary society because they had the best buffet (turned out to be a fantastic scholarly move). But mundane joining motivations are usually outliers. So, what really does attract and motivate people to join a group? Is it because the organization's mission aligns with your beliefs? Does the organization's branding give you or your business the cachet it needs? Do the individual members form a collective group you want to be associated with? Or is it that the person in charge of catering actually is the next Daniel Boulud? These are not rhetorical questions, but more on that later. Maybe it's a combination of these things. But being the kind of person who just can't leave something alone once I've gotten into, I decided to do some research. And here's what I found.

In general, I classify motivations for joining an organization based on two elements that an organization offers: *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* value. According to the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, "The intrinsic value of something is said to be the value that that thing has 'in itself,' or 'for its own sake,' or 'as such,' or 'in its own right.'" For WTS-LA, that doesn't mean we have hidden gold reserves or piles of cash stored in the chapter's secret vault (don't ask). We're talking about the true value of the chapter for our members and transportation in Southern California. So, the value of a highly diverse network of transportation professionals at all levels, for example, is something inherent to WTS-LA. That's one example of our intrinsic value.

Okay, what did Stanford have to say about extrinsic value? "Extrinsic value is value that is not intrinsic." Thanks, Stanford. Fortunately, the encyclopedia adds that extrinsic value is value based on "the sake of something else to which it is related in some way." So, essentially, it's relational value. It's the value that an individual *believes* the organization can provide to them in how they use the organization and its offerings. Extrinsic value would be how an individual can use WTS-LA's professional network to advance or change jobs. It could also be the esteem that membership in WTS-LA brings to an individual when they enter a room for a short-list presentation. Okay, great. But still, what motivates someone to join? On some

level, creating conditions that compel an individual to join centers on creating intrinsic value and expressing extrinsic value within the chapter. And once again, that's where you all come in.

As I mentioned earlier, my questions about what motivates individuals to join are *not* rhetorical. I want to know. And I want you to tell me. Why did *you* join WTS-LA? What about the organization motivated you to act and hand over your credit card? What intrinsic value do we have that we can exploit? What intrinsic value are we missing that we should acquire? What extrinsic value can we create that makes us more appealing? What can we do to not only encourage new people to join, but to make current members want to stay and get more involved? This is your chance. I want to know what you think can make our chapter better. What will make you want to stay a part of a club that is happy to have you as a member? With apologies to Groucho, please email me and let me know.