

Group Dynamics of Social Loafing in ADF Groves  
or  
No One in My Grove is Participating! What the Bleep Should I Do?  
By: Medb Aodhamair

*Once upon a time, there were four people;  
Their names were Everybody, Somebody,  
Nobody and Anybody...*

So you have a plan to start raising money for your Grove, the plan seems fool-proof and everyone is excited about it. You arrive on the appointed day to put the plan in to motion and suddenly, you find that you are the only one doing anything (or worse, no one else shows up). Yikes! What happened?

This is actually a very common problem; psychologists call this phenomenon *diffusion of responsibility, motivation loss, or social loafing*. Diffusion of responsibility is a social phenomenon that occurs in groups above a certain size when no clear job responsibilities are assigned. Diffusion of responsibility can lead to *Social Loafing*. Social loafing is the tendency for people in a group to work less hard when participating in a group effort toward achieving a common goal than when individually accountable for their actions.<sup>1</sup>

The primary explanation for diffusion of responsibility is that members of groups believe that someone else more qualified will do it. Further, the main explanation for social loafing is that, because they assume that their performance will not be evaluated, individuals feel unmotivated while working in a group.<sup>2</sup> Social loafing occurs when an individual feels that they are not accountable for their work, their work duplicates a colleague's efforts, they feel exploited, or the work is boring.<sup>3</sup>

Loafing lessens when the challenge of the work is increased, different members have different tasks, group performance of one group is evaluated against another group, or when members are working on something that is very important to them.<sup>4</sup>

*Social facilitation* is another social phenomenon which happens when there is stronger performance in the presence of others but only when the task is easy or something that the person is especially good at. This can be encouraged by giving members tasks that they enjoy or are good at doing.

Additionally, you can divide your Grove in to two (or more) smaller groups and assign a similar task and have the groups compete. For example, when brainstorming ideas for the next Grove fundraiser split the group in to two (keeping your officers impartial) and have both groups brainstorm for the best and most fully-formed fundraising plan, the officers will vote on the plans to decide which one will be used.<sup>5</sup>

Other things you can do to minimize social loafing in your Grove include; getting the individuals in your group to collaborate by assigning each member a task, giving group members a chance to choose their tasks, or offering awards to individuals for having the most participation.

Keep trying new techniques to get your members involved and make sure that the charity, community service, or fundraising programs you are doing are meaningful to your members. Get people excited about helping and emphasize the virtue of hospitality. Offer rewards and recognition for your Grove's hard work. Be consistent with where and when your activities take place. Above all, don't get discouraged; if you keep it up and continue to make a big deal about what you are doing you will eventually get at least a few devoted members who consistently show up and support your efforts.

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<sup>1</sup> Jackson, J. M. & Harkins, S. G. (1985). Equity in effort: An explanation of the social loafing effect. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 49, 1199-1206.

<sup>2</sup> Latané, B., Williams, K., & Harkins, S., (2006). Many Hands Make Light the Work: The Causes and Consequences of Social Loafing. In M.J. Levine & R.L. Moreland, *Small Groups*. (pp. 297-308). New York: Psychology Press.

<sup>3</sup> Karau, S. J. & Williams, K. D. (1993). Social loafing: A meta-analytic review and theoretical integration. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 65, 681-706.

<sup>4</sup> Jackson, J. M. & Williams, K. D. (1985). Social loafing on difficult tasks. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 49, 937-942.

<sup>5</sup> Wegge, J., & Haslam, S.A. (2005) Improving work motivation and performance in brainstorming groups: The effects of three group goal-setting strategies. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, Vol 14(4), 400-430.