

Retention

Keeping Members Active and Engaged

When people join a group, think of it as more like a 5-3 vote rather than a landslide win. Most people come to new experiences both wanting to be involved (the 5 votes) and feeling uncertain (the 3 votes). You have won them over, and it is now your job to keep them involved.

If you want a member's loyalty, interest, and best effort, you must take into account the fact that:

1. The members of your organization need:
 - a sense of belonging
 - a feeling that they are sincerely welcome and no one objects to their presence
 - a feeling that they are needed for their total self, not just their hands, money, specific talents or because they know someone. Make sure you introduce new or potential members to everyone in the group. The new members will then feel respected and treated as equals with everyone else.
2. The individual member needs to have a sense of being a part in the planning and the execution of the organization's objectives; she/he needs to be a part of the idea sharing, the brainstorming and the production and decision making process of the organization. Involve new members in specific activities immediately and not just busy work or stuff that no one else wants to do. This is very important—if a new member has nothing to do, he will feel that joining has been a waste of his/her valuable time.
3. He/she needs to feel that the goals and objectives are consistent with his/her values and reasons for joining the organization. Members must also believe that the goals of the group are decided upon by the group, are within reach and that they make sense. It is also important that their membership makes a difference to someone and that their contributions are appreciated. A word of thanks personally and privately is important. Recognition at organization meetings and in newsletters, among other things, are also important .
4. The individual member needs to know in clear detail what is expected of him/her and not only the detailed job, but also future opportunities. The individual must also know that what he/she does relates to the total outcome of a group project.
5. The individual member needs to be given responsibilities that are challenging and that are within the range of his/her abilities and interests. The responsibilities should help the member to become a leader. Be sure to train him/her to do the job assigned. A subtle form of training is to pair members into two-person teams, an old member and a new member in each, for each task.
6. Do not limit your understanding of retention to strictly new members. Remember the seniors in your organization who drift away that take with them good experiences or leadership that could benefit your organization. Also, remember those members who float in between who feel the organization is only focused on retaining new people.
7. Keep seniors involved in the organization. When doing this, remember that their goals have changed from when they first joined so the organization needs to be sensitive to that.

Finally, the key to keeping members is **information**. Make sure to give your new members all of the information they need to develop into fully functioning members. Gaps in a person's understanding of an organization is probably one of the quickest ways to lose a member.

Keep Your Members' Spirits Up!

- Offer feedback from advisors and peers
- Organize an effective training program
- Provide a sense of unity
- Compliment good work
- Reward good efforts (certificates and trophies)
- Initiate recognition (press releases, awards)
- Provide financial reimbursement (out-of-pocket expenses)
- Initiate social interaction (parties, contests)
- Recognize individual achievement (remembering birthdays, special honors)
- Allow for new challenges
- Install a suggestion box
- Allow volunteer participation in decisions which effect workers

Christense, V.R. and Myers R.C. "Motivating Volunteers: What Makes Them Tick" Programming, November 1979, page 48.