

# Grow Your Association: 5 Keys to Attracting and Retaining Your Members

By Bonnie Mattick

Are you concerned with having members slip away from your association? You can strengthen your membership and attract new members with some basic steps. First, look at the ways you are staying connected to your members and the new people that come to your meetings. Refer to your association's mission and values with a strategy for how your membership can grow – by having a clear intention and following your mission. Intention is more than just having the Board and President state their ideas...you grow when you improve the kind of experience you give your members.

For example, networking is a key component to building relationships, specifically in programs that attract members. Many associations have business programs and opportunities for members to connect with others in the community. This gives them an opportunity to build relationships with a potential for working with others. In a successful networking relationship, you must be willing to give more than you receive. When you help others by sharing contacts and ideas, they will want to connect with you more often.

## #1 – Networking

Deliver effective networking opportunities for members. Hold an event specifically for networking within the association. Encourage your attendees to bring business cards and marketing materials to share with other members. One process I am familiar with is the "Beehive Networking" process developed by Dave Sherman in Phoenix, AZ. In this process you gather 4-5 people (the "worker bees" in a small group with a designated leader (the "queen bee"). The people discuss what they'd like most to learn more about, or who they'd most like to meet. The leader shares that information with other small groups and shares contact information with people of similar interests.

Some benefits you will gain:

- ▶ Networking opportunities encourages members to

come to your association. They not only want the social interaction but they want to share their expertise.

- ▶ Networking is the key to gaining trust in building relationships. In addition to building relationships and friends, they are also enriching their personal lives.
- ▶ Increased use of digital media by reaching out to members in a variety of ways. Many X and Y Generation members, as well as millennial generation members, will appreciate you using technology that is an important part of their communication style.



According to Gary Vaynerchuk, author of "The Thank You Economy," said: "Anyone who has done business in the last 200 years or plans to in the next 200 years knows that human beings are the ones who make the decisions and the ones who execute the ideas and allow opportunity and growth," Adding... "It's always going to be a human business, even within all this technology."

Building relationships through networking is one way to improve the atmosphere at your association – another way to improve it is through your programs. You can develop the kind of atmosphere in your property that brings success to your meetings by creating an exceptional experience for the members. They will leave your meetings wanting to return again and again. Here are some tips and techniques for bringing added value to your membership:

## #2 – Interest Groups

Start a group of your long-standing members to interact and exchange ideas. Require they have 10 years plus experience. You can:

- ▶ Create interest groups to discuss issues, unique challenges;
- ▶ Make it so many members will want to be a part of it.

### #3 – Create a Forum or Blog

Accommodate members with a forum/blog which allows them to exchange ideas among all members of your association. This becomes a virtual library of ideas and allows:

- ▶ More voices to be heard;
- ▶ Members to feel they are supported by the association;
- ▶ Members to connect outside of the regular events;
- ▶ Helps the board members understand areas of greatest concern.

### #4 – Crowd Sourcing

Do a lot of “crowd sourcing,” in order to determine what they want from their membership. The best advisors are the members themselves. If suggestions are out of scope, consider:

- ▶ Taking on new initiatives with courage (the members give great suggestions, but some may be far-reaching);
- ▶ Involve the members and gain their support in implementing ideas;
- ▶ Consider if suggestions fit in with topics of existing programs or committees.

### #5 – Get Members’ Feedback

Send out a short survey following a special event (i.e. a charitable golf event) and ask members the following questions:

- ▶ What was the most beneficial effect from the event and how are you using it?
- ▶ What is one word that comes to mind if you were asked to describe the event?

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