

It's More than Recruitment...

The Four R's of Membership Development

When thinking of membership development, attention is often turned to recruitment. While successful recruitment is a vital part of the health and success of a chapter, it is only one aspect of membership development.

All chapters should have a planned membership development program. Whether you are a chapter of 10 or 210, a well thought out, yearlong plan to promote positive membership development is essential to the future of your chapter.

With the combined dedication of your chapter's leadership and general membership, success can be found by focusing on the four key areas of membership development: relationships, recruitment, retention and rewards.

Relationships

Relationships are at the heart of successful membership development: relationships between the board and the chapter, relationships between chapter members, relationships between chapter members and those who haven't joined AMBUCS™ ... yet. Careful cultivation of these relationships can lead to a stronger membership and therefore, a stronger chapter.

The leadership of your chapter needs to be strong, confident, optimistic and open. Leaders who demonstrate chapter pride, motivation and encouragement to members will have a positive impact on member satisfaction. To achieve this, chapter leaders should remember to accept new ideas and suggestions, delegate responsibilities, accept criticism and help, listen and understand members, and take responsibility when mistakes occur.

Cultivating stronger relationships between chapter members can sometimes be a difficult task. Someone joins AMBUCS™ because they have a void they need filled. Be it networking opportunities, giving back to the community or social opportunities, your chapter needs to find ways to fulfill each of these needs and strengthen these relationships. This can be attained by providing time for members to visit with each other during meetings, offering ample opportunities for involvement in projects and being creative in planning socials.

Relationships between your chapter members and the public are also of utmost importance. This is a key step, which has a direct effect on the next step, recruitment. It is often said that successful recruiters see everyone as potential AMBUCS™ members. By cultivating strong relationships between your chapter and the public, you can open up the doors to membership recruitment. You can take steps to better these relationships by properly promoting your chapter events, keeping in contact with those you serve such as AmTryke® therapeutic tricycle families and scholarship recipients and keeping an eye out for partnership opportunities with other organizations.

Recruitment

Once you've taken the steps to strengthen your chapter's relationships, the next logical move is to capitalize on them by strategic and smart recruitment efforts. The most important thing to do is to develop a membership program that best meets the needs of your chapter.

Look at what "roles" most need filled within your membership. What skills could help your chapter? Look at the people your chapter has established relationships with to select individuals to meet these needs and skills. As you work to establish new relationships, your pool of potential members will grow.

There are some qualities that need to appear within your chapter to have a successful membership recruitment program. They include:

1. Energetic members who are excited about AMBUCS™.
2. Members who are knowledgeable about AMBUCS™ locally, regionally and nationally.
3. Chapter officers that are actively involved in recruitment.
4. A yearlong recruitment plan.
5. Leadership opportunities for new members.

AMBUCS™ helps with recruitment with programs like Branding Time and Spring Round Up. The National Big Hat Club also announced the new Big Hat Mentor Program this year.

The concept of the mentoring program is to match up Big Hatters with members who are just one or two new members away from getting their own Big Hat. The steps include:

1. Recruit mentors from those who are already Big Hatters.
2. Match them up with the future Big Hatters in your chapter (those with one or two new members to go or those with aspirations to become a Big Hatter!)
3. The mentors work one-on-one with the future Big Hatters to call on potential new members.

Together they set up phone appointments, meet with the potential new member and invite them to the meetings as well as serve as hosts to welcome the guest to the chapter meeting.

Cultivating relationships leads to a larger pull of potential new members. Strategic and focused recruitment efforts lead to more new members. Once you have your new members, its time to focus on the third "R" of membership development, retention.

Retention

Retention is probably the most important “R” of successful membership development. To succeed, a chapter must have proper retention strategies woven into day-to-day chapter operations. Members are a chapter’s most precious resource. We all must find ways to provide them with a source to meet their needs, involve them and give them real responsibility to make them feel valued. When your chapter meets these goals, you ensure a lasting relationship with the member, long after the new member application is submitted.

It is the entire chapter’s responsibility to always warmly welcome new members. It’s sad but true that one negative experience can have a lasting impression on a new member. A new member should never be left standing in a corner or sitting at a table alone. Welcome him or her at the entrance and escort the new member around making introductions.

As soon as a new member joins your chapter, sit down with them and review the committee preference sheet, Form 1145. Explain to them the different opportunities available with each committee. Ask them to fill it out and return it to you.

Once they are assigned to a committee, communicate with the committee chairperson. Make sure that the chairperson makes a phone call to welcome the new member, explain jobs that he or she can participate in and explain when the next orientation event will take place. The quicker a new member becomes involved in chapter activities, the higher the retention rate.

Orientation is one of the most neglected areas of membership development, but is a crucial element in retention. Your chapter should have an established orientation program and schedule. The orientation should be a special time for the new member, in fact consider asking their family members or significant others to attend too. Orientation for new members should be held as soon as possible. It is important that new members understand the expectations of membership including, chapter policies and procedures, attendance and dues structures.

We have talked about how cultivating relationships leads to a larger pull of potential new members. How strategic and focused recruitment efforts lead to more new members. And how education and involvement lead to higher retention rates. Once you’ve accomplished this, you are left to reap the rewards of membership development, the fourth and last “R.”

Rewards

Like any long journey, it is important to celebrate reaching your destination, or in this case, celebrating the rewards of a positive membership development program. Measuring and acknowledging the hard work of your chapter is extremely important to ensure long-term success. You can measure overall success best by taking a look at the chapter as a whole and also the achievements of individual members.

Your Chapter

How do you measure the success of your program and the successes of your chapter? National AMBUCS™ have two tools to do this in the Blue Chip Report and the Chapter Operations Scorecard Recap.

After the end of each quarter, National AMBUCS™ publishes the Blue Chip Report. The Blue Chip Report shows each chapter’s membership total for the quarter including the number of new members, dropped members and the retention rate. This is a good way to track your chapter’s progress as well as compare your activities with other chapters in your area and throughout the association.

A healthy chapter has an on-going, successful and active membership development program. The best measure of a chapter’s health is the Chapter Operations Scorecard Recap. Also published quarterly, this report will share your chapter’s cumulative scorecard points earned for membership and other activities. Compare your chapters points to other chapters of similar size as well as to your chapter’s scorecard points the last few years during that same quarter. Do you see a positive change? If so, you know you are doing things correctly!

Chapter Members

Just as important as celebrating your successes as a chapter, it is important to acknowledge and reward the hard work and successes of individual members. National AMBUCS™ helps out with this through the Big Hat Club. But your chapter can make your own efforts to acknowledge the good works of chapter members. Hold big hatters-only events or let the big hatters have a special meal or special seating one chapter meeting a quarter. Be creative and help make the Big Hat Club something exclusive and something your members will want to be a part of!

Congratulate those who sponsor new members as intensely as you welcome new members. Share their good works with the chapter. Congratulating them in your newsletter is a perfect place, along with your chapter meeting. Finally, don’t forget to thank your Friendship committee or whoever in your chapter leads the membership development program. Their hard work is what inspires the chapter to succeed.

Relationships, recruitment, retention and rewards... the four steps between your chapter and excellence. This basic approach, when adopted as a practice of your chapter, will position you for success and long-term growth. It just takes a driving force, a commitment to succeed and the participation of your chapter.

Be sure to use the tools available to you. Those include the recruitment, retention and orientation workshops, the seven steps to successful recruitment, the blue chip report and the chapter operations scorecard recap.

And most importantly, **PLAN!** Follow these steps carefully, take it seriously and come up with a plan that best works for your chapter.