

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Membership Success with Recruitment and Retention



By *Ralph K. Dain Jr.*,
GCSAA Regional Representative Florida

Just a little over four years ago, I was invited to GCSAA headquarters to audition for the part of Regional Representative for Florida. Some in this region may say I am still auditioning or that I must be the understudy!! My assignment was to make a presentation on the topic of member recruitment and retention.

Well, here I am, and the issue is still front and center for all of us. In preparing for this article, I looked over what I used in my interview. Interestingly enough, I am employing a good bit of the theories I proposed and have put them to work out in the field. Some have been met with success. Some are yet to be determined.

The number-one successful strategy for retention is to communicate what is going on with the chapter. Those chapters that prepare a seasonal calendar seem to have better superintendent attendance at meetings. I equate it to a superintendent at his facility. One would not just decide to

aerate their greens a couple of weeks out and surprise their pros or their golfing members without fearing for their livelihood. In the same fashion, chapters need to avoid finalizing meeting details at the last minute. I have seen the success the Everglades GCSA has enjoyed in meeting attendance due to the fact that they provide their yearly events calendar at their annual meeting. I believe they averaged 88 attendees at their 2012 functions. Their event attendance has actually grown over the past four years, as has their membership. The proportion of superintendents to vendors is also at a healthy ratio where their vendor supporters see the value in their participation. I have seen both scenarios and the lack of advanced preparation should cause chapter leaders some angst.

With regard to recruitment, we have had some success by conducting visits with members and non-members at their facilities. Several of the Florida chapters have really engaged with me in this process and we have seen a number of positive outcomes.

The chapters, with whom I have worked, asked their board of directors to identify 10 individuals who are members that are not very engaged with the chapter, non-members who have never been members, or non-members who have dropped their membership. In a perfect world, we will have identified 90 individuals that we can hope to visit over the course of a calendar year. We usually undertake five meetings that can be completed in half of a business day. This allows a local board director to be present at the facility as well.

By conducting these visits in the superintendent's office, the superintendent feels much more relaxed and tends to be

more forthright in our conversation. The conversation is intended to demonstrate the value of both the local and national associations and create an awareness of our benefits.

In the case where the superintendent used to be a member or is just not very active as a current member, we have been able to determine the root cause and soften their stance enough to have them attend a later meeting. Often times an invitation to pick them up for the next meeting followed by a personal phone call works wonders!!

I was at a recent Florida West Coast GCSA meeting where there were more than a few faces I recognized from these visits. The West Coast Chapter was the first Florida chapter to participate in this exercise, and I can see how some of the individuals we have engaged are now participating at their events. In the same fashion they have gathered intelligence that the board has been able to utilize moving forward. The chapter is very active in pursuing meetings with surrounding chapters and creating a greater sense of community over a larger area. This has boosted superintendent-to-vendor ratio and has again enhanced the value for their members.

I know none of this is earthshattering information, Heck, even I, the understudy, thought of this! Getting back to good old-fashioned business practices can go a long way when trying to keep your members engaged or becoming more attractive to superintendents and assistant superintendents who aren't currently members.

Until next time,
Ralph Dain – GCSAA Regional Representative (FL)

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ENTERING THE SLOW ZONE



**GREEN SIDE UP
BY JOEL JACKSON**

Rumors of my retirement are just that, rumors. What is true is that I have reached another milestone in my chronological age. It's the same as the number often seen posted as the speed limit on our interstates and the Florida Turnpike. You do the math.

I'm not ready to fully retire so I've asked the FGCSA Board of Directors if I might continue my service with my primary focus as editor of our

publications and the website with the beginning of the New Year. Naturally there will be a salary adjustment, but by waiting I've maxed out my monthly social security benefit, which will help balance out the salary reduction.

This means that the FGCSA Government Relations Committee will need each chapter to step up and respond to Calls for Action on issues that will continue to challenge us. I will always participate with my letters to the editor and emails to regulators and politicians identified as the people to contact. Of course we all should be doing that anyhow. That's one of the main reasons for the FGCSA – unity for advocacy on any and all challenges our profession faces. It's not going to ease up in the near future with local ordinances still being advanced by cities and counties. Water availability is fast becoming the next front burner topic of conversation and regulation.

But it's time for my wife and me to do some more travel and see the rest of the USA. We

haven't made it to Yellowstone or Yosemite yet. Mount Rushmore, the Black Hills are also on our bucket list and we want to do Boston, Maine and Prince Edward Island also. Right now we are also planning on going on a one-month tour of Europe with our daughter next September.

I'm not hanging it up, but I am slowing it down a notch or two. I love telling your stories in the *Florida Green* and *Florida Golf Central* articles and *Golfdom* columns. Also I want to spend more time with our website to keep the information as fresh as possible and share more photos, etc and really make social media work for us.

The current make-up of the FGCSA Board of Directors is a crystal clear picture of the generational change in our association's leadership. It's time for the veterans and founders of so many of our chapters and policies to adapt to and support needed changes for the FGCSA to remain viable and productive and representative of our

profession.

It's obvious by the flagging participation rates across many of our local chapters that changes are needed, so the next slate of long-range planning meetings will be critical. We cannot cling to the old model of operation anymore. We need to get creative and be willing to try new methods and organizational changes to remain relevant to our members who rank more family time high on the list of things to do.

The key to your success and our association's future is participation. Pressures are being brought to bear on green industries on water use, water quality and fertilizer and chemical use. They will only increase. The best way for us all to guarantee fair and factual representation is for everyone who makes a living in golf is to participate in our industry at the local, state and national level.

The clock is ticking. Resolve this New Year to help by being active in your profession. It counts.



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