

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Membership Success with Recruitment and Retention



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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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