

RASC Membership Development News

Welcome back!

Summer is over; and yes, fall is here! Tell-tale signs of autumn - the publication of the *Observer's Handbook and Calendar 2014!*

This issue of "RASC Membership Development News (MDN)" deals with membership recruitment and retention, always relevant topics for member organizations. We also look at bridging the gap between volunteer programs and volunteers.

If you would like to contribute to the next issue, please email me at thompson@rasc.ca. Enjoy! ♦♦

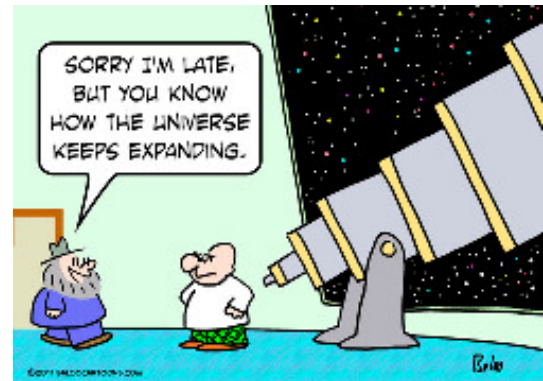
Society Office Updates

The new **RASC Board of Directors** had their first official meeting in Toronto on September 14 and 15 at the Society Office to develop the new RASC Strategic Plan 2014-2016.

Keep warm! A new order of RASC toques arrived at the Society Office last week. There are limited quantities so place your order today by emailing or calling the Society office at mempub@rasc.ca or 1-888-924-7272.

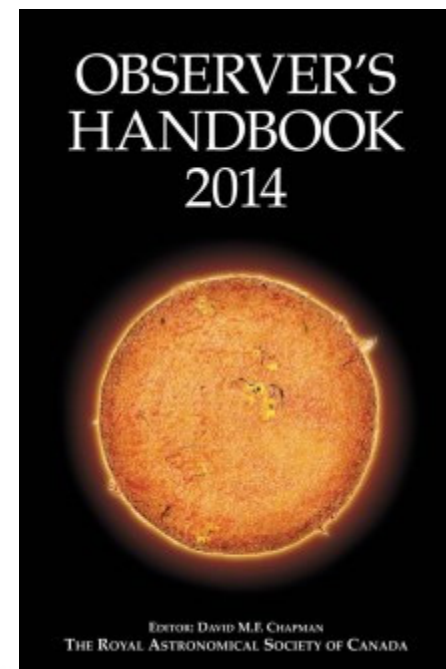
RASC Membership stands at almost 4200 members and growing – including our new family membership category!

Get Ready! The *Observer's Handbook and Calendar 2014* will be printed and ready in mid October! We sold out last year, so place your Centre orders soon by contacting Melissa -- mempub@rasc.ca at the Society Office. ♦



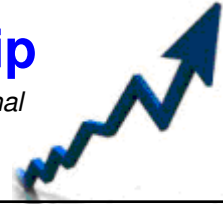
To improve is to change; to be perfect is to change often.

Winston Churchill



Ideas to Increase your Club's Membership

Adapted from Toastmasters International



If you're a member of a struggling club with less than 30 members, you probably believe that increasing membership in your club is difficult, if not nearly impossible. Conversely, a club that is member-strong with 40 or more will likely agree that acquiring new members is a pretty simple process. In fact, many clubs in this category spend very little time promoting their club and new members just seem to keep coming! Why is that?

The answer actually has very little to do with luck, but everything to do with the visitor and the public image that your club projects. Here are several proven tips to help you increase your membership:

- Before launching any new-member campaign, improve the quality of your meetings. Getting visitors is easy! Impressing guests enough so that they come back...now that's the challenge!
- Separate duties between the Membership Officer and Public Relations Officer. Consider the idea that public relations "gets the visitors in the door" and membership converts them from being guests to members.
- Have a member create or update and maintain a Web site for your club. It has been estimated that up to 80% of all club visitors find a club to visit through the Internet.
- Be sure to notify your community of your Web site and put your Web site address on everything promotional that you do.
- Provide a member's name, email, and phone number on your Web site and encourage visitors to contact him or her with any questions.
- Be sure to arrange with your meeting chair to arrive 30 minutes before each meeting. Guests typically show up 15 to 20 minutes early. If no one is there, they might think the meeting was cancelled. Plus you gain some valuable time to build rapport with this prospective member.
- Ask your meeting chair (and other members) to always be on the lookout for visitors, and remind them that they should always be prepared to drop everything to greet the guest.
- Implement a strategy with your meeting chair to "partner" the guest with a member who will introduce the visitor to the group at the beginning of the meeting and be able to answer questions throughout the meeting as they arise.
- Educate the club members on how important it is that everyone to interact with and introduce themselves to guests before the meeting. This makes the visitor feel welcome and comfortable. Same applies for the speaker who has been generous enough to take time out of his or her day to add value to your meeting!

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Ideas to Increase your Club's Membership *continued*

- Ask the guest to provide their feedback at the end of the meeting about what they thought about the meeting. This will give you a good indication whether they are a potential member. Sometimes they'll convince themselves to join right in the middle of their comments! Just make sure to tell the guest at the beginning of the meeting that these comments will be requested at the end so the guest is not caught off-guard.

What many people do not realize is that even the large clubs can run into trouble with membership. Usually, a dip in membership is the result of poor leadership in the club and a decline in meeting quality. Make sure you have a good product before trying to get others to buy into it and you'll be at membership capacity in no time! ♦

Bridging the Gap between Volunteer Programs and Today's Volunteers

By Paula Speevak-Sladowski

How can associations and other non-profits best attract, retain and involve volunteers in the second decade of the 21st century? Volunteer Canada, in partnership with Manulife Financial, recently released a report, *Bridging the Gap*, which may provide some of the answers.

The report is based on research done in the summer of 2010. The work included a literature review, a general population telephone survey of 1,016 households, a survey of 551 volunteers, 18 focus groups around the country, and an online survey of 208 non-profit and voluntary organizations.

Our study zeroed in on four specific groups: youth, baby boomers, families, and employer-supported volunteers. As might be expected, significant differences from one group to another were identified. For example, while youth saw volunteering as supporting their job search, skills development, and networking, baby boomers wanted activities outside their skill/knowledge base, seeing these as "refreshing."

Demographic differences aside, five key gaps between organization and volunteer perspectives emerged from the study:

1. Many organizations still want long-term commitment, BUT many more volunteers are looking for shorter-term opportunities.
2. Many organizations focus on what they need, BUT many volunteers come with their own goals to be met.
3. Volunteers want the organization to clearly define their roles, BUT many also want flexibility to create their own opportunities.
4. Many people are looking for group activities, BUT few organizations have the capacity to offer them.
5. Many people come with professional skills, BUT many professionals are looking for volunteer tasks different from their work life.

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Bridging the Gap between Volunteer Programs and Today's Volunteers

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Action steps that associations may want to consider in order to bridge these gaps:

- **Build meaningful relationships with volunteers:** Understanding where potential volunteers are in their life cycle as well as their personal goals and motivations is as important as knowing what skills and experience they can offer. Try to create an open dialogue where volunteers feel comfortable letting organizations know what would make their experiences most satisfying, when they need a change and when it is time for them to move on.
- **Develop integrated HR strategies that include volunteer management:** Human Resource policies and practices need to be based on the scope, requirements, and boundaries of the position and not whether or not the person is paid. These strategies should include an inclusive and safe working environment, effective initial engagement techniques, opportunities for training and recognition, how work will be evaluated, and feedback mechanisms to ensure two-way communication.
- **Be flexible and accommodating with volunteers:** Be willing to adapt to the changing schedules of volunteers and creatively modify volunteer roles to respond to any specific physical and mental health issues in order to make volunteering accessible.
- **Be sensitive to gender, culture, language, and age:** Multi-generational, multi-cultural, diverse volunteer bases that reflect the changing demographics of today's society will better position an organization to serve a range of communities.
- **Provide greater online engagement:** Leveraging the power of the Internet and social-media technologies is imperative because these are the primary means to search for and promote volunteer opportunities in today's increasingly wired world.
- **Develop customized, balanced approach to engagement:** Ensuring a quality volunteer experience and tailoring approaches to individual volunteers will help solidify and increase the volunteer base.

The research for Bridging the Gap was conducted by Carleton University and Harris/Decima. The full report is available on Volunteer Canada's Web site at www.volunteer.ca. Reading it may provide insights into how your association can adapt its volunteer program to meet current realities and thus help Canada maintain its long-established position as a world leader in volunteerism and social capital. ♦

Paula Speevak-Sladowski is Director of Applied Research and Public Policy for Volunteer Canada and was Principal Investigator for Bridging the Gap. She previously served as Managing Director of the Carleton University Centre for Voluntary Sector Research and Development and as Executive Director of Volunteer Ottawa. She can be reached at 613-231-4371 ext. 240 and pspeevak-sladowski@volunteer.ca

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Growing Through Membership Retention

by Tony Rossell

The retention rate obtained by an association in large part determines the ultimate level of membership for an association. For example, an association that adds 5,000 new members a year and maintains a 75% renewal rate will grow to 20,000 members. While an association that adds the same 5,000 new members but maintains an 85% renewal rate will grow to 33,000 members.

Better membership retention helps an association grow by lowering the number of new members that go toward making up for lost members and letting those new members contribute to membership growth.

So how do you increase renewal rate? I believe the key is through engaging or establishing interaction between your association and your members.

This interaction can be as simple as a phone call. Interaction can also be in the form of member transactions. In a data analytics study we did for an association, we found:

- Members who also maintained membership in an optional local chapter along with their national membership were 17% more likely to renew than those who were not a member of a chapter.
- Members who attended an association meeting in the past year were 19% more likely to renew than those who did not attend a meeting.
- Members who attended an association meeting at any time in the past were 7% more likely to renew than those who never attended a meeting.
- Members who attended four or more meetings were 30% more likely to renew than members who never attended a meeting.
- Members who placed a product order in the past year were 28% more likely to renew than those who had not placed an order.
- Members who upgraded their membership in the past year to a higher level of service were 12% more likely to renew. ♦