



RECRUITMENT OR RETENTION OF MEMBERS

Keith Lloyd writes about his attendance at the Sue Froggatt Seminar on Membership.

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Which is the most important ... recruitment or retention of members?

An interesting question!

Is this a bit like the ‘chicken and egg’ scenario? If you are happily recruiting, you don’t need to worry about retention. Or, if you’re happily retaining, you don’t need to worry about recruitment?

Sue Froggatt is a renowned and experienced membership development specialist, she says that membership organisations often fail to allocate sufficient time and resources to membership retention. So this month we concentrate on her recommendations from the *Membership Retention Strategies & Techniques* seminar I attended recently.

Retention Fundamentals

To get a mental picture of the issue, think of a bucket full of water which is leaking because of a number of holes. To keep the bucket full, is it more effective to keep pouring in more water (recruitment) or to stop and find out what is causing the holes and plug some of them (retention), and then pour in some more water? Sue suggests the latter.

You probably already know the number of members joining and leaving every year. This is a useful starting point. The next task is to look at the attrition issue. Who is leaving? Why are these members leaving - what is causing those holes? Are we in a position to easily do something about it? (There may be some areas that you can have no impact on at all). What will it take to try and reduce the loss from the holes you can fix? Now you can work out your plan of action.

Defining Retention

If one consults a dictionary or thesaurus for a definition of retention you will see some interesting suggestions ... hold, detain, restrain, clench, grasp, clutch, grip and preserve. And, in my time as a Club Secretary I can think of one or two individuals where such alternatives could have been happily applied to!!

But how do your club officials use the word “retention”?

Do they see it as:

- ☞ A number or a percentage of renewals?
- ☞ A clerical task ie sending out renewal notices?
- ☞ Or a measure of member satisfaction and meaningful involvement?

Sue believes it is the last option, satisfaction and meaningful involvement, that hold the key to retention.

So let's start with one of the most vulnerable categories of members and work to consider how we can get them involved and reduce the size of this hole.

Special handling for first year members

The vast majority of new members are recruited via an interview at the Golf Club. The excellent facilities, friendly atmosphere and standards expected will have all been covered in great detail, so the new member leaves that day with a clear opinion that they have made the right choice.

They have great expectations from their investment in their subscription and are looking forward to great things at their new club.

Some members find no problem in getting involved, particularly those who have played in medal and other competitions at previous clubs. However others, particularly those who have not been playing golf for long, may need more orientation to get going and this is where you, the Secretary/Manager can help. Sue suggests you map out and develop the main natural 'involvement pathways' for new members and encourage those who have not started playing to come along and get to know others and get involved.

For example:

- ☞ Send them a personal invitation to a new members evening
- ☞ Ask the person who has sponsored them to invite them to join them for a game and ask them to invite others that would act as a useful 'buddy' or 'mentor' in their first year
- ☞ Contact a member that lives near the new member and ask them to ring the new member and find out if they are going to a forthcoming social function and would like a lift
- ☞ If they have joined during the winter months, invite them to an indoor event like a 'rules-of-golf' refresher, competitions on next year, a bridge drive, a golf fashion show, etc.
- ☞ Introduce them to one or more of the regular groups that exist
- ☞ Encourage committee or board members to invite them to play in competitions

It is my experience that in many clubs you see a core group of members at social functions, medal and knock-out competitions. There may be different faces in each group, but regardless they can become quite "cliquey" and difficult for newcomers to break into. So we need to pay special attention to finding out what new members want from their membership and helping them to get involved in a way which is appropriate to their interests and time commitments.

Whichever methods you chose, don't just take these new members to Base Camp and expect them to navigate the rest of Everest on their own!

Useful Research

Another useful suggestion is if appropriate, to ask members who resign to complete an Exit Questionnaire. Obviously there are some cases where it would be insensitive to request such information (death of a partner etc).

Some members might welcome the opportunity to give you formal feedback or to be able to get something 'off their chest'. The information gained from such could be most enlightening.

Besides first-year members, issues that might come up are:

- ✎ If a member's main contact or playing partner at the club leaves
- ✎ New competition for the member's leisure time, for example, a new job, a period of heavy work commitments or the arrival of a new baby at home
- ✎ New competition for the member's funds eg attraction of special deals from another club, a move to a bigger house and associated increase in mortgage.

NB: Members are advised that thanks to the kind permission of Sue Froggatt, a new GCMA Reference Document has been added to the Electronic Library on this subject, No. 6088 entitled Membership: Member Exit Questionnaire Template. As usual this is also accessible by fax or post on request from HQ.

You can also research which groups are and are not participating in the activities you offer. Consider reviewing age profiles, employment (retired, part time or full time), how far they live or work from the club, their handicap (is it falling or rising?), etc. This may help confirm your intuition and give you useful information for planning future activity at the club.

Conclusion

To maintain a manageable attrition figure Golf Clubs may need to seriously look at carrying out the following:

1. Have an accurate assessment of member attrition – what do the statistics say?
2. Conduct formal exit research – start now, go back twelve months if possible
3. Bring all the staff on board with the findings – everyone in the organisation affects the retention of members
4. Focus on the involvement of members, particularly new members
5. Promote the involvement opportunities and the value of involvement in all your communications with members including newsletters, notice boards, emails
6. Don't assume members know what is going on and available to them – remind them several times
7. Re-examine the balance of resources that you put into recruitment and retention

8. Be prepared to change or tweak current policies to determine the best way in which to retain your current membership.

Finally be aware of blind spots that have been developed because things have “always been that way around here”.

To illustrate this I will leave you with a story about a young girl that was watching her mother prepare the family roast. One Sunday she asked her mum, “*Why do you slice off a piece of meat from each end off the joint before putting it in the oven?*” The mother replied “*it was because her mother had always done it that way*”. Intrigued, the next time she visited her grandmother, she asked the same question and got the same response. Not satisfied with this, the little girl asked if she could visit her 92 year old great-grandmother, currently in a nursing home but quite in charge of her faculties. On seeing her great-grandmother she put the very same question to her about the beef, to which the response came “*Well my dear, we only had very small ovens!*”

Keith Lloyd 2005

I would highly recommend her services to members of the GCMA, in particular her one-day seminars, which are run at various locations throughout the UK.

All information on services and seminars can be accessed via her website www.suefroggatt.com

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