



## RETENTION

Sue Froggatt writes about the retention of membership.

Secretary At Work: Reviewed March 2012

Why is retention so important? What is at the heart of membership retention? What can you do about improving your retention? In this article Sue Froggatt highlights all these issues.

How does your golf club handle member retention? Is it simply a statistic that you calculate every year and reflect on at your development meetings and mention in your annual report? Or does it form both the backbone and heartbeat of what you offer and how you communicate with members?

Retaining members is a key performance indicator of how well you are meeting the needs of your members. You should certainly be comparing this figure every year with what you achieved in the previous few years and also with other similar clubs in your area.

The reason why retention is important becomes clear when you consider the analogy of water being poured into a leaky bucket. There is no point in recruiting members until you know why members leave and put resources behind any obvious ways of encouraging vulnerable members to stay.

There will always be 'natural' reasons why members leave, with companies closing down or people passing away being two obvious examples.

But are there other reasons why you are losing members that you could retain? Conducting member exit research will start to tell you why. You will find a template of an exit survey you can customise at [www.suefroggatt.com](http://www.suefroggatt.com) or GCMA Library Document 6088.

For example a problem that is common to individual golf clubs that represents a 'hole' in the bucket is retirement or redundancy. So could you offer these groups the opportunity to be more involved with the club by way of offering them organising or mentoring (new members) opportunities? These people now have what everyone else is likely to be desperately short of – time.

The heart and backbone of a healthy membership is involvement:

1. Firstly you need to foster an organisational culture that promotes member involvement. For example, in internal meetings do you talk about 'us' and 'them' or 'we'? Encouraging the use of inclusive rather than exclusive language in all your communications is very important.
2. Secondly you need to focus on the members' expectation and definition of involvement. It is when they are satisfying this expectation that they will remain members.

Some members join simply because they want to just play golf. That is how they judge the value of their membership. They may not want to come to any events that you run. They get annoyed by all the mailings you continually send them about events and see this as a waste of money. However other members may be the exact opposite. They have joined to meet up with other people in the community and network to exchange ideas or develop their business. This is exactly what they want out of their membership.

It is important to take the time to recognise member involvement, particularly from volunteers. There are many ways to do this from an informal simple handwritten 'thank you' note to engraving their name on a long-service member board that hangs in your foyer. Recognise their involvement, both active and passive, in ways that will encourage them to move up the ladder of involvement.

The task of finding out what individual members want and then meeting those involvement needs may seem like a huge task. However with a member segmentation strategy in place, the member has clearly and easily been able to express their involvement expectations in a way you can manage and service.

For example consider the Allegiance® approach to membership segmentation. This highlights different types of members such as:

1. Mailboxers™: These members primarily want involvement through mail, fax or computer.
2. Relevant Participants®: They attend relevant conventions and seminars.
3. Status Conscious®: They join to improve their professional image.
4. Shapers™: They are most active and want to shape golf club policy.
5. Cognoscenti®: They want the golf club to add to their fund of knowledge and expertise.
6. Altruistics®: They share the values of the golf club.

Each member is asked to award points to nine statements that reflect these categories to highlight how they would like to get involved. This then becomes the basis for how you involve and communicate with them.

To summarise, calculate and compare your retention ratio so you know where you are at the start. Then use exit research to highlight groups of members that you can economically retain. Finally make sure you treat members differently by introducing a member segmentation strategy that is based on ‘their’ involvement expectations and find ways to move members up the ladder of involvement.

*Sue Froggatt 2006*

Sue Froggatt is an independent consultant and trainer specialising in membership development. Sue runs open seminars on recruitment and development around the UK. For more information visit [www.suefroggatt.com](http://www.suefroggatt.com)

*[This document is prepared for guidance and is accurate at the date of publication only. We will not accept any liability (in negligence or otherwise) arising from any member or third party acting, or refraining from acting, on the information contained in this document.]*