



Have fun with your retention program. While it will require diligent effort from the club leadership to the front line staff and some members, the rewards are certainly worth the effort.



PICTURED LEFT - RIGHT

Mr. John L. Fitzgerald, Esq., chairman of the board St. Francis Yacht Club
Ronald Banaszak, CCM, general manager/COO St. Francis Yacht Club



The Retention Chair

TOP DOWN MEMBERSHIP RETENTION HERE'S HOW IT'S DONE!

BY RONALD BANASZAK, CCM

MEMBERSHIP RETENTION IS AN ISSUE EVERY CLUB FACES. EVERY CLUB LOSES MEMBERS; SOME ATTRITION IS NORMAL. NO ONE WANTS TO LOSE MEMBERS UNNECESSARILY, HOWEVER.

Attention to membership retention must permeate the club, beginning with the top club leadership and include all the staff and key members. Retention is an attitude that must reach every employee and member.

You love your members and now you need to let them know it.

Successful membership retention requires attention. Establishing an organizational structure for retention is a critical step. So is understanding why members choose to leave as well as providing great value to all members.

It goes without saying (but we must) that it's much more efficient to keep a current member by addressing their needs and concerns than it is to find new members and have them join the club.

The steps for a retention program are simple.

- **DEFINE** the specific issues why members at your club are leaving.
- **STIMULATE** the membership by incorporating events, activities, menus and fiscally conscious programs.
- **EVALUTE** the retention program, not completely by how many members are leaving the club, but by the buzz, club usage, and the activities the members are utilizing. This is where the *Retention Chair* comes into play.

A successful membership retention program can be organized simply. Start by establishing a membership retention committee with a strong chairperson (preferably a board member).

It is paramount to include a dedicated volunteer member who will spend the time assisting and supporting management on the plan to retain as many members as possible. This volunteer is the catalyst, liaison and cheerleader to get the job done.

Think of this program with the club president as the CEO of any successful NFL team, the general manager/COO as the coach and the membership director as the quarterback who is throwing long passes to the front line staff and members.

All four of these individuals are required to drive the program from the leadership to the front line staff and membership.

The Retention Chair's greatest contribution will be assembling the volunteers for their committee. If your club already has an Ambassador Committee, then use it for this purpose to.

If your club doesn't have an Ambassador Committee, form one. Members of the Ambassador Committee will assist the Retention Chair and staff with keeping their ears close to the ground to hear the comments, likes and dislikes of the current membership.

Each member that is lost has an individual need that was not being addressed. Discovering the need, especially when they will not tell you on their own, is the key to success. Talking to the members that are not using the club as much as they have in the past is important. The Retention Chair's personal contact and support of these ambassadors is fundamental to the success of the program.

These ambassadors, so they can be visually recognized, should be designated with a lapel pin, crest or

cover story continued on page 24

other insignia that will get the attention of current members. The ambassadors are the communication link that allows management and the leadership of the club to “know” exactly what members are thinking, without the fogginess of the “vocal minority.”

These dedicated volunteers are fundamental to the retention of members. Your club most likely already has informal “ambassadors,” but formalizing these individuals and including them is fundamental for the success of the program.

Once the concerns are isolated the Retention Chair can raise the issues with the board, which is then charged with the obligation to address, or not to address, these issues. The culture difference of the board and the front line member, if present, can be a challenge. The board members need to put themselves in the mind frame of the average member (possibly much younger) and understand their needs, wants and expectations of their club.

In addition to dealing with members’ concerns and needs, it is critical that members appreciate the full value they receive from the club. Building value for the membership is fundamental to any retention program. Determine what is working and give the members more of what they want. Thinking in the mind set of the members and understanding the often-difficult financial decisions they are making can guide you to building value.

Look for ways to create a sanctuary feeling for members at the club. When members appreciate the club amenities, they will not want to give them up. This is what keeps them coming back and paying dues. Make the time at the club worth every penny of their dues as well as the amenity spending the member does.

IDEAS TO BUILD VALUE

Here are some ideas for building value of membership and, therefore, helping to retain members. And if you’re not already doing them, you should be

- Reach out to members who are underutilizing the club. Data mine them. Have the Retention Chair call them. How are you doing? What can we do to get you back to the club?
- Establish payment plans for large account balances and for member-guest type tournaments and expensive events
- Create layaway or payment plans for merchandise in the pro-shop
- Give discounts for early reservations on events and golf tournaments
- Schedule more family events
- Schedule special events such as carnival type events for Fourth of July, Opening Day, Labor/Memorial day week-

ends. Involve all members of the family and allow for the event to be spread throughout the club.

- Add a family aspect to already scheduled events.
- Establish a Kids/Junior Clubhouse for the kids to relax and enjoy video games, table games and movies.
- Host complimentary tasting nights. Pair up with your vendors for samplings of food, wine and other beverages. Provide just a taste and end the event by 7:00 p.m. so members will stay for dinner
- Increase the number of complimentary social hours at the club. Allow members to bring their own bottle of wine for a tasting social hour.
- Sip and shop in the pro shop. This works better than you can ever imagine. For the price of three bottles of wine you can double your sales. Do it every Friday and Saturday night in the months you want sales to increase.

Don’t take for granted that your members really know their club. Get them excited to see the club in a new light and tell their stories to their friends and fellow members. Be creative.

- Have your chef offer cooking classes in the kitchen on the nights the club is closed.
- Have an open house for the membership at large. Take them for a tour of the back dock; show them your wine cellar and liquor storage rooms; show off the golf course maintenance area and the equipment that is used to care for their course; demonstrate your trash compactor and cardboard bailing machine; and expose them to how the club is working hard to be “greener.”
- Do a cocktail reception in the golf course maintenance area. Let the members sit on the mowers and try on the hard hats.
- Do you have a patio at your club? Why not let the members shoot golf balls off the patio into the lake with a prize for the most accurate shot? They will never forget it and will remember their club in a way that they never imagined. Doing so will stimulate your membership so they are aware of what a special place their club is as well as the amenities the club offers.

Have fun with your retention program. While it will require diligent effort from the club leadership to the front line staff and some members, the rewards are certainly worth the effort.

Retention is a job that is never done, but it doesn’t have to be a chore. Make it fun! **BR**

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