

*Did you know?*

*Over 80% of members join Sweet Adelines because they either know someone who is a member, or they see a performance.*

*What does that mean?*

*We need to be talking to everyone we meet about our chorus*

*We need to be performing more*

*(And promoting ourselves properly when we perform)*

---

## **Retention Matters**

To me, it seems that the director is the “lifeblood” of the chorus, the inspiration, and the driver. The chorus takes on the director’s personality, and members are looking to you to lead them. If you are not thinking about member recruitment and retention – why should they?

As director and leader of your chorus, it is vital that you constantly consider these issues (amongst so many others!). Due to attrition, a chorus must continually recruit new members in order to simply “stand still”. Without members there is no chorus.

It also seems that choruses are talking about membership recruitment a lot, but we could be missing one important market – our **existing** members.

Obviously, it is cheaper and easier to retain an existing member than it is to recruit a new one. So, membership retention is a highly economical and efficient marketing strategy. We cannot afford to lose members, if we can do anything to prevent it. Once we have retention under control, then we can look at recruiting more members.

So, in this issue of Membership Matters to Directors, we will focus on the area of membership retention. Future issues will discuss recruitment.

### **NEW MEMBERS**

The first year of membership is crucial. If a member feels she is an important, valued part of the organization after the first year, she is much more likely to continue her membership. So how do we help the new member feel a part of the chorus? The answer is, we need to give her individual attention and get her involved in the running of the chorus.

## **Individual Attention**

Communication is the most important part of marketing – and probably life too. To help our new member to feel valued we need to feed a constant stream of positive communication to her. Communications can be verbal, written or visual.

Some ideas to make a new member feel welcome:

- Personalized Congratulations and Welcome letters
- Reminders of benefits\* of membership
- Members wearing name-badges so she can learn names
- Buddy or sponsorship programs
- “First-timer” ribbons so that everyone knows to make her feel welcomed
- Telephone calls from existing members to welcome her and talk about being a Sweet Adeline
- “What To Expect” information before performances, conventions, meetings, etc.
- Latest issue of *The Pitch Pipe*
- Membership card and/or certificate
- New Member Kit – with tapes, music, brochures and information
- New member orientations, showing her around the facility
- Personal introductions to other members (preferably those who may have something in common with the new member)
- When further contributions or dues are required, remind members of benefits\*, telling them what fabulous value they get for their money
- New member surveys – her experience is valuable and we want to provide the best possible service and make her feel comfortable
- Recognition of new members in the chorus/region newsletter
- Invitations to social events and fellowship

You can increase this list of ideas ad infinitum.

## **Getting Involved**

Give your new member small tasks to get her involved in running the chorus. Ask her to make the coffee or serve refreshments, and get her immediately involved with committees and meetings. When a member takes part in running the chorus it makes her feel that she is valuable and necessary, that the chorus needs her, and she will automatically feel more commitment and responsibility towards the group.

According to the American Society of Association Executives, in their book *Attracting Organizing and Keeping Members*, “New members who become active in the association during their first year are more likely to renew than those who remain passive.”

Having plenty of events for members to look forward to certainly help with retention. If a member has three performances, a competition and a convention to look forward to, she is much less likely to want to leave her chorus.

When its time to collect dues, send first year members a personalized letter congratulating her on her first year of membership. Be sure to mention membership benefits\*, including what she has learned, all the fun she has had and all the friends she had made over this last year. When she remembers all of this, she is much more likely to renew her membership than if she were just issued an invoice.

### **EXISTING MEMBERS**

An existing member wants, essentially, the same as new members. She wants to belong, to feel needed and valued, so we need to keep her involved and communicate with her regularly.

Keeping members involved in the running of the chorus ensures that she feels committed to, and involved with, the organization. Having plenty of events to look forward to give her reasons to stay. Regular communications by letter, postcard, e-mail, telephone, newsletter, and in person, make her feel needed and wanted. Plus, these are excellent opportunities to remind her of the reasons she joined Sweet Adelines.

We all forget benefits and start to take things for granted. That is why we need to constantly remind our members why they joined, and why they should continue their membership.

When it comes to retaining existing members, the atmosphere and friendliness of the group as a whole is key. Many members have been lost due to gossip and/or personal differences. We can guarantee that disputes will happen, so handling squabbles efficiently and fairly has a great impact. We need to make sure everyone feels heard, and then make a sensible decision for the “greatest good” of the group.

### **EXITING MEMBERS**

When we lose members we need to know why, and what we can do to prevent losing more. We can do this by sending them a letter saying that we are sorry to lose them, reminding them of the benefits of membership that they did enjoy, and include a survey to find out what we can do differently (if anything) in the future.

In fact, of our exiting members, over 89% are extremely happy with Sweet Adelines, which is an outstanding statistic. The main reasons we lose members are due to ill health, lack of time and relocation, according to our current online surveys. We are doing most things right, according to our exiting members.

## **“WE CARE” ATTITUDE**

Customer service is the hot word in marketing these days. If a company’s staff can be initiated with a customer-service attitude at all levels, membership retention is greatly increased.

In our choruses, we should be friendly, open minded, non-critical, positive and encouraging. We need to talk to each other with enthusiasm. And we need to handle problems quickly and leave the grievied individual feeling better than they did beforehand (if possible).

“A member who drops out because of poor service or poor treatment,” according to the ASAE, “is a walking testimonial *against* the association.”

On the other hand, if we can turn a grievance around and create a happy customer (or member), she will be your strongest testimonial in favor of the organization. She will be sure to tell everyone she knows what a fantastic group of women you are.

A “we care” attitude is spread by word of mouth. People get to hear about the good stuff (as well as the bad!).

## **IN SUMMARY**

Members who are welcomed, involved, fit in, feel valued and recognized, and who perceive that the group is benefiting their lives will stay.

Let’s make sure we constantly remind members

- Of the benefits\* of membership including education, fun and friendship
- To talk positively to each other
- To welcome new members enthusiastically
- To get involved and take on some responsibility for the group
- To let us know if they have problems, so we can prevent escalation