

Membership Retention Tips

Top 25 Ways to Retain Members

1. Have a program, not a campaign. Retention is a year-round priority and needs to be planned. Any post that is, or wants to be, successful at retention must be able to identify the specific steps it takes to increase its retention rate. In addition to having a series of activities that make up a retention program, your post should be able to identify resources that can be allocated to help implement the program.

2. Recognize members who reach milestone membership anniversaries. If members stay in The American Legion for five, ten, twenty or more years, they are probably not among those who are likely to drop out. When members reach one of these membership milestones, it provides two retention opportunities for your post. First, it is another opportunity to recognize a member or group of members for their continuing support. Doing that solidifies their membership even more. Also, by publicly recognizing these membership milestones, you inspire other members to strive to earn the same recognition by maintaining their membership, too.

3. Start a regular column in your newsletter to thank members for their involvement. One organization featured a column in their monthly newsletter that was called "Tip of the Hat." This column's sole purpose was to say "thank you" to those members who had helped the organization in some way since the previous newsletter. The member's name and the specific service they had performed were all mentioned. It became the most popular feature in the newsletter because every month members saw their name or the name of someone they knew.

4. Provide and encourage the use of The American Legion Emblem. There are good reasons for members to want to display the Legion emblem or other Legion artwork. The emblem can be an effective membership and marketing tool.

5. When important issues come up, call some inactive members for their opinions. It's natural for posts to contact their leadership people when an issue of importance arises, such as a legislative crisis, a local election or the setting of a new standard. These issues and events are also opportunities to involve some of the post's least active members simply by asking their opinion. When the opportunity comes up, have a list of inactive members ready to call, fax or write and ask for their opinion on how the post should react. The fact that the post cared enough to contact them might make the difference at renewal time.

6. Accept credit and debit cards for dues payments. Credit and Debit card payments have become the norm for almost all purchasing transactions. If your post does not already accept them, you should consider doing so. Credit and debit card acceptance is especially useful to posts during difficult economic times because it allows members to renew and still be able to make installment payments (if a credit card company.) Your post would also be able to accept dues payments on-line, which is a very popular method of payment for the younger veterans. Your finance officer must take the fee paid to the credit card company into consideration.

7. Send an audio CD with your regular publications. Even members who don't have time to read your regular publications will have time to listen to a CD on their way to or from work.

8. Create an annual slogan or theme for membership each year. It's often easier to get someone's attention if they have an image of the goals of the post. Having an annual theme or slogan can rally the existing members around a specific program or set of objectives and create an image in the minds of those thinking about dropping. If your post is celebrating a milestone year, that entire year can be dedicated to an anniversary theme.

9. Recognize your members as often as possible. Thank him or her for their participation in each and every program or function. Whether you do it formally or informally, it pays to express appreciation to members whenever possible. It's never too late to show gratitude to hard workers!

10. Get members involved at SOME level. Involved members don't drop. Your post needs to try to find ways to get members involved in a meaningful way without taking up too much of their time. This is especially true with newer members.

11. Publish an annual report in the local media. Thank the community for their support and send a copy to members. Publishing an annual report (Consolidated Post Report) allows your post to summarize all the accomplishments from the previous year. It shows the community that your post is an asset to that community and it shows your members that the post is run in a business-like manner and will remind any members thinking about dropping out that they would be giving up all of the benefits listed in the report.

12. Set up car pools to get people to meetings, especially new members. Car pools help raise the attendance at meetings therefore increasing the involvement of those who may not have shown up if it weren't for the car pool. Some of the drivers may have even found excuses not to attend had it not been for their assigned driving duties.

13. Set up a speaker's bureau: Speak at other organizations' meetings. Posts are always trying to spread the word about the Legion and the post's activities in that community. One of the best ways to do this is by finding speaking opportunities for your post's leaders. You can establish a post speaker's bureau, a pre-qualified group of members who are capable both in terms of knowledge and speaking ability to represent your organization to the media or to other civic groups. When these representatives

speaking, current members are instilled with a sense of pride in membership, which can make a difference at renewal time.

14. Be sure non-members pay a higher fee than members for programs and functions. There are two ways to make this idea support your retention efforts. First, be sure that your post charges more for non-members to participate in any of your post functions or to purchase any of your goods or services. Second, be sure to remind your current members about this additional fee that nonmembers pay. This serves to remind members of the money they save each time they take advantage of your post's services.

15. Remind members how much money they have saved by participating in programs and functions at the member rate. Remind your members of the money they may save by participating in the national member benefits program and the discounts for post functions.

16. Keep members' names and addresses current and accurate it's the best sign of a caring organization. It is common courtesy and good business practice to keep your membership records as accurate as possible. This becomes even more important because members' expectations increase as they compare your post's communications to those they receive from other sources.

17. Make sure you capture e-mail addresses whenever possible. Also make sure your members know your post e-mail address so they'll accept e-mail from you. E-mail is the quickest and least expensive method of sending information and documents to your members and to receive correspondence from your members.

18. If you ask a member to do a volunteer job, make sure it's a WORTHWHILE job! Even the smallest volunteer jobs need to provide some sense of accomplishment for the members assigned to do them. Although there is a lot of pressure to get members involved in the post's leadership structure, just having a title is not enough to justify the valuable time members have to give up in order to participate. Be able to pinpoint the contribution each member makes to your post's success and be certain to mention that contribution when thanking the member.

19. Call your annual dues an investment rather than dues. Referring to your dues as an investment will create an image that your post isn't spending the members' dues but rather investing it in programs and services that bring value to the members, to the post and to the community.

20. Assign an officer to contact a certain number of inactive members each month – just a little say Hi! call. Some members believe the only time we contact them is when we need money, information or support. This impression is strongest among the less active members. To alleviate some of these feelings ask officers and E-board members to make some random calls each month to your inactive members. These courtesy calls will remind these members that the post knows they're still out there and that their opinion is valued. Be sure to give the callers something substantial

to talk about, such as getting input on an upcoming legislative issue or proposed post policy changes.

21. Bring a list of inactive members to a post meeting and have members contact them. It's an important sign to members when a volunteer leader takes the time to contact a member simply to say that the post misses them and to also relay to the member that the post is there to assist if there's anything the member needs.

22. Get spouses active – it assures renewal. When you have multiple family members simultaneously belonging to the Legion, the Auxiliary and the Sons of The American Legion, your chances of having them renew is much greater than the renewal rates of individual members.

23. Bring in National speakers to describe how National adds benefits to state/local membership. Posts should try to get representatives from the Department and National organization to speak at a post or District function to emphasize the member benefits available through affiliation with the National organization.

24. Hold leadership-training programs – give your members the tools to be successful volunteers. It is important for members who do get involved to have a good experience during their involvement. Leadership training is becoming one of the best services that organizations can give their members. The skills developed through leadership training are transferred back to the members' workplaces. At renewal time, members will remember where these skills were developed.

25. Create a new member welcoming committee. When a new member joins ask someone who is already a member to call the new member. Tell the new member what a good investment membership has been for them and congratulate the new member on making a great decision to join. In as little as ten seconds the welcoming member has validated the new member's decision to join by making that person feel more welcome in the Legion post.