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## Triple Your Attendance

By Shar McBee

Do you want to increase your membership? Would you like more people to attend your events? The answer may be easier than you think: Give people what they want.

Surveys show that baby boomers say they want four things:

Make my life easier.  
Save me time.  
Don't rip me off.  
Give my life purpose.

I think they want two more things:

Pay attention to me, and  
Appreciate me.

All people want to be recognized and respected. Besides a good price and a good product, what keeps loyal customers coming back? Attention and appreciation. One survey showed that happy volunteers stayed with their organizations because they received continuous recognition and appreciation from their immediate supervisors. The key words are "continuous" and "immediate." Attention and appreciation can't be doled out occasionally. They have to be given on a regular basis.

Seven ways to quickly build your attendance:

1. First, treat the people who come to your events like they are your best customers. I've been at events that were sparsely attended and heard the organizers say, "Nobody came." Nobody?! What about me? I came. Am I nobody?

Even if only one person shows up, make that person feel like the most important person in the world.

2. Get to know the volunteers in your organization. Talk with them. Ask them questions about their work. Listen.
3. Acknowledge work well done, work done on time and consistently. Pay attention to the not-so-obvious ways that people give.

4. Create a plan for helping every new person to feel valued and needed. Make it possible for people to give as much as their hearts can give.
5. Make a good first impression. Be sure no one is ignored.

A good introduction makes new people feel included and appreciated. When introducing two people, apply the principle of *To Lead Is To Serve*. The person making the introductions serves those who are being introduced by giving enough information about each one so that a comfortable conversation can follow. It is not enough to simply say the two names and walk away. Too often, introductions are rushed as the person making them hurries through it so she can get back to the “real” work. If the goal of the organization is to succeed, making people feel welcome is the work.

6. Develop a guide for newcomers to the organization. You can compile it easily during a “walking meeting.” Gather a group at the front door. Together, walk in as if each of you is a new person. This can be fun as one person takes notes on what the rest of you “see.” Include:
  - a. Location of copy machines, restrooms, office supplies, closets, kitchen and break rooms, emergency exits.
  - b. Telephone and email protocols.
  - c. Phone guides and email addresses.
  - d. All procedures for approvals and requests of any kind.
  - e. Who to call or notify, and how, for absences and time off.
  - f. Dress codes
  - g. Office hours
  - h. What is expected of every volunteer

With this information, create your guide. Then, institute a buddy system by assigning one seasoned volunteer to each new volunteer. This, and your “walking meeting,” will create a culture of welcoming in your organization and contribute to the success of the newcomer.

7. Create a team of “Greeters.”

When I first served on the board of directors of DOVIA, the Directors of Volunteers in Austin, Texas, our president’s goal was to increase our membership. Attendance had been lagging at the meetings, so we did two things:

- First, we asked each board member to say hello to everyone at every meeting and spend extra time with people the board member did not know.

- Second, we created “Greeters.” These were five people who agreed to talk to every person at every meeting. The five wore badges saying “Greeter,” then each one recruited someone else to be a “Greeter” at the next meeting.

With this plan, everyone in attendance was assured of being welcomed by at least two people, a board member and a greeter. DOVIA met once a month and we initiated this welcoming policy at a June meeting. By August, we had tripled the attendance. Three times as many people were now attending our meetings!

To triple your attendance, use this *Triple A* formula:

Attention and Appreciation = higher Attendance

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