



The "Terrible Turnover"

Do you have retention-deficit disorder?

By John Lamothe

And so it came to pass: A voice from on high spoke to the people asking, "Why dost thou flee from my sight, leaving a void that must be filled by another? Who will complete the meeting minutes or make the sacred flyers, if not thou?"

There's no plague of locusts or burning bush nearby, but campus groups everywhere must deal with a mass exodus annually as members depart in favor of other activities. No group can retain every member who walks through the door, but the more members you can keep for a longer period of time, the stronger foundation you'll have to complete bigger and better projects.

Read on for tips from top campus groups, and use our diagnostic to ensure you're retaining as many members as you can.

Get Them Involved

Because of the level of training and experience required, turnover in student publications is disastrous. Nobody knows that better than *The Sandspur*, **Rollins College's** student newspaper. With a new advisor and a growing staff, the newspaper has found its voice in the community.

According to Dean Hybl, *Sandspur* advisor, "The key to keeping people in an organization is to get them active immediately." Interested students are given articles to write every week so they can feel like a contributing team member.

Even if a member doesn't want to become an editor, Hybl says the paper encourages open dialogue. "Everyone has a voice in the decision making process," he says. "You can't rely on a small group of people to do everything, or eventually, that small group will be all the membership you have."

Stay on Target

Few people rush out to do community service, but at **Stetson University**, the

Campaign for Adolescent and University Student Empowerment (CAUSE) has built a group of campus and community volunteers to help reach at-risk youth in and around DeLand.

CAUSE overcame retention deficit by keeping its members in direct contact with the reason they joined. "At times, we spent a lot of our energy developing the organization, meaning paperwork, meetings, fundraising, etc.," says Matt Morton, president. "Group moral was at its lowest, so we made sure to incorporate working with teens—the reason most members joined—into the organization-developing process."

Morton also attributes team-bonding activities like bowling nights or dinner to his group's success. If members feel a connection to the group, they're less likely to leave.

Get Comfy

Being new members of a campus group isn't easy. Not only are there the all-too-frequent cliques that form among current members, but the group's procedures, activities, and jargon are all unfamiliar to newcomers. In a club aimed at experiencing the finer things in life, committing a social faux pas—such as using the wrong fork at an upscale restaurant—can be especially unnerving.

Luckily, Kristen Brunelle, advisor to **Beacon College's** Cultural Club, understands that some of the club's activities can be outside a student's comfort zone. "I lead by getting my feet wet first," she says. "I'll ask the docent in a museum or the maitre de of a restaurant the first question. Members see that no one is going to laugh at them and that honesty is always met with respect."

Test Yourself

Use the following questions to determine if you have retention deficit. If you have a group with a bad case of "flees," test yourself and try out these tips:

1. What's the group's priority?

TIP: Reiterate the mission statement, goals, or purpose of the group, and show how the group's activities accomplish these goals.

2. How are your meetings structured?

TIP: Keep your meetings short, convene at a convenient time in the day, and include a social element (such as ice breakers, food, etc.) so participants have something to look forward to each time.

3. Do members feel like they're heard?

TIP: Don't hog all the power. Giving members responsibilities makes them feel like they're contributing.

4. How do you keep in touch with your members?

TIP: Use e-mail, a web site, or a newsletter to keep your members informed and the group in the forefront of their minds.

5. How do you recognize individual achievement?

TIP: Take time at the beginning of each meeting to recognize and thank those who have contributed to the group's success.

6. When was the last time your members had fun?

TIP: If you can't remember when it wasn't all work, it's time to schedule a little R&R. Plan a party at the end of the year or organize social events outside of normal club activities.