

## Membership Marketing - Going Tactical Series

### Part Four: Integrating Members Into the Referral Process

*By Bob Bodman*

It is a well known fact that the best source for new members is a club's current member base. So, how come it's so hard to get members to offer referrals and sponsor their friends, neighbors and associates?

In order to maximize the power of the current members to introduce potential new members you must understand what the dynamics are that prevents them from getting involved. Here are a few key foundational elements that are needed in order to have a healthy sponsorship program:

Time: Begin with the first obstacle that is usually in the way. Many members won't engage in this type of effort because they fear the process will require too much of their time and effort or on the part of their would-be invitee.

Member Usage: If a member is not using the club, they are not going to give much thought to introducing their friends. They won't even be bringing in their friends as guests. This is fundamental, yet it is the number one reason why members quit and also why they don't participate in sponsorship programs.

Member Satisfaction: Unhappy members will not sponsor their friends. It's that simple. Find out the areas in the club that are under-performing, rated low on the member survey, or are receiving the highest number of complaints. Focus on these areas and fix them.

Member Pride: In order to reach out and invite a friend to consider joining their club, members need to feel some degree of pride. Without having pride in their club, they will not be very good at talking up the club or being very persuasive. If the member does not exhibit a certain excitement or passion about their own club, it will not get their friend very excited either.

The "They Syndrome": Over the past 15 years of conducting focus groups, I have seen a syndrome develop, whereby members refer to the club and the club leaders in the third person (it and they). This is as if to say that the club is a retail store and they are the customers. Members who view the club simply as a service they use, rather than as part owner of the entity, will create an attitude of "not my job" when it comes to building the club's membership.

Lack of Knowledge and Perspective: Most members have retired from their businesses or have otherwise come to place in their lives that they don't want to work when they come to the club. They simply want to relax and enjoy a country club. Therefore, it is no wonder that many members don't realize they have become a stakeholder in a business that not only requires their money, but also requires them, at some point, to volunteer their time, talents and their sponsorship efforts in order to perpetuate the club's future and to continue to

provide the exact thing that attracted them to their club. Educating the member, especially the new members, that there is a need and an expectation that they will help to ensure the future viability of the club through sponsorship.

### **Integrating Members into the Referral Process**

Getting members involved in the referral and sponsorship process means having the above-mentioned points covered. If any of the above are a problem, then it would be more effective to develop a two part sponsorship plan with the first part focussed on improving on those. Then, the second part, would involve a proactive, step-by-step system that gets the members actively involved. Here are a few key elements:

1. This system needs to be easy to use and easy to explain to the members.
2. It should require the members take a formal step, versus just mentioning that they “have a buddy who might be interested.” We use a “Sponsorship Request Form” that is available as a handout, pdf form and also available to complete online. Recent experience with this is that most prefer to complete the form online.
3. Send a personalized invitation “on behalf of the member” and copy the member.
4. Always provide feedback to the member and ask for their help with contact information, background, answering questions, giving a club tour, etc.
5. Offer an incentive that “can only be extended by a member of the club” and also offer a comparable incentive to the member if their prospect joins. Allow for the member to transfer their benefit to their prospect, as many members don’t like the idea of getting a “bounty” on their friends. However, conversely, in today’s culture, many members don’t participate if there is no incentive. So you will need to design something that will fit either way.
6. Invite the sponsoring member to everything that the prospect is scheduled to do, including the new member orientation if their prospect actually joins.

This is a brief outline of some of the key elements of a sponsorship program, but it will differ from club to club.

*To learn more about Membership Sponsorship, including a copy of our Sponsorship Request Form and how we set this up for online response, contact Bob Bodman, president of Club Resources (800) 267-6758 or via email: [Bob@ClubResources.com](mailto:Bob@ClubResources.com)*