



How We Grow (Part 1): Moments of Honesty & Vision

[This is part 1 of a 3-part series on the authors' opinions on how the GWTA should approach our need for growth. This series is neither endorsed nor supported by GWTA leadership; the opinions are the author's alone.]

Our *Touring News* has recently had many articles where people are beating the drum of "Recruit, Recruit, Recruit". You have seen it, and so have I. And, of course, we do need to constantly recruit new members to keep our beloved GWTA alive. However, having worked in a variety of organizations for a long time, I think we need to re-think our approach to solving the problem of dwindling numbers.

As I see it, it does us no good to recruit to an organization that isn't working. Whatever we do to get people to visit or ride with us won't work if our meetings and rides aren't fun and invigorating. (Or if we don't have meetings or rides.) In my opinion, before we begin to recruit, we need to take a moment of honesty and vision about what is important to us in our GWTA Chapter, and where we want to go (literally and figuratively).

Let's begin with the most important and relevant question: *Would you join your Chapter?* Be honest. Is your Chapter what it was when you joined? Do you remember why you joined? What was attractive to you? Who invited you? Who stood by you? Who called you to come back? If you didn't know anybody in your Chapter today, would you come to visit? If you came to visit, would you honestly consider membership?

If not, why not? What would it take for you to be more attracted?

Yes, these might be very tough questions for some Chapters. That's the idea. We need to take a very serious look at what works for us, and our Chapters. The answers (the honest answers) are very important. They will be the deciding factors for what we need to do to keep new members coming. Once we are clear about what is important to us as members, what it is that we offer to others who might join, what we enjoy and want to do more of, and what we are less-than-pleased with (and don't want to do anymore), only then can we begin to focus our message in a manner that others will find as desirable as we did when we first joined.

So how do we go about achieving this goal? I have some ideas.

First, Chapter leadership may have to realize the need; this may not be an easy thing to do. Often our CD's and ACD's are so busy working their behinds off trying to keep things together, they may not feel they have the time for such introspective reflections. So call a special meeting, giving people a month or more to get it on their schedule. Follow-up with special notices and phone calls to get as many members there as possible. And consider having an un-biased, independent leader (such as a State/Provincial Director or Regional Director) to lead the discussion, drawing out from folks what they really feel, and their commitment to make things better.

After you have set a meeting time, place and facilitator, start writing down the important questions as described above, and others that would be helpful from a potential visitor/members' perspective. If you get stuck, ask your most recent members what they were looking for when they joined. Plan 15-20 minutes or so of this kind of discussion. (Having a timeframe will help you focus your thought process.)

It is entirely possible that everyone is really happy, there are no problems, and everything is just perfect. (Yeah, right.) Great! Now you can begin to think about how you can best communicate what works for you to others, and invite them to participate and join with your group. Spend the balance of an hour talking about this.

If that is not the case, and you see a number of areas that need attention, this, too, is good news. You can begin to figure out how to make the areas of issue better. Not doing enough riding? Plan some rides. Meetings boring? Think about inviting some guest speakers, or other ways to make the meetings more fun. Need a newsletter? Commit to doing a generic email or simple Microsoft Word document that will suffice until you have the time, energy and resources to do something more creative. And so on and so forth. Again, try to limit this discussion to the balance of an hour.

Decide you need help? Ask the leaders of successful Chapters to give you a visit and share ideas. Another good place to look for ideas on how to have a fun, strong Chapter is the Chapter Olympics program. You can find lots of tools and ideas at the Chapter Olympics web site, www.gwta.org/olympics.

Once you have figured out what works, and what needs improvement, you'll be in a much better position to have successful recruitment efforts. You'll be moving in a positive direction, on the road to "Destination Friendship".

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