



Rethinking Retention

I was looking over the membership reports the other day for our local chapter. (Usually I'm only looking at new members to be sure to get them information on the organization, and members on the expired list, to call and encourage them to renew their membership with GWTA.)

For some reason, this time I really looked at the chapter roster, and realized that there were several members who have been on the roster since before we were Chapter Directors (going on six years ago), that I have never met.

I got to thinking that there must be some reason why these folks renew year after year. They are not life members (life members have an expiration year of 2099), but they faithfully renew. "What keeps them in the organization," I wonder. "Why aren't they active?" These and other questions ran through my head, so I talked to some folks. One answer was that they enjoy reading the newsletter and Touring News, but because of work schedule, they couldn't participate. Another answer was that they belong because it gives them a 10% discount on their motorcycle insurance rates, and the discount was greater than the annual membership fee.

I've talked to several Chapter Directors, and I often hear concerns about inactive memberships. "It's not worth the effort to call them, they never come," is something I've heard. I would have to disagree. Some good friends of ours used to be on that inactive roster. We have a calling chain in our Chapter, and we use it to remind folks of upcoming events, or last minute changes in schedules. This couple would get those calls, they said, but they really didn't know anyone in the Chapter, and so wouldn't go. But our calling chain coordinator was persistent. She kept calling. She invited them to come out to dinner, to come on a ride, to come to a meeting, and finally, one day they came to an event. They were welcomed, and had fun. Soon they were coming to more events. They had more fun. They began to volunteer to help out at Chapter functions. Before you know it, they became Chapter Directors. In 2003, they were nominated as our Chapter's Family of the Year, and went all the way to being honored as National Family of the Year. They've come a long way out of that shell and have never regretted taking that first step into being active members.

How do you get those inactive members to an active status? First, you need to find out why they aren't attending. The knowledge is crucial to your success. Perhaps they have a scheduling conflict for weekday evenings, but weren't aware there were weekend rides. Perhaps they are intimidated by going to a meeting or a dinner where they don't know anyone. Now, probably they wouldn't come right out and say that, but an offer to meet with a smaller group may be welcomed, and may be just the right thing to help encourage them to get their feet wet. But mostly it's finding the right key to unlock that door. And finding the right key can take a lot of persistence.

If you don't already have someone in your Chapter in charge of memberships, we strongly suggest you ask for a volunteer to be in charge of welcoming new members, encouraging renewals, for those coming due, and to help minimize the memberships who are inactive. Remember, though – it's not just one person's responsibility. It takes the whole Chapter working together – "Destination Friendship" – to keep them coming back.

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