



What Makes Us Different?

The GWTA is “different”. We stress to everyone that we’re “member owned and operated.” To really see how ingrained the concept of structural de-centralization is within the GWTA, you need to hear how the whole organization got started. Most people know that we were once part of “that other Gold Wing group”, and split off. But if you knew the whole story, you might be surprised, and you might very well have a whole new appreciation for what makes us “different”.

Once upon a time, when the earth was young and Gold Wing motorcycles were introduced to America, some bright enterprising person decided to start an organization dedicated to the shared enjoyment of folks who loved this magnificent ride. Things were slow at first, but a chapter grew. Other chapters with similar ideas heard about the ideas this enterprising entrepreneur was doing, and asked to sign up with him. “Sure thing, for a fee,” the enterprising businessman said. Like many small businesses, he worked out of his house, got his wife involved, and initially only scraped by.

But lo and verily, after some years, other Gold Wing aficionados flocked to the businessman, and his investment in the organization began to show profits. With profits came power. (And why not? This is America, land of the free and home of the brave. If you invest in a business, you can call the shots.)

It came to pass that some of the flock didn’t always agree with the businessman. “My way or the highway,” he’d proclaim, “Off with their heads.” And the disagreeable members would be banished from the businessman’s kingdom.

Some of the existing kingdom began to chat among themselves. They enjoyed the fellowship, but abhorred the unnecessary national control. They set out to form their own organization. The new organization was similar in infrastructure to the existing group, with the key difference that the members would be in control, not a single owner.

Formation of the new group required a commitment. The small core group created applications, with a promise that all moneys collected would be returned if the organization did not start. A goal of collecting funds representing 1000 members was reached within just three months! (Several hundred people bought “life memberships” at the rate of 10 regular memberships, an amazing show of faith for the new organization.) After lots of hard work, an exhilarating new group (the GWTA) was born.

It is fascinating to imagine the courage and tenacity of those original GWTA members. They put substantial amounts of money on the line, with no guarantee of success. Their passion for self determination has permeated the whole organization to the degree that today we just don’t think about how different we really are from other organizations.

Most often, of course, the question comes up in relation to “that other Gold Wing group”. But the same question and answer applies to what makes us different from any other social group, or a bowling group or a car group or bicycle group.

Many groups have a Board of Directors (BOD), just like we do. But not all of them are elected by the membership. You might be surprised to know that many other organizations have their BOD’s appointed by the Chairman, to whom the Board is obliged. Similarly, in “that other Gold Wing group”, Chapter Directors are appointed, not elected as we do in the GWTA. That really makes us different.

Many groups have a treasury, just like we do. But the funds generated by memberships and advertising sales and big annual gatherings are often not the property of the membership in general, but part of an overall business structure. And that business structure can decide to do with the funds what they want, without asking the members for approval or oversight. That’s another big difference with the GWTA; our BOD represents the members, and our Executive Director reports to the BOD.

Most organizations have rules and procedures for darn near everything. Not the GWTA. Our “TA WAY” is a set of guidelines and suggestions, with relatively few hard and fast rules and regulations. In most situations and circumstances, whatever the local Chapter wants to do is probably ok. With very few exceptions, Chapters don’t have to seek approval from the national office for anything.

I could go on and talk about how many organizations require the home office to be a joint signature on any bank account the local chapter might have. Not the GWTA; Chapter money belongs to the Chapter. I could go on and talk about how many organizations can tell their local chapters what they can and can’t do, when they can and can’t have an event, and can actually appoint and fire local chapter, state and regional officers. Not the GWTA. We really are member owned and member operated.

But a generation or two of Wingers have passed since the passion and enthusiasm of our original pioneers. It is time for a new group to step up with energy and excitement, but also respect for those who gave so much that we might enjoy the organization we have today. Let’s remember the sacrifice, and help pave a new road to “Destination Friendship”.

Jerry Weltner
National R&R Director (Recruitment & Retention)