

## **CLASS OBJECTIVES**

1. Participatory class designed for chapter Membership Chairs and other leaders invested in member retention.
2. To identify ways and tools to keep members involved, happy, enthused, fulfilled.
3. To define the concept of recruiting with a member-retention mindset.
4. To continue to acquaint leaders with the Members Count! Toolkit.

## **QUESTIONS TO ASK OURSELVES**

1. Do we know how many members we lose?
2. Do we know the reason why members leave?
3. Are there any compelling reasons why members should remain loyal to us?
4. Are we good communicators?
5. Could we be driving members away?
6. Could anything have been done to keep them?
7. How do we establish trust in our chorus?
8. How do we show our members that we value them?
9. Could we do more to retain our members?
10. Where... when... how... do we start?

## CLASS OUTLINE

### **What Is This Thing We Call Retention, Anyway?**

- Definition
- Understanding member loss; accepting it as part of natural order of things
- Developing a retention mind-set

### **Belonging to a Chorus**

- What attracts us in the first place? What do we look for in a group? What are we seeking? What is it that we need to have in order to stay?
- What is Chorus Culture? Is yours evident?
- Understanding and buying-into guilt-free membership

### **Recruit to Retain**

- It's about people, not programs or strategies
- Establishing clear goals, clear expectations
- Keeping it fun
- Establishing trust
- Maintaining open dialogue with all members (prospective, new, old)
- Utilizing non-threatening exit interviews with those choosing not to join, and with departing members

### **Retention Tools**

- Member retention team
- Member retention tools
- Big Sister program (orientation/communication tool)

### **Adjust the Mindset of Others**

- Find a program champion
- Selling your program's importance to others
- Adding value
- Make added value tangible

### **Wrap-Up**

- Chorus Culture: This is what we do here! This is how we treat one another!

## **MEMBER RETENTION TEAM**

It is recommended that every chapter have a Member Retention Team. A good place to start would be to find people in your chorus who feel passionately about membership retention, and should include the director(s), as he or she is crucial to the overall plan. We obviously cannot prevent members from leaving due to illness or a move to another geographic area, but many times members leave us for reasons we **CAN** do something about.

## **MEMBERSHIP RETENTION TOOLS**

- Develop a good musical product for your chorus. It's all about the music! Sing well and they will come; sing well and they will stay! Have fun!
- Maintain a positive outlook and set realistic and manageable goals. Keep everything on a positive note... always! Get every member involved! Have fun in whatever you're doing!
- Develop a good rehearsal plan. Make sure weekly rehearsal time is well planned and executed. It's important to make good use of quality time. Have fun rehearsing!
- Communication / Communication / Communication! This cannot be over-stated. Keep your members well informed. Be available to listen to members' questions, concerns, opinions, and suggestions.
- Seek / request member input on "hot" issues.
- Recognize and respect our differences and the very things we have in common.
- Provide orientation and assistance to all members, not just for the "newbies." (Member Handbook, Rookie Program, Big Sisters, Riser Buddies, Board Buddies, Name Badges, Music Team/Section Leader/Tape Listener, Choreo Team, etc.)
- Provide on-going communication. (newsletter, announcement sheet, mailboxes, fliers, website access, updates via e-mail, chorus roster, listing of chapter board/management team and all chapter committees).
- Keep track of everyone. If you don't already know why someone is absent, call or e-mail her; let her know she was missed. Bring her up to date on important doings.
- Encourage participation and socializing. Use chorus retreats, parties, dinners, picnics, Afterglows, and installations as a time to get to know each other. Attend regional and international events together. All these events create wonderful opportunities for us to bond with one another, have fun, and create memories.
- Recognition! Create opportunities for members to share good news. Recognize members' good deeds. Give a pat on the back, a standing ovation, or an award. Periodically feature members in your newsletter. Send birthday cards. Send other cards as needed (get-well, thinking-of-you, sympathy). Select a member of the month and a Sweet Adeline of the Year.
- Develop an exit survey for departing members. Find out why they're not renewing membership. Keep it non-threatening. Make constructive use of the information.
- Use the resources available to you through Sweet Adelines International (Members Count! Toolkit; other manuals and material from our organization; leaders available to you, etc.).
- Work toward your chorus goals together. Play together. Don't take each other for granted. Let the music and friendships bond you together. Have fun! SING and ENJOY!

## **BIG SISTER PROGRAM**

### **Finding Big Sisters**

Members of the chorus let the chair know if they are interested in being Big Sisters, so there is always a list of people “on deck.” Every now and then, you might need to let the chorus know if you’re anticipating a need for a new batch of Big Sisters... for example if you have a RSG program or Guest Night planned. Sometimes, you may still not have enough Big Sister volunteers, and it may become necessary to recruit chorus members who you know would do a god job, and ask them.

### **Matching Big/Little Sisters**

Whenever possible, try to match people’s voice parts, so that a new lead for example, is paired with a lead, etc. This way, Big Sisters can help their Little Sisters with music related questions. Of course, exceptions are made if a new member has made friends with someone of a different voice part, and who may want to have her for a Little Sister. In some cases when a chorus member brings a close friend or relative into the chorus, we try not to pair them as Big/Little Sisters, so the new member will have more than one person in the group looking after her.

### **Orienting Big Sisters**

It’s helpful to have plan for an informal session (perhaps during a chorus retreat), to orient Big Sisters. Plan to give new Big Sisters a Big Sister Orientation/Information handout that includes a rough timeline of topics to discuss with Little Sisters, as well as a list of miscellaneous information that should be conveyed. This handout will undoubtedly get changed, updated, and revised regularly. At this orientation, allow ample opportunity for experienced Big Sisters to talk about what they have done that was successful, and what the experience meant to them. Current Little Sisters can also attend this orientation, and can be given the chance to offer feedback about the program.

### **Keeping Informed**

Develop a weekly or monthly e-mail communication with all the current Big/Little Sisters, as well as the most recent “graduated” Little Sisters. This informal message can remind Big Sisters to keep in touch with their Little Sister and list upcoming chorus events and “doings” that they will need to talk with them about. Big Sisters are encouraged to use all mediums in communicating with their Little Sister, e-mail, telephone, person-to-person.

### **Presenting Big/Little Sisters**

After new members are voted into the chorus, present them with their Big Sisters, and encourage cheers and wild applause. The Big Sister receives her information handout and her Little Sister's e-mail address and telephone number. Among the things you already give to new members (Member Handbook; chapter roster; flower; any chapter logo items; etc.), you can also present her with a Welcome Card, with her Big Sister's name, e-mail address and telephone number.

### **Graduating Little Sisters**

The commitment to be a Big Sister to a new member is a one-year job, although informally, these relationships sometimes carry on for years! Select a couple dates within any one-year, and conduct an informal graduation ceremony at the end of rehearsal for the Little Sisters whose one-year anniversary with you falls near that date. Little Sisters may receive a diploma or certificate to signify their "graduation" and something fun like a sparkly crown or halo with streamers they can wear home.

### **Beyond Graduation**

Resist the temptation to "drop the ball" on these Little Sisters just because they've passed the one-year mark and graduated. Don't fall victim to the *Middle Child Syndrome*, and have these members feel disenfranchised and quickly abandoned after that first year, in favor of the newest members to your chorus! Keep them on the weekly or monthly e-mail messages, and encourage them to become Big Sisters themselves when they feel confident enough to serve in that capacity.

Sweet Adelines International  
BUILD IT, AND THEY WILL COME;  
MAINTAIN IT, AND THEY WILL STAY  
Part 1  
Toula Oberlies

International Education Symposium  
Handout #5

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