

Commander-in-Chief Says Retention is Vital

Coming off a tremendous membership year, here's a look at some ways to keep your members and reconnect with those you haven't seen recently

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With the new membership year well under way, VFW Commander-in-Chief William "Doc" Schmitz has a message for all members: "Retention, retention, retention."

With the VFW attaining more than 100 percent membership for the first time in 27 years, culminating in July at the VFW's 120th national convention in Orlando, Fla., Schmitz said he wants the organization to keep the momentum.

"Let's make sure we are staying in touch with our members," Schmitz said. "Don't lose track of those new ones recruited last year. And reach out to those you haven't heard from in a while."

According to VFW Membership Deputy Director Rick McKenna, retention is all about personal interaction. While a phone call or email is nice, McKenna said it's face time that counts.

"If you haven't seen or heard from a member in a while, do a wellness visit," McKenna said. "You'll find that most members are very appreciative that you are taking time out of your day to visit with them."

McKenna said his Post — 7397 in Lenexa, Kan. — took a day in the spring to do just that. Eight members split up and visited more than 50 members in person. The Post leaders visited those whose memberships had lapsed or were about to lapse.

By the end of the day, 14 of those members had renewed. Several more re-upped shortly thereafter.

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McKenna said this “membership roundup” takes planning in order to get enough members to agree to participate. He advised planning at least 30 days in advance and then holding people accountable to show up.

He also said those visiting need to wear something that identifies them as VFW members so they aren’t confused for solicitors.

“It’s easy to get members back if you let them know you care,” McKenna said. “Just politely remind them that their dues have expired, but most importantly, show that you are there to check in on them.”

COMMUNICATION IS KEY TO RETENTION

A couple of the top membership recruiters last year have proven thoughts on retention. Tim Peters, of Post 10010 in East Helena, Mont., said his Post works hard at recruiting new members to attain 100 percent each year.

Peters doesn’t want to see that work go to waste. For him, the key to retention is showing the value of belonging to the Post.

“We have been successful by communicating with them throughout the year,” said Peters, the Department of Montana adjutant/quartermaster. “We send out newsletters to let our members know what their Post is doing and to invite them to Post meetings and events.”

Peters said the Post hosts a free banquet for its membership every year on the anniversary of the Post. At that event, Voice of Democracy and Patriot’s Pen winners are recognized, as is the Post’s Teacher of the Year.

“I truly believe that by knowing their Post is always doing something in the community, it makes them want to stay a member,” Peters said. “Even though they can’t all be active today because of work or family obligations, we feel encouraged that most of them will get active one day.”

The Persian Gulf War vet said his Post no longer asks annual members to renew their dues, but instead, asks them to continue their VFW membership. Peters said this points to the value of the person rather than the money.

“We let them know that they are valued members of the Post,” Peters said. “We ask them to extend their membership, and this has worked better than we ever thought it would. You just have to find what works for your Post.”

Immediate past commander of Post 9191 in Killeen, Texas, Carlo Davis admits it’s challenging to retain new members. To that end, the Post has a communications committee co-chaired by the Post’s junior vice commander and adjutant.

“We have to constantly communicate with the member and show them what we are doing in our community and for our veterans,” Davis said. “We must constantly reach out and keep the new members informed of our business meetings, community events and when their dues are due.”

Davis said his Post also offers incentives, such as a raffle for a life membership. There also are drawings for annual members to win a one-year paid renewal.

“Money is necessary, but not the solution to getting members to renew their memberships,” Davis said. “The members have to be passionate and have love for the comrades that make up our organization.”

Do you have a surefire way to keep members? If so, [send the VFW magazine an email](#).

This article is featured in the November/December issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Janie Dyhouse](#), senior editor for VFW magazine.