GIVE NEW MEMBERS THE PERSONAL TOUCH DURING CHAPTER ONBOARDING

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The first few months after they join your association, a new member is evaluating whether they made the right choice. Has membership met their expectations? Are they seeing a return yet on their dues investment? Did their chapter onboarding experience help them understand how to get the most out of their membership?

Chances are new members are having wildly different onboarding experiences depending on the chapter they joined. But members can get some semblance of a consistent chapter onboarding experience if both National and chapters focus on their strengths. National can contribute expertise and resources, while chapters focus on the human touch.

ELEMENTS OF A CHAPTER ONBOARDING PLAN

Our last post discussed collaborating with chapters on a new member onboarding plan, welcoming new members right away, and learning about their goals, needs, and interests.

SCHEDULE AN ONBOARDING EMAIL CAMPAIGN

https://www.billhighway.co/give-new-members-the-personal-touch-during-chapter-onboarding/
National’s onboarding email campaign should take a slow and steady approach so new members don’t experience information overload. Little by little, introduce them to the association, but only to what’s relevant for them. Select the content based on what you’ve learned from their membership application and any chapter outreach.

For example, send new vendor members an email suggesting best practices for developing relationships with fellow members, or introducing them to a few marketing opportunities. Young professionals might want to hear about early-career educational events or microvolunteering opportunities. C-suite professionals would like information about exclusive roundtables with their peers. Emails sent to a professional specialty segment could tell them about an upcoming webinar or job-specific online discussion forum.

All new members would benefit from hearing how to pursue common goals, such as connecting with other members, keeping up on industry news, contributing expertise or time, helping out on a project, or learning a new skill.
SUGGEST OPTIONS FOR NEW MEMBER ORIENTATION

The danger with in-person orientation sessions is yawn-inducing information overload. Instead, try a more enjoyable story-telling approach. Because stories stick in our memory, new members will be more likely to act upon what they’ve learned.

Volunteers could talk about how they got involved in the association/chapter and the different ways they’ve taken advantage of membership. Allow plenty of time for formal and informal Q&A, and follow up the next day with an email linking to relevant information.

MONTHLY NEW MEMBER MINGLES

The Kansas City chapter of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry (NARI) hosts monthly New Member Mingles, an opportunity for new members to network in a small group setting. Each attendee receives coupons to use in their first year of membership for discounts on educational programming, events, and membership renewal.

ENCOURAGE ONLINE CONFERENCING

Encourage chapters to host online orientations too since new members can’t always get to meetings—or host them yourself. You could do a live webinar and then make the recording available, or do the same on a web conferencing platform like Zoom.

HOST ONBOARDING WEBINARS

The International Coach Federation (ICF) hosts onboarding webinars to guide new members through ICF resources and benefits. An Associations Now article reported, “ICF uses the webinars as an opportunity to explain the ICF credential to new members. That promotion has paid off: ICF has seen a 39 percent increase in first-year members applying for the credential.”
ARRANGE A WELCOMING FIRST EVENT

Remind your chapters how it feels to walk into a room where you don’t know a soul and everyone is chatting it up with friends. Encourage them to make a special effort to welcome new members at their first few events. Put something on their badge that identifies them as a new member. That alone should prompt existing members to greet them warmly, but you could also add a name badge icebreaker.

NEW MEMBER AMBASSADORS

Ask members to volunteer as event ambassadors who welcome new members and introduce them to a few others in the room. National can provide a training video or best practices tip sheet for new member ambassadors.

ENCOURAGE STRUCTURED NETWORKING

Build in time for structured networking. New members need networking time to connect, but during open networking, association consultant Amanda Kaiser said, “Friends gravitate to friends leaving
new members feeling like they are the only one in the room who doesn’t know anyone.”

“Create guided discussions with a purpose. Roundtables, mastermind groups and discussion circles all fit the bill. These formats give [new or] potential members a chance to see that current members are just like them.”

At conferences and other large events, give new members a space of their own, like The Hive at ASAE’s Annual Meeting, where they can grab a coffee or water, relax, get questions answered, and meet other members. Ask members to “staff” the space for 30 to 60 minutes each—an other microvolunteering opportunity.

THINK MEMBER EXPERIENCE

Ask new members to pick up a gift before they leave the event. We heard about one association that gives new members a logo-ed coffee cup filled with treats to bring back to work. Assign a volunteer to call new members the week after the event to check in, hear about their experience, and suggest next steps.
LET MEMBERS CUSTOMIZE THEIR ASSOCIATION EXPERIENCE

Members are used to setting preferences with online services and brands. During onboarding, ask new members to update their member profile with interests and other data you can use to personalize their membership experience. For example, let them opt in to receiving information about specific types of microvolunteering opportunities, or allow them set the frequency and types of communications they want to receive.

During the first year of membership, your association and chapters will share lots of information with new members—and they will end up forgetting much of it. But you have time to slowly learn about them and introduce them to different relevant benefits of membership. By leveraging National’s resources and the chapter’s human touch, you can meet and exceed a new member’s expectations.
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Charlotte oversees marketing strategies and branding. She has a passion for learning and trying new things (and did we mention corgis?) that she brings to her daily work of understanding our target markets, building our brand and message, and determining our next marketing move.

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