

# Club Growth

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A club, an association of people for some common object usually jointly supported and meeting periodically, a group identified by some common characteristic, AMATEUR RADIO. What I'd like to do over the next year is to see how we, the staff and myself, could bring the SSC's and Affiliated clubs together in Kentucky. Each one has something to bring to the table to offer each other. Some are flourishing and others are struggling. Some are stagnant, others moving ahead with no looking behind. It would be nice to see each club prosper the same way. Starting this fall, early winter I'd like to get a list-serve started with each club having one representative appointed to it, the ACC, ASM's and the Section Manager so we can communicate with more power and revelation. Share ideas and of course support each other. We'll only grow in numbers if we offer the five ingredients spoke of by Del Albright in his article written on the Five Ingredients to a Membership-Building, which are; Individual Leadership, Motivation, Organizational Skills, Progressive Development of Future Leaders and Step Back. The strength and future of our favorite modes of Amateur Radio are going to rest for the most part with organized clubs and groups. That is not to say that individuals (non-joiners) cannot make a difference; the individual is what this country is all about. To be successful in the battle to gain membership in Amateur Radio Clubs, we must not only put aside proprietary internal feuds, but also find ways to increase membership in organized recreation.

**First Ingredient – Individual Leadership:** Leadership among volunteers is essential to increasing membership in your club/group. I am referring specifically to leading by example, practicing what you preach, asking for nothing you wouldn't do yourself, all the clichés you've heard before. But more importantly, a leader must be willing and able to make tough decisions, keep meetings on track and facilitate/mediate club feuds. A strong leader finds ways to maximize the talents of the club members, thereby distributing the workload and increasing the effectiveness of the club. A leader takes the advice of his/her staff and fellow volunteers, and makes a decision based on that input. A leader asks questions like what would you do? Or what do you suggest we do? You don't have to be a genius. You just need to listen to the folks around you and be that person that makes the decision to keep things rolling in the right direction. Then don't be afraid to let folks do the job you've given them. A strong leader of volunteers creates a process of building future leaders in the group. This is where the next ingredient comes into play.

**Second Ingredient – Motivation:** Members of volunteer groups/clubs need to believe in your cause before they will be motivated to help achieve it. It is the job of the leader to help volunteers reach down inside themselves and find those motivations, whatever they may be. You can lead to your heart's content, but if you can't inspire your followers into following, you'll be lonely "at the top." Volunteers join clubs and groups for many reasons. Usually they are at least interested in activities the group represents. The amount of their involvement relies on the motivation (and recognition) they receive. It is important that organized amateur radio clubs/groups provide a mechanism to feed the old ego just a little bit. Yes, we should not deny the fact that we like to be proud of what we do, both in our public service and play worlds. So the leaders of a club need to find ways to prove the value of their club and what it represents. That value must be translated into "credit" that is passed on to the individual members and the group as a whole. Finding worthwhile projects that benefit the community is of great value. It is critical that the leaders and organizers ensure that the "credit" belongs to the group, and not just to the leaders. A friend of mine said it simply: "You got to feel good about what you're doing, or why the heck do it?" Here is where we must learn to translate value into credit, then we are beginning to really build on our motivational factors. Many folks ask me why their club members just want to ride and not get involved in the group or in politics. Well, the answer is that someone has not given them the motivation to change their attitude. Perhaps the motivational factors have not hit their backyard yet. Or perhaps they just don't have the complete picture of what is happening in our country (without our input). You, the leader, must provide that information to give them the motivation to change the way they think.

Third Ingredient - Organizational Skills: It seems clear from my research that leadership and motivation will go only so far if you don't have the ingredient of organizational skills included in your recipe. These skills include everything from time and meeting management, to the basic requirements of planning, staffing and directing an event. Without some organizational skills, leaders will begin to lose followers; even in spite of motivation and interest levels. Frustratingly long and unproductive meetings will turn off your volunteers. Events that are poorly planned and executed will decrease the value of what you do, hence you will also decrease the motivation for staying in your group. I have yet to see many seminars or workshops offered by Amateur Radio groups that focus on establishing organizational skills in our volunteer leaders. Well, I think it's certainly time we changed that. We have to start investing in developing skills that result in leadership that motivates members to want to join and stay (productive) in our clubs and groups. If you're lucky enough to be on a convention planning committee someday, try pushing for a seminar on leadership. Maybe we could get one of the leaders from HQ to come and speak to the group.

Fourth Ingredient - Progressive Development of Future Leaders: Here is where we start to add the spices to our recipe. This step is where we reach out to those "lurkers" and quiet ones in our group to find the talent that has yet to surface. We find that talent and we use it. A good leader will capitalize on the skills of the group by learning to delegate responsibilities and tasks. We must share our knowledge and abilities with our volunteers, while at the same time helping them to become more involved in orchestrating and executing events/activities. To find that talent in your group, put together a simple survey form. Have everyone fill it out. Ask them what they're good at, or what they've had experience with. Compile a database and put it to work. It may start out with the delegation of small tasks. Then eventually, with some practice and a little training, we give folks larger and more complex tasks. I think you'll be surprised at how many people will rise to the occasion just because they've finally been given the chance (and responsibility). Again, though, I must emphasize that people need some training and development before they're thrown to the wolves of being "in charge" of something. It also seems relevant that if you have a pleasurable experience being "in charge" of something, then you're more likely to do it again. So if we prepare our future leaders with some training and progressive involvement, then we're very likely to encourage them to do more! They in turn, will help build and motivate other leaders (and more members to the group). A good leader of volunteers will give folks clear expectations and objectives. Expectations reflect the conditions and standards you put on how the job gets done and how people are treated in the process. Objectives reflect the measurements of how successful you are in the job you're doing. For example, in planning an off highway event, some expectations of the event organizer/leader might sound like this: I would like to avoid surprises and the last minute rush. Please keep me posted of any obstacles as we go along that might lead to a major crisis BEFORE they actually become one. Conduct your tasks as if you were in the shoes of the participants. Visualize how what you're doing is actually going to play out on the day of our event. I would like you to feel free to play the role of "devil's advocate" as we plan our event. This helps us to plan ahead of time to cover all the bases. Expectations are not really measurable, whereas objectives are. Some objectives for this same event might sound like this:

1. To conduct this event on schedule (on time).
2. To ensure this event runs smoothly, with a minimum of participant downtime.
3. To make safety our number one priority and avoid accidents and injuries.

In volunteer groups, leaders must seek out staff to develop and nurture. You may have to conduct surveys, ask for biographies/resumes, or interview every person in your group. But find ways to learn about what your folks are capable of and what their interests are (beyond just enjoying the sport). Then plug them into the process of furthering the sport so their enjoyment increases concurrently. Then it's time to add the final ingredient.

Fifth Ingredient - Step Back: Other words for this ingredient are empower, encourage, counsel, and guide. The bottom line is that as a current leader, after you have given a volunteer some training, presented some clear expectations and objectives to ensure a successful endeavor, step back and let folks do their job. Don't meddle or micro-manage. If it's not getting done the way you, the leader wants it done, then it's probably because YOU didn't paint a clear enough picture of the soup you were trying to concoct! If you have to jump in and follow-up on every detail of an event, then I suggest you look at the expectations and objectives you gave out

in the first place. Summary: These ingredients can help a club build a better, stronger membership. But it is also important to look at your recruiting efforts if you are having a retention problem. At a conference recently, I heard the expression: "Stop recruiting until you analyze why retention is a problem." This is a valuable point. If members are dropping out of your organization, do a survey or interview, or whatever it takes to find out why. Find out what it would take to get them back. Correct the problems, and then jump back into a full-fledged recruiting effort. Take the time (and effort) to train leaders and look for ways to empower people to become more involved in your sport or club. Let them step up to the plate because they know how and want to. And if you have followed the five ingredients mentioned above, you'll find your members recruiting for you. You'll be on the road to a strong, healthy volunteer organization.

Ham radio needs to be accessible to people. We hams need to welcome in people that would like to be in our hobby. Hams need to be thoughtful with questions from people new to the hobby. There is no place in this hobby for "hazing" new folks, even if the rules for obtaining a license have changed. If the FCC licenses a person, then he or she is a ham...that's the only requirement. But if we don't make ham radio accessible and make new hams feel welcome, there won't be any old days 20 years from now. If we make someone feel lousy who can't possibly comprehend the old days because they weren't there, then people will stop joining our merry little band of communicators. Then we will lose our spectrum for lack of use, and when people say "do they still do that?" when they talk about ham radio, the answer will be "no".

Credit given to Del Albright on his article written on the Five Ingredients to a Membership-Building.

Source: Kentucky Amateur Radio Web Site – <http://www.qsl.net/kd4pw/>