

33 Simple Ways to Build Member Loyalty

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By: *Joseph C. Isaacs, CAE, and Vinay Kumar*

One of the biggest reasons associations lose constituents is indifference to members' need for some affection. Simply put, if you don't love your members and demonstrate that they matter, somebody else will, earning their membership and business.

Without the capacity to retain and attract members, your association has less clout, less engagement, and less revenue. Moreover, the expense of recruiting new members significantly exceeds holding on to the ones you have.

When your members feel loved, they buy more, they buy more often, they're more loyal, they engage, and they are willing to give of their time and energy and recommend you to others.

With these thoughts in mind, here is a list of 33 simple ways you can love your members, in ways that can be meaningful and memorable and will contribute to a stronger, more fulfilling relationship.

1. Smile

People do business with people they like. Smiling is a gesture understood universally as warm and welcoming. It makes everyone, both sender and recipient, feel good and at ease. You can even sense a smile during phone conversations and in correspondence. Smile broadly, whenever appropriate, in all your one-to-one membership communications.

2. Send Handwritten Thank-You Notes

When was the last time someone sent you a handwritten thank-you note? Or you sent one to a member? They are so rare these days that, when your member receives one, it will stand out and be remembered for the more individualized contact it is.

3. Send Valentine's Day Greetings

Send your members a personalized e-message or card, along with a clever poem.

Roses are red,

Violets are blue,

We wish we had

More members like you!

4. Acknowledge Them on Thanksgiving

The year-end holidays are the time when the greetings we send can get lost in the clutter. Instead, send members personalized cards at Thanksgiving. What better time to convey your association's gratitude for their involvement and support? Have association board members sign these cards personally so they have a genuine, peer-to-peer feeling.

5. Listen

People often don't feel heard. Take the time to listen to your members, to both their spoken and unspoken messages. You will not only pick up valuable information that can help your association; it will also strengthen the relationship because you care enough to listen and encourage their openness.

6. Keep an Open House

Invite your members to come by and visit your headquarters whenever they are in town, and designate certain staff with responsibility that can give them a tour and introduce them to the people who deliver their goods and services. Open houses can strongly contribute to lasting positive impressions if you have your house in order and keep staff attuned to hosting such visitors.

7 Ask Questions

Conduct periodic surveys to obtain member feedback and insights into members' interests, needs, concerns, and views. Members appreciate it when you ask for and respect their opinion. So be sure to report back on the findings and about how their feedback will be used (e.g., strategic-plan development, assessing current programs, evaluating communications, and so on).

8. Keep in Touch After Their Departure

Even when members leave the association, stay in touch with them. Remember the adage, "Out of sight, out of mind." Departures from membership often have more to do with economics than disappointment with the association. Keeping lines of communication open will keep departed members informed of products and events in which they can still engage and will increase the likelihood they'll return when circumstances improve.

9. Happy Birthday!

If you can capture the birth dates (no year needed) of your members (or their representatives in institutional membership associations), you can recognize their birthdays with a card and handwritten note. Wish them a wonderful birthday, thank them for their membership, and include a gift certificate for use in the association's store.

10. Share Information on a Member's Interest

Make an effort to learn what your members' individual interests are. If you come across a book or article that fits the interests of a member, send it to the member along with a note to say the information made you think of him or her.

11. Advance Their Writing and Speaking Skills

Associations offer exceptional opportunities (educational events, journals, trade magazines, and more) to showcase members' knowledge and expertise. While some members engage in these confidently, others would like to but lack confidence in their public speaking and professional writing skills. Your association can offer training in these basic skill sets. Even if it does not result in authorships or volunteer service, the training will be appreciated for advancing key competencies and contributing to personal growth.

12. Foster Community

Associations are all about affinity building, and whether it's via listservers, forums, blogs, or social media venues, offering opportunities to exchange strategies and solutions can be invaluable outlets, even for lurkers. Whether they are Lonely Heart Club members or manning the kissing booth, members want to feel a part of something larger than them. To encourage engagement, put out a trivia question from time to time and announce that the first member to post the correct answer wins a prize.

13. Allow Members to Share Their Avocations

Members are more than their professional or trade identities. They may be great chefs, artists, dancers, musicians, or collectors. Provide an outlet such as a regular member-spotlight column to share this side of them with other members. You can also have recipe exchanges, cook-offs, and member art shows at your annual meeting. Don't limit your affinity building to just industry or field interests.

14. Keep 'em Informed

Keep your members updated on your progress routinely. It not only demonstrates your accountability, but it also emphasizes your dedication to serving them and your awareness that their satisfaction cannot be achieved without regular, open communication.

15. Make It Right

If something goes wrong, don't delay. Quickly apologize and make it right. We don't agree with the adage from the movie *Love Story* that says "love means never having to say you're sorry." On the contrary, love means saying you're sorry because you know the other party will be more understanding if you respond quickly and explain how you will rectify the matter.

16. Don't Leave 'em Hanging

If a member makes a mistake in his or her dealings with the association, contact the member immediately and ask what you can do to help. To err is human! Show them you recognize that we all make mistakes and take the long view even if it may require some expense at your end. If you do, the member will be more likely to reciprocate when the roles are reversed.

17. Take the High Road

When problems arise with members, don't play the blame game. No one wins. Instead, focus on just making it right, no matter who is at fault. People tend to forget who was at fault. But they'll be likely to remember how you handled it. Remember these two basic rules of business: 1. The customer is always right, and 2. If the customer is wrong, see and accept rule number one.

18. Save 'em Money

Accept that everyone works hard for his or her money. If you see a way to help your members save money, even if it means less for you, let them know. They'll recognize and value you as a business partner and not merely as a dues collector.

19. Get Things Done Efficiently

Members often feel overloaded. Help them by getting their interactions with the association handled as efficiently and pleasantly as possible. Continuously review your systems and processes, from initial customer contact to tracking to delivery to billing to evaluation of customer satisfaction. Look for opportunities to make improvements at each and every touch point.

20. Be Honest

If you don't know something, admit it. Then go to work to find answers and get back to your members promptly. Members don't expect you to have all the answers, but they do expect and appreciate honesty and your willingness to make an extra effort.

21. Keep Your Promises

This is a core principle of good business. If you make a promise, be sure to keep it. Your word is your deed, and building your reputation for honesty is essential to earning the trust that will keep members in the fold.

22. Celebrate Their Success

Celebrate your members' successes (major contracts or grants, awards, new degrees, promotions, and so forth) by announcing and toasting their accomplishments.

23. Stand By Members in Tough Times

We all hit hard times at one point or another. Stand by those that do, offer your assistance, and cut them slack. Forego dues for a year or offer scholarships to various events based on need. It's the right thing to do. And what goes around comes around when you are faced with your own challenges.

24. Always Be Respectful

Treat others as you would have them treat you. It is the golden rule in all aspects of life. Respect your members, their decisions, and their choices. You don't always have to agree with their actions, but it is important to accept their right to their own opinions.

25. Serve as a Sounding Board

Often members need a third party who they can bounce ideas off of and who will offer an objective voice to help sort through their ideas and challenges. Invite such contact and refer it to the most appropriate staff. Relationships rely on two-way communication, and your ear and insights can be therapeutic and may also uncover a business opportunity for the association or an issue that may be addressed before it erupts further.

26. Help With Career Advancement and Job Hunting

This has been a particular strength of professional societies, but the experience of the current economy and unemployment suggests that all associations should love their members by formally and informally lending them a hand when they seek career-advancement opportunities and new jobs. Let them know their association is an important participant in their networking.

27. Personalize Your Communications

Your members are real people. Call them by their names. Let them know you know them, and invite them to call your staff by your first names as well. It is a sign not of informality but rather familiarity.

28. Offer How-To Guidance

Regardless of the type of association, members will be at different stages in their development. Addressing “nuts- and-bolts” challenges, which continue to evolve, will always be sought from associations. Encourage member success by developing and making available the how-tos on best practices, regulatory responses, or pursuing more effective operations and strategy.

29. Present Them With Occasional Gifts

Some associations have added fans by offering members periodic complimentary access to informative and well-received online continuing education. We've certainly taken advantage of such free offers from associations we're members of and, though we had no obligation, responded by purchasing more.

30. Offer Links to Other Resources

Associations must be seen by their members as a resource, and that means accepting the fact that other sources may be better positioned to help. Seek reciprocal relationships with other

outlets and organizations and share links on your websites. Members will respect you for it. As an added bonus, you may just turn your competitor into an ally and business partner.

31. Go the Extra Mile

If members come to you for information or services and you can't deliver, don't just leave it at "Sorry, we can't be of assistance." Instead, if you know of an alternative source, acknowledge that, "While we don't have or provide that, you can obtain it from ..." even if it is a competitor. That kind of selflessness scores big with members and breeds loyalty.

32. Acknowledge Achievements

Regardless of the type of association you're with, the association plays a major role in providing opportunities to recognize and reward excellence and provide members with a metric for their own success. Make sure you have a robust awards program and help those who model outstanding achievement to shine as an example to other members.

33. Walk in the Park

At all your meetings, weather permitting, schedule a walk together with participants. Research has shown that walking side by side with others fosters agreement and mutual appreciation. Not only will you foster your members' good feelings about the association and each other, but you will also offer needed exercise.

Joseph C. Isaacs, CAE, is president of New Heights Management Consulting Group and vice president of public policy at the United Spinal Association in Washington, DC. Vinay Kumar is president of Vinay Kumar Associates and senior advisor at Marketing General, Inc., in Alexandria, Virginia. Emails: jisaacs@unitedspinal.org, vinay@vinaykumarassociates.com