

Housecalls at Work

Answers from Dr. Insite

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Dr. Insite is an ongoing column to address people-related issues in nonprofit organizations. For answers to your workplace issues, please e-mail your questions to DrInsite@coreinsites.com. All responses will be handled confidentially.

DEAR DR. INSITE:

I am the Executive Director of a state association. Over the last few years our membership has been relatively flat. We have had some attrition, and we have not been attracting new members. How can we use our strategic planning process to tackle this pressing issue?

DEAR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:

Increasing membership is a primary concern of associations and their leadership. But all too often, people talk about the problem, and they never attack the issue strategically. Here are a few guiding questions to help you in this vital area:

- **Have you established—growing and retaining membership—as a leading goal for your association?** Without agreement that this is a prime focus for everyone in the association, you will not have the energy and support to achieve significant change.
- **Have you set a compelling and challenging number as a membership target?** Research suggests that performance

is closely correlated with aspirations. We usually achieve at a level we strive for. Measures communicate expectations and drive behaviors. By setting a number that is a reasonable stretch, you have a quantifiable goal that everyone understands.

- **Do you regularly monitor progress in achieving increased membership?** Just setting a goal is the beginning. If members do not regularly discuss their progress in achieving that goal, chances are slim that you will be successful. Let monitoring your progress be an ongoing part of Board meetings and Executive Committee discussions.
- **Have you discovered what programs and services will promote increased membership as well as retain members?** Members must feel the association is adding value to their lives. Take opportunities through meetings, discussions and surveys to evaluate current and prospective programs and services to enhance the value of membership. Similarly, use a luncheon or dinner setting to bring together prospective members to

learn the things that would propel them to join.

- **Do you have a customer-focused culture?** The association lives and breathes because of its membership. You must take the lead in promoting a culture that is service-focused and that sees its purpose of advancing the work of its members as vital work. When you are surrounded by people who are passionate about their work, you will find that membership goals are easier to achieve. ●

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