

## RETENTION

“The great thing in this world is not so much where we are, but in what direction we are moving”  
– Oliver Wendell Holmes

OK. So you have publicized your organization in the Daily Illini, at Quad Day and in the residence halls. You now have the largest, most energetic group in the history of your organization. How can you keep them that way?

Member retention is one of the most overlooked – yet extremely important – aspects of an organization. So many people feel that as long as their members show up for meetings, they must be enjoying themselves. Losing group members does not typically occur because the member has failed the group; more often than not, the member feels the group failed him.

Keeping members interested, excited and feeling responsible for the success of the organization are key factors in member retention. There are several ways to accomplish this which are not difficult or magical – they just take a bit of practice and conscious effort.

- Get a good start. Making new members feel welcomed and appreciated from their first meeting goes a long way. Make a special effort, as an individual and with your group, to warmly welcome new members and let them know you are glad they are there.
- Goal-setting. Setting goals together as a group helps members feel more responsible for completing the goal. People are more likely to support ideas and projects that they were involved in creating.
- Team builders. Nearly everyone groans at the statement “Let’s do an icebreaker!” but they work! Doing team-building exercises every so often helps people get to know one another, strengthens the bond within the group and often reminds people that the group needs each and every one of them in order to succeed.
- Recognize success. How disheartening it is to work hard on a project only to have it fade away without being recognized. When your members work hard, reach a goal or pull off an event, thank them!
- Delegate. What is the point of being in a group if you have no responsibility? Delegate assignments as much as possible. If members have specific responsibilities, they will feel more important and necessary.
- Ask for opinions. Group meetings in which one person does all the talking may go quickly (or may not!) but generally do not leave members feeling valued. Encourage group discussion in your meeting and make a point to ask for the opinions or suggestions of your

particularly quiet members.

- Keep them informed. Do everything you can to keep your members abreast of group activities. Send them copies of the agenda prior to the meeting, distribute the minutes within two days after the meeting, make announcements of major changes prior to the rumor mill getting started. Do not keep them guessing.
- Create individual mission statements. Many organizations have group mission statements which are excellent for keeping on track and working towards a common goal. It is also a good idea for each member to write their own mission statement: Why am I a member of this group? What do I hope to get out of my participation? What talents can I contribute to the group? If someone's only reason for participation is "resume building," he may want to reconsider his membership or find other motivating reasons for being involved.
- Show your support. Encourage your members and support them in their projects and ideas. Let them know they have someone they can turn to for help, support and guidance.
- Communication. Keep the lines of communication open. If your members feel they can freely ask questions or voice concerns, they will be more likely to remain in the group with a positive attitude.

Brainstorm with your executive board to think up other strategies on retaining members. Also, talk with your group. Find out what they like about the organization and what can improve. You might be amazed at how helpful some frank discussions can be!

**Reference:** Taylor, M.A. (1991). Organizational R&R. Western Illinois University.

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