



Chapter Connection

Membership Engagement

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You have scheduled quality speakers for relevant RIM topics and advertised well, but it seems like only your board members and a handful of core members consistently show up. This is a common problem when folks can get the same education through excellent white papers and quality online webinar presentations. So that begs the question, “Why would someone choose to take an hour or two out of their day once a month to attend a local chapter meeting?”

I am convinced that – in the words of the song writers/philosophers, Gary Portnay & Judy Hart-Angelo – it is because:

Making your way in the world today takes everything you’ve got. Taking a break from all your worries sure would help a lot. Wouldn’t you like to get away? Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name and they’re always glad you came; you want to be where you can see, our troubles are all the same; you want to be where everybody knows your name.

In our high tech, disconnected world, people are looking for reasons to connect with other like-minded folk. We need to give them those reasons. As chapter leaders, one of our key responsibilities is to give our members opportunities to connect and to have a “**VOICE**,” as described below.

Volunteers

So, where are they anyway? There are those exceptional few extroverts out there that will show up to a meeting, introduce themselves, and ask, “How can I help?” Let’s face it, it would sure make our task as chapter leaders easier if there were more of these people, but they are the rare exception. Keep in mind, though, that members show up because they want to be personally involved in what is going on, so proceed with confidence.

If you are being turned down with regularity when you ask for volunteers, change your tactic. This is a scary approach: “Hi, would you be our programs director next year?”

A more successful approach might be: “Hi, we are looking for some assistance on our board for next year. We have openings for programs and community outreach. As the programs director, you would be responsible for assisting us in selecting topics and scheduling speakers. The community outreach director helps us find ways to give back to the community. Which of these is a better fit for you?”

Here is the best approach: “Would you be available from time to time to assist one of our directors? In hospitality, you could help welcome and check in our attendees and hand out name tags. Working with our programs team would entail helping us come up with fresh ideas for relevant and interesting meetings. Coming alongside the community outreach



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director, you could help with the logistics of setting up our senior shred day. Where do you see yourself best helping out?"

In this last approach, members are mentored into positions without having the full responsibilities thrust upon them, which can be overwhelming and is often the reason we are turned down when we use the initial scary approach.

Outreach Opportunities

Research shows that a key reason for club/organization involvement is that we want to make a difference in our communities. This is often a low priority in our chapters and something we do only when we can fit it in. It is however, a great way to help our members connect and feel a sense of belonging and fulfillment.

It is great when we can set up the big events...senior shred day is a common example. This type of event can take a lot of time and manpower that we just do not have...so nothing happens. Start small and work up to the occasional bigger event.

On a regular basis, your members can be encouraged to participate by bringing donations to a chapter meeting. Here are some examples of what some of the chapters have done:

- September – Back to school donations of school supplies
- November – Thanksgiving food drives; bring canned or boxed foods or perhaps volunteer to serve at a local food bank.
- December – This is a great month to bring in Toys for Tots.
- February – With Valentine's day, you can "Show the Love" by donating blood at Red Cross.

Be creative and come up with some of your own ideas. Reward the participants by allowing them to be part of a raffle. Vendors/sponsors might donate gifts, or the gift can be as simple as a free ticket to your next chapter meeting. Even better, give the winner two tickets – one for him or her and an extra for a non-member guest. (Win-Win!)

Invite Them!

We have to get them to our meetings before we can get them involved. This suggestion seems silly at first, as we all invite people. The question is, "Can we do it better?" After all, few are showing up.

The problem is generally not for a lack of advertising. Many of us are sending multiple e-mail blasts and going so far as to advertise on Facebook, LinkedIn, and other social media outlets.

When was the last time you personalized your invitation? How about picking up the phone or writing a postcard? There is nothing like having someone tell you that you have been missed and it would be great to see you at the next meeting. Enthusiastically, tell them why you are going to the next meeting.

Once they are there, give them a task. Following the president's welcome, ask them to participate in the meeting by introducing themselves and then reading the list of the



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chapter sponsors. Hand them a short paragraph about the following meeting that they can read at the end of the meeting inviting members to come back.

Collaborative Connections

This is a fancy way of saying “networking.” (I needed a “C.”) Many of our members work for organizations where they are the entire records “team.” Having the resources that a chapter full of experienced members brings is a huge asset and one of the top reasons people attend chapter meetings. It is tough to network without being face-to-face; just ask yourself how many of your LinkedIn connections are beneficial to your day-to-day job responsibilities. The encouragement that comes from knowing that the people in the room can relate to what you are dealing with can be very comforting.

Think about having a meeting specifically for networking and establishing collaborative connections. If nothing else, your vendor/sponsors will love it and surely attend.

Educate with a Purpose

Education, after all, is our main purpose for existing. We desire to be the key authority on managing records and information. When building your program schedule, be intentional. Think about who your members are, what the main professions in your community are, and who it is you wish to reach. Target key groups and then personally invite them to attend.

Get your sponsors involved. They will appreciate the opportunity and be more likely to continue their sponsorship of the chapter. Have a well-balanced diet of topics throughout the year. Your members will only attend so many talks about e-mail archiving or differentiating records management from information governance. Headquarters can be a huge help here, as well as *Information Management* magazine.

Overall, be creative, be diligent, and be personal. Welcoming all guests with a smile and handshake to let them know you are glad they came is essential. Yes, attendees need to leave our meetings feeling that they learned something in order to justify their time, but they also need to have enjoyed themselves in order to want to return. Help them to find their VOICE within the chapter and they will. Good luck.