

## Is Membership Dead or Dying?

*Are you involved in an incorporated society? Is your incorporated society struggling to attract and retain members? Are you noticing that many people now just seem to want a more casual involvement? If so it is likely that these issues will be starting to impact the future sustainability of your incorporated society.*

It appears that many New Zealand incorporated societies are starting to notice these trends.

I was fortunate enough to attend a recent seminar by Belinda Moore, an Australian who runs a consultancy called Strategic Membership Services. Belinda is an expert and author on the topic of membership issues and her seminar traversed some of these increasingly common issues. Some of the key points that came out in the seminar and subsequent discussion were as follows.

If you have noticed changes in membership well hold on...because more is probably coming. Mainly this is a result of demographic and lifestyle changes in our society. Some of the more significant changes include:

- An aging population
- Busier lifestyles than in past generations
- Increasingly a more independent and self-absorbed focus of many individuals
- More individual pursuits rather than group pursuits e.g. going to a gym rather than playing a team sport
- More choice and hence increased competition for one's time

The above factors contribute to fewer traditional "do'ers" in many clubs, i.e. those that pitch in and take on organisational and administration roles. This in turn can result in this small group of club people being overloaded and burning out. Many busy people would rather spend their money than their time; hence clubs have to be aware of this.

### Enough Diversity in Your Membership and Model?

Many clubs are built by existing members, for the existing members. As a result they run the risk of not considering, or in some cases I suspect not being aware of, what is required to attract younger or a different class of members. Failure to do so can seriously expose the club to a sustainability risk as their traditional existing membership naturally ages and numbers decline.

To attract a different audience firstly one must seek to understand what it is that makes them different in terms of desires and characteristics.

Many clubs are currently managed and governed by baby boomers. As a generalisation, and not meaning any disrespect, baby boomers are sometimes characterised by being resistant to change.

### Some Possible Solutions to Consider:

Consider the opportunities for your club to offer more diverse membership structures that can accommodate both the traditional and the ad hoc participants. i.e. if some people just want occasional pay per play - how can your club accommodate that?

Does your club understand your different audiences and are you segmenting your communication accordingly? As my 14 year old said the other day; "Email is for old people Dad, put it on Facebook." Make sure you understand your audiences and that your communication is relevant and appropriate for them and delivered via the right medium.

Offer opportunities for ad-hoc volunteering and involvement. Many people balk at the thought of what they perceive as the huge on-going workload of the committee. Often with good reason from what they see of many committee members. However these same people will often happily consider a short term defined involvement.

Membership is largely about community. Therefore successful clubs need to actively work to encourage and engage members to keep their communities strong. So what is the glue in your club's community?

### Some key community building aspects to consider are:

- How are new members inducted? Who takes the time and care to help them into the club's community?
- What is the on-going communication to keep members updated and advised of reasons why belonging is important and where there are opportunities to be involved?
- What are the great events run by your club that are memorable for existing members and help attract new members?
- What is your annual membership renewal process? Does it remind members of the good things about the club and reinforce them being part of the community? Remember that the annual membership renewal is effectively a referendum on your club's value proposition!

For more information on this topic see Belinda Moore's very good article on her website at <http://www.smsonline.net.au/pages/membership-is-dead.html>



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