

First Year in the Life of a New AFA Member

By Randy Coggins, Membership Committee

Over the past year, we have contacted a variety of members across AFA wanting to know what they felt was the most important factor in a new member's experience (this applies to individual and Community Partner membership). As a part of this research, we also contacted several chapters that won a retention award last year.

While there wasn't a universal answer, there were two common themes...personal contact and communication by the local chapter early in a new member's experience with AFA.

The first 90 days may be the most critical time to make contact and welcome a new member. For whatever reason a person decides to join AFA, they have some expectation about our organization. That may be difficult to determine for each individual, but as a whole most people expect something in return for their financial and personal commitment.

Have you ever thought about what you expected from AFA when you joined? How about from other organizations you've joined? What will I get in return for my membership dues?

Most people want an acknowledgment of their membership...say a 'welcome letter'. Others want some information about the organization they just joined both at the national and local level. Some may want to know about activities or meetings in the local area in which they can attend or participate. A few may want to know about positions in the chapter where they can volunteer their leadership skills. Almost everyone appreciates belonging to a professional organization that keeps them informed.

The first 90 days may very well be the key to retention of members as well. A person who is welcomed into an organization and is kept informed of ongoing events is more likely to renew their membership. There is a sense of belonging and of ownership resulting from personal interaction and participation.

The Air Force has a checklist for almost every task, so let's create a checklist for the first 90 days after a new member joins AFA:

1. Send a Welcome Letter...make them feel appreciated and tell them why you're glad they joined! (The D.W. Steele Chapter has a great welcome letter.)
 - a. Tell them about your chapter and AFA in general.
 - b. Highlight upcoming local chapter events and activities.
 - c. Provide your chapter's website. (Let them know if you have a calendar on your website where they can check on dates of events.)

- d. Note the date/time/place your chapter has their monthly Executive Committee meeting and let them know they are welcome to attend.
 - e. Include a personal contact (with phone number) within the chapter.
 - f. Don't forget AFA members transferring their membership to your chapter. They want to be welcomed and informed just as a new member.
2. Make a personal call (phone or e-mail) to welcome them. Assign a POC or 'Buddy' to welcome new members.
 3. Establish an e-mail membership database.
 - a. Send monthly or quarterly reminders of upcoming chapter events
 - b. Notify of EXCOM meetings
 - c. Provide updates (let them know what their Membership helped do....scholarships, grants, education, CyberPatriot, accomplishments with Congress, pay raises for our Air Force, got new planes, etc)
 - d. Spotlight new members (individuals and CPs) in your quarterly newsletters
 4. Recruit them to participate in committees where they have an interest. Develop your future leaders.
 5. Include families in chapter activities when appropriate.
 6. Ensure activities are planned that encourage participation from all membership areas (Active Duty, ANG, AFRC, Enlisted, Officers, Civilians, Retirees, Families, Industry, CPs.)
 7. Send a renewal letter. (Highlight what their membership has helped accomplish at the National, Regional and Local levels.)
 8. Treat member as a Stakeholder in all communications.
 9. If their membership lapses, send a letter reminding them of the importance of their membership and how they can renew--send an application. (Alamo Chapter's Membership lead sends a very good letter.)

It takes teamwork to accomplish any goal. Every member of AFA is on the Membership Committee, so the responsibility is not just for the Membership lead.

In the words of Henry Ford, *"Coming together is a Beginning, Keeping together is Progress, Working together is Success."*

NOTE: This checklist is still in draft stage and we are soliciting your feedback to improve its content. Once it is finalized, we will post it on the AFA website for your use. Please send your comments to Randy Coggins at wmarcoggins@gmail.com.