

Recruitment and Retention:

Once You've Got Them, You Gotta Keep Them

BLUF:

Recruitment is like fishing – get the hook in them but then you must hold onto them and make them successful. When bringing in new members, make sure they know what will be expected of them once they become a member in order to maintain their membership.

Bringing new members into your department is crucial to the success and the future of your organization. Some potential members come to you ready and raring to go while others you must seek out and then increase their interest and desire to give back to their community.

One of the most obvious issues to consider when recruiting and retaining members is to ensure they have all the information you can provide to make them comfortable that they are making the right decision.

It is a known fact that everyone who comes through your doors won't necessarily be a successful candidate as a volunteer firefighter or emergency medical technician. Everyone has different reasons for applying for membership with an emergency services organization. You must do what you can to learn those needs and do what is possible to satisfy the needs in order to retain them as members.

However, it must be understood that the process starts much earlier. Recruitment with the intent to retain recruits starts with making sure you are providing every potential new member with as much information as possible before they "sign on the dotted line".

Things they need to know:

- What are the training requirements to ride?
- When will I be able to ride?
- When will I be able to drive?
- Where are classes held? When?
- What "duty" requirements do I need to meet?
- What other responsibilities do I have as a member (bingo, bull roast, carnival, etc.)?
- Many other organizational specific concepts....

My personal introduction to becoming a member was when a co-worker brought me an application. I filled it out and return to him along with five dollars and just like that - I was a member (once they voted on my application of course). I had no idea what was expected of me but it really didn't matter – it was something I just really wanted to do. But remember – I was probably the exception. Many potential

members do not come to us that fully committed to the concept of being a volunteer. It is imperative that your potential members know what you will require of them *before* they join. Otherwise, you are bound to vote them in only to see many of them vanish in a very short time as they learn of commitments they were not prepared to make (heard many times in the firehouse - "we vote in a lot of people but where are they?")

Why is this important? Well, to begin with, it can (and should) take a considerable amount of time and effort (and in some cases – money) to bring new members on board with your department. It takes (or should take) even more to keep them once they are "in the door". Given that, you want to ensure that the effort you and your organization make to recruit and retain these members is focused on those who are committed to what you are asking of them. Weeding out the uncertain or non-committed applicant "at the door" allows you to focus on those who are eager and ready to go.

One last thing to consider: if someone decides after hearing what is expected that they are not ready to join, at least they have the information that could lead to them returning again in the future when they are in a position to satisfy all of the requirements to be a successful part of your organization – and that's what we all want and need.

Think: "An informed member is our best member".