

XCEL Points

For Leadership Success

Campus Center and Student Activities Department

Retention

Why is Retention Important?

Retention is an important aspect of any organization. Once the school year begins, activities such as involvement fairs, new student orientation and advertisements gather the interest of both new and returning students. These events will usually peak their curiosity enough to attend meetings, programs and consider becoming a member of the organization if they are interested.

Once these members come to a few meetings, they will decide whether or not they want to continue their involvement with the organization or if they should try something else. This is where retention comes in. Retention is important because it not only ensures that an organization will grow and develop future leadership from within, but it also provides an opportunity for the growth in the organization as a whole. With more members, any group will have the opportunity to meet and educate more students about the organization and what it strives to achieve.

What Can You Do to Retain Members?

Retention can be a simple part of any organization if the leadership is aware of the role that they play within the group. Many leaders take on additional responsibility or tasks to feel as if they are the true leaders of the organization. However, this can be a harmful thought process for organizational growth. Students become part of an organization traditionally, because they are able to share common interests or values with their peers, are allowed to socially interact and want to be involved. Below is a list of ways that you can insure member retention within your organization.

1. **Provide a sense of belonging:** members of your organization do not go to meetings because it is someplace they feel they have to go like class, they go because they feel as if they belong and are contributing in some way. Be sure to introduce new members and provide an open and welcoming environment of just not people, but ideas and opinions. Each voice should be heard.
2. **Set goals as a group:** No one wants to be part of a dictatorship. Organizations should set goals not only within the executive board, but with the general membership as well. Members will be more interested in helping the organization reach its goals if they have shared their vision for the organization as well. Those who have assisted in progressing the group will feel ownership, which will provide motivation to assist the group.
3. **Challenge members:** Make sure that the executive board is not doing all the work! Use delegation as a key element in retaining members and getting any task at hand done. This does not mean that leaders should only hand down menial tasks, but rather use the personal strengths of members and their interests to include them in long term projects or important tasks. Ask if anyone would like to step out of their comfort zone and try something new. This will assist in making members have ownership in the organizational activity and, additionally, takes the work load off the organizational leadership.
4. **Do not just think of new members:** Yes, it is important to retain new members, but one must also focus on the existing members as well. Similar to new members, existing members also want to be challenged and included in the organization. Those who have been around for more than a year could take on a greater role within the organization, whether that be by chairing an ad-hoc committee or mentoring a new member.



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Retention Tips

1. Offer feedback from advisors and peers
2. Organize an effective training program
3. Provide a sense of unity
4. Compliment good work
5. Reward good efforts (certificates and trophies)
6. Initiate recognition (press releases, awards)
7. Provide financial reimbursement (out of pocket expenses)
8. Initiate social interaction (contests)
9. Recognize individual achievement (remembering birthdays, special honors)
10. Allow for new challenges
11. Install a suggestion box
12. Allow volunteer participation in decisions which effect workers
13. Recognize new members that come to meetings and make them feel welcome



Christense, V.R. and Myers R.C. "Motivating Volunteers: What Makes Them Tick" Programming, November 1979, page 48.

Ways to Measure and Increase Retention

1. Take attendance at meetings
2. Keep an active member list: Keep an active member list for the organization's records and review it on a regular basis. You will be able to see who has and has not been attending meetings.
3. Make personal connections with those who have not been attending meetings and ask them why they have not been coming or what would have made their experience more beneficial for them.
4. Set expectations regarding what the leadership of the organization and the general membership expects from each other.
5. Review goals and regularly ask for feedback regarding the organization.
6. Keep or start a database of members to pass through the organization each year. This will provide a longer range of assessment connected to retention.
7. Create an evaluation for the middle and end of the academic year. Ask members about their experience, what they liked and what they did not. Additionally, ask them about why they stayed involved in the organization. This can provide some insight to the leadership regarding what the next steps are for growth and what should be changed on a regular basis.

"We don't accomplish anything in this world alone ... and whatever happens is the result of the whole tapestry of one's life and all the weavings of individual threads from one to another that creates something."

~ Sandra Day O'Connor



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