

Doing Nothing: How's That Working For Your Chapters?



As a result of limited staff, small budgets and the reliance on volunteers, many chapters – by choice, complacency or necessity – make minimal or no changes to what they offer and how they deliver it, in areas like membership, engagement and technology usage.



This approach, while safe and easy, is also quite limiting. And dangerous. Being passive leaves your chapters vulnerable to outside forces that can decrease your membership and could eventually be the end of some of your chapters. Those forces include:

- The economy, as members and guests decide their limited dollars are best spent elsewhere
- Competition from other networking opportunities
- The availability of professional development content online
- Membership fatigue and/or boredom

When your leadership believe the status quo is acceptable, your members get more of what they already have, day after day, year after year. If there are normally 35 people at your chapter's monthly meetings, you'll continue to see 35 people at those meetings. More than likely, it will be the same 35 people each time, and there's a good chance they come for the pizza, not for the speaker.

Doing nothing means that your membership rate remains average; an average number of people join, renew and leave, and you have a reputation for being, well...average. Being average allows your chapters to survive, but not to thrive.

People's dollars are stretched in so many ways, and if they decide to spend time and money with your group, they expect something significant in return. According to the ASAE (The American Society for Association Executives) Foundation that return should include things like networking and professional development opportunities, as well as what ASAE calls "good of the order" benefits, including "promotion of the field, the creation and maintenance of standards and codes of ethics, and advocacy."

They also expect that return to include technology that makes it easier for them to be members. Effective technology usage – such as online registration and payment and easy access to relevant content – makes members stick around. The ASAE Foundation says that members whose chapters meet their technology requests appropriately are nearly 20 percent more likely to renew than those who think their chapter isn't doing a great job with it.

Doing nothing also means that your membership, for the most part, isn't highly engaged. You're providing information and opportunities, but is it really what they need? Is it helping drive their careers forward? Do you know what it is your members really want to get out of their membership? If not, over time, those members may look to get their professional development needs met elsewhere. You may find you get less than 35 people at your chapters' meetings, and at some point, you may find you don't have anyone ready – or interested – to step into their board positions.

If you don't feel your association is in danger of losing members, revenue and reputation; if your chapters' board members don't see a need to do a better job delivering value to all members; if you're ok with being average, then doing nothing is the right approach.

But, if the idea of losing members to other professional associations or to the internet is keeping you up at night, you have options.

