

Don't Let Your Association Chapter Retire With You – Leave It Better Than You Found It



With the Great Resignation of the past few years showing no signs of slowing, you've lost a number of association chapter members to early retirement. (42% of nonprofit leaders expect turnover to increase in the coming year.) Hopefully, you've given members ample reasons to stay, including how they, and your chapter, can benefit from their participation even after they retire.



You're still bound to lose members who have decided that retirement also means retiring from your association chapter board. As these board members step down, are they leaving an organized association chapter management system anyone can take over? Or are you digging through boxes of paper files, opening countless online folders, resetting passwords, and exploring disparate systems to make sense of things only the board member really understood?

To improve the chances for a successful handoff and to help ensure the long-term success of your chapter, it's important to eliminate risks like this where you can. For some chapters, this means making changes to things they've done the same way for a long time and adding structures that bring the board and the chapter to a new place – one that's even better than it was before.

Create board job descriptions. Board Job descriptions clarify roles and make it easier for someone to step in quickly when an association chapter board member leaves by helping them understand what's

expected of them. If you don't have one for the role of the person leaving, ask them to create a list of their major chapter board responsibilities.

Eliminate single points of failure. Is your VP of technology the only person who understands how your association chapter website works and the only one who knows where all your passwords are? What happens when they step down with no notice? Think about how you can centralize content and processes for critical functions to avoid having a single point of failure on your board.

Hold exit interviews. Speak with departing board members as early as possible to learn as much as you can before they go. In addition to asking what worked well and what they recommend the incoming person focus on:

- Ask them to document system passwords and processes
- Agree on priorities for their remaining time on the board
- Introduce them to their replacement so they can help them get situated

Ask board members to stay on in advisory roles. Help ensure a smooth transition by having them stay on in an advisory capacity to answer questions and provide advice as needed. Work with the person who is leaving, decide on the type of help they'll provide, how many hours you think it'll take, etc.

Centralize disparate systems into a single system. Rather than leaving the board to hunt for what they need in multiple systems and spreadsheets, consider a single technical platform for everything chapter related. By centralizing member information, chapter financials, technology, etc., you're making it easier for everyone -- the board, committees and members -- regardless of who "owns" the content.

Deb Schneider is president of the Syracuse New York chapter of ACF (American Culinary Federation). She spoke to us about her chapter's need to better engage a new audience of potential members. She also touched on how she believes the StarChapter Association Management System (AMS) will help the board and the chapter move in the right direction.

Prior to being president, Deb spent two years on their chapter association board as a VP. Later this year she's retiring from her tenured position as an Instructor in the Hospitality Management department at Onondaga Community College. She's also stepping down as president of ACF Syracuse, though she will remain a chapter member.



Deb witnessed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on chapter membership. Once the pandemic started, she explains, “long time members did not renew, and several retired or changed careers from the hospitality industry. The current board struggled to engage members of the chapter as well as encourage new ones.”

As she transitions from her role, Deb is working with her board to implement a StarChapter AMS.

“Using the StarChapter AMS,” she says, “will certainly be easier and free up time that has been spent on maintaining our membership.” It will also make it easier,” she adds “to build our chapter again to make it better/more relevant for professionals, students and culinarians...and will help motivate and organize our chapter to build on its membership and participation.”

“The StarChapter AMS,” Deb says, “is engaging and informative and can reach far more potential members than what we have been able to do on our own in the past couple of years. In stepping down I am encouraging current and new members to keep up the work we have done to build on our chapter to make it better, as the saying goes.... after all it takes a village.”

Encourage your board members to work together to find ways to keep the chapter moving forward in ways that benefit the board and your members. There are changes you can make to move the chapter forward, to keep existing members engaged, engage new ones, and keep retirees from leaving in the first place.

