

What's Your Plan for When a Key Team Member Leaves?

Bob has been managing your website for years. Bob doesn't have a committee, and he doesn't use outside vendors. Wednesday, Bob emails you that he's taken a job in another state. And he's leaving Friday. You see the email and mean to follow up, but you're buried under work, chapter, and personal responsibilities.



The next thing you know, Bob is gone. Your emails are returned as undeliverable, because they're going to his work email address. Bob was the only one with access to the website, including logins and passwords, email addresses, and final versions of content.

Now, what? Can your chapter survive without Bob? Will it be a seamless shift? Or will the chapter fall apart?

Bob is your Single Point of Failure (or SPoF), as he's the only person responsible everything web-related. He has no assistance or backup. How will you handle his leaving? Will your chapter be

completely overwhelmed and unable to recover?

The dangers of having a SPoF

SPoFs are never good ideas. And having one without a transition plan can be disastrous. The worst-case is that the chapter dissolves because no one can figure out how this person did what he or she did. Perhaps in Bob's case, you don't know how he manages the website and don't have money to create a new one.

At the least, Bob leaves and you can piece together everything you need to keep the website moving forward. You figure things out



slowly, and the resulting disruptions causes you to lose members, when the processes they've followed for things like registering online no longer work. When that happens, members don't renew, and new members don't join.

Identifying your SPoF

There's a good chance you have at least one SPoF, despite your best intentions. It's crucial to be clear on what that person does, the criticality of his or her function, and what needs to happen when he or she leaves.

Look at the different roles in your chapter and ask the following questions about each. (Don't assume that the people who've been in role the longest are automatically the ones with the most knowledge.)

1. What does this person know? Are there things he or she knows, or has access to, or a task that he or she completes that no one else does? You may find out he or she completes critical tasks you weren't aware of.

2. What will happen if this person leaves and no one can step in? What's your level of risk?

3. How difficult is it for someone to learn and take over this person's tasks? Would it require outside training? Mentoring from the person in the role? Or, can his or her tasks be documented and followed?

Avoiding a catastrophe when you lose your SPoF

Here are some ideas for keeping an SPoF from shutting down your chapter.

1. Make sure Bob has an understudy. No person is an island. Each individual should have at least one backup or partner, who understands the role and can jump in as needed.

2. Learn what your boards, committee members, and volunteers do. Even something as simple as a vacation can cause undue stress if there's no one who knows what needs to be done.

3. Make each person's responsibilities easily accessible. Don't spend hours trying to find out what a person does.

4. Have solid transition plans. Be sure you know what needs to be done, if you do have a role that can only be managed by a single person and that person leaves.

5. Decrease the number of different systems you use. Consider consolidating the number of systems and processes used to run your chapter. Having one system for email, membership, the website, and more means all of your information is stored in a single place. It also allows your board members easy access to that information, and you're not relying on the passwords and technology habits of a single person.



If you have no way of getting around relying on one person for something, you need to identify that person and plan for his or her unexpected departure. It's not a complicated process, just one that requires you to identify your SPoF and have a plan to mitigate the risk if it happens. You may need to spend a bit of money and time, to purchase new systems, learn responsibilities, build relationships with new vendors, or develop alter-

native processes. This isn't a one-and-done exercise, but one that should be repeated regularly, to account for any changes in processes and systems.

Without a plan for avoiding an SPoF, your chapter could be doomed. What's your plan for ensuring your chapter survives and can still execute its mission if a key member leaves?

