



MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

RETENTION MATTERS

Information and suggestions on how to
integrate and improve the retention of
new members in your club



The British Association of Barbershop Singers

SING BARBERSHOP

It's the Harmony that makes the difference

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RETENTION MATTERS

Let us start with a mission statement that encapsulates every point made in the Retention process:

Every Member Matters

A dictionary definition of retention is:

“The act or power of retaining - to keep in mind”.

Those last four words form the simplest and most effective message in the whole matter of Retention.

The rationale behind the publication of this document is to help your club manage the process of retaining both new and existing members. It should be remembered that the retention of our members plays a vital part in the ongoing development of your club and ultimately the Association.

If you have any thoughts that you may feel useful to add to this document, do please let me know, and I will consider them for inclusion in future updates.

Richard May
BABS Membership Services Director

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Retention Matters

Image is paramount. Retention starts the moment the newcomer first encounters your chorus. Furthermore it provides opportunities for new members to be integrated without overly disrupting the chorus.

BACKGROUND

There are very few clubs in BABS that have not run, as a Recruitment aid, a Learn to Sing course in the last few years and it is gratifying that they are rarely anything but a great success. In fact, it is becoming the norm that clubs will incorporate a 4 - 6 week course as part of their Barbershop year in much the same way as they will run an Annual Show.

When you think of the effort put in by club management and those running these courses, not to mention the grant and free literature provided by BABS, it is a shame that the same effort is not always expended to retain those new members.

GENERAL

You only have to consider the age profile of the average member of your club, to realise that there will be some who cannot continue because age or failing health prevail. Coupled with those, are guys who move house or are forced in this era of business difficulties to re-locate. There is not a club in the country that will not lose a proportion of its members for these reasons and of course there a very little that can be done about it.

Putting those aside for a moment as 'regretful leavers', let us concentrate on those whose Retention can be founded on tried and trusted methods.

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MEMBERSHIP
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There are two levels of membership, new and existing, both are equally important as each other when it comes to Retention. They have similarities of course, but it is worth while considering them both in isolation. So let us first consider:

New Members

A fundamental consideration from the outset should be for the Club to explain what are the aims and aspirations to its members. It should be expected that any new members, who do not have a background of Barbershop, will need to know from the outset the direction the Club will be taking. If the majority are looking for a 'fun' club who may not have an interest in competing, they will be at odds with those who are expecting success on the competition stage.

We all have experience of people leaving within the first two years of joining. Many of those leave because they do not receive adequate value in return for their time investment or because they know or understand very little about the chorus or the parent organisation. Remember, no matter what support and encouragement you get from Association level, it is the club's themselves that will provide the greatest incentive for membership growth and retention.

Why do they leave?

Is it too hard? - Learn to Sing candidates have to learn 2/3 songs in a fairly unthreatening environment, once they move into the chorus - they have to contend with repertoire - uniform - singouts - convention - annual show. Have you frightened them off?

Is it too easy? - What about the seasoned singer coming in from another club or other singing organisation. Is it a case of teaching grandma to suck eggs - we teach them how to stand - breathe - emote etc, but have they joined a chorus that does not want to compete?

ORIENTATION

The assumption of a definite direction in response to stimulus - is the key to Retention.

- * Tells the new member what sort of club they are considering joining and the level of expectation as a competing chorus.
- * Gets them on an equal footing with the rest of the members.
- * Gives them a chance to become fully engaged much more quickly.
- * Encourages them to share their new found hobby with their friends.

A new member, with their new found enthusiasm, can often be the most likely to produce a friend of his own to join.



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NEW MEMBER INTEGRATION

Do you have a new member joining procedure? If you don't, you can use a version put together by a BABS club that has been in existence for thirty six years, as a basis for your own document. A summary of it is shown at the back of this document. Having this procedure is a good discipline in the retention process. To help new members integrate, allocating a Buddy is a proven system.

- * Allocate a buddy and introduce him to the new member. Give him the buddy's home telephone number or email, so if he needs help he won't feel embarrassed having to ask in front of other people.
- * Make sure the section leader knows who is his buddy.
- * Liaise with club treasurer when he needs to start paying subs and the amount involved.
- * Introduce him to the uniform manager so that he knows what the club will provide and for what he has to pay.
- * Get him linked into the club email system.
- * Introduce him to the club badge organiser.

Coupled with the Buddy System, there are some points which can be described as:

Good Club Practice

Club Chairman should present both his club badge and the BABS Membership Certificate to the new member. When the new member has passed his chorus audition, let him know the buddy will be there to help him with the rest of the repertoire.

Once the new member has become a fully integrated member of the club, a further way of ensuring they feel part of the set up is to give them a job. They could be a visitor greeter, attendance recorder, librarian, organiser of the weekly fund raising system etc.

Find out what skills they have

Another important area to investigate is their skills other than singing. Do they know anything about Health & Safety? Have they financial experience? Are they particularly computer literate? Are they in sales or marketing? Have they any experience with funding?

Any of these could be of great benefit to the club and once it is explained how beneficial this knowledge could be, will provide the new member with a great sense of belonging.

You should also be aware that once the new member is registered with BABS, a personal welcome letter is sent from the BABS Chairman together with an explanatory booklet and a BABS badge. Twelve months later a first anniversary letter is also sent.



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How can you improve the new members' experience?

What can be done to help them enjoy the hobby? Based on the assumption that every club would want to strive for continuous improvement and a desire to retain its membership, the following actions, in conjunction with the Chorus Director and Music Team, should be considered:-

- * There should be a timed programme for rehearsals, available in advance, with 3 or 4 repertoire songs being aired each week, include the same repertoire songs for 3 weeks which will give the new guys a chance as well as refreshing existing members' performance.
- * Review the repertoire - are there songs that have been used for ages? Are they getting stale?
- * Consider adding new songs, so that the whole chorus, including the new members, are learning together.
- * Ask for feedback - check with the chorus every 3 months.

How can clubs improve their singout programme and Annual Show? Ask the newcomers if they can play an instrument, if they have any acting experience or have knowledge of back stage work.

Existing Members

It can be argued that more time needs to be spent on New Members as they will be subject to a great many pressures from all other aspects of their lives and not yet steeped in our magnificent hobby.

Allowing however for all the club energies to be spent on the retention and encouragement of the newer intake can be self defeating, as those who have been the backbone of the club for many years could feel threatened. Every time there is a new intake of members, there is a possibility that the whole ethos of the club will change.

INTEGRATION

Integration is the key to maximising the expectations of both existing and new members alike. To help ensure the Retention of older members:

- * Communicate with them. Keep them informed of what is going on.
- * Ask for their input - check with those that might be resentful, every three months - ask them what they want?
- * They might have to accept different methods - how can the club improve their experience?
- * Seek out those who appear frustrated - what can be done to re-vitalise their interest in the hobby?
- * Get them involved. If they have not already got a job - give them one, no matter how small. Maybe they can become a Buddy?



BABS recognizes long term members by the award of 25 and 30 medals. These awards are in favour of those who have given half a lifetime to Barbershop. However, what about you having a Club Award for those who have been with the club 5 or 10 years?

THE ULTIMATE RETENTION: HAVE FUN

Do not let go to waste all the effort expended in running a recruitment programme, a Learn to Sing Course or your weekly rehearsal evening by neglecting the needs of every member. Make rehearsal night enjoyable and a panacea to all the woes of the week

CONCLUSION

It will be an impossible task to retain every member, be it because of their age, failing health, family matters or relocation for business reasons. If you are certain that the club has done everything in its power to retain a member that wants to leave, there are two methods of keeping them in touch and within the Barbershop family.

- * Offer them the opportunity to transfer their BABS membership to the 'Don Amos' club, details of which are to be found on the Membership Matters page on www.singbarbershop.com
- * To maintain an even more personal relationship you could ask them to become a 'friend' of the club which could mean they would be persuaded to make a donation each year. They would still receive your club magazine and be given first offer on any shows the club may perform.

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Thanks to the Chess Valley Barbershop Singers for allowing their publication on 'New Member Joining Procedure' to be made available - a copy is shown on the next page.



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NEW MEMBER JOINING PROCEDURE

An example from the Chess Valley Barbershop Singers

FIRST NIGHT

- * Guest welcomer makes him feel at ease and ascertains the purpose of his visit, his name and offers the use of the guest music folder
- * At an appropriate time welcomer introduces guest to Membership Secretary and the Chairman
- * Chairman introduces guest to chorus, normally at the interval
- * Membership Secretary issues him with an introductory leaflet
- * Membership Secretary asks for his contact details
- * Membership Secretary explains voice checking procedure and confirms if guest is happy to undertake a voice check

SECOND WEEK

- * Membership Secretary checks which vocal part he sings and introduces him to the Section Leader and issues a copy of the guest folder
- * Membership Secretary selects a Buddy from the chorus and introduces them to each other
- * Vocal coach explains on which songs he will be assessed
- * Membership Secretary informs him of how to gain access to the member's area of the web site

SUBSEQUENT WEEKS

- * Membership Secretary checks progress on auditioning with Buddy and Section Leader
- * When the audition has been passed, Membership Secretary prepares a New Member pack and informs Chairman
- * Chairman announces to the chorus that the new member has passed his audition and presents him with the new member's pack
- * Membership Secretary issues Bankers Order and Gift Aid declaration to new member
- * Membership Secretary informs Treasurer of date that subscriptions are due to commence
- * Membership Secretary raises new member form for BABS
- * Membership Secretary updates members address list and informs new member of the list
- * Membership Secretary requests club uniform manager to measure up new member for all aspects of stage and walk out uniform