

Spells and Potions For a Successful Magic Club

by Wilbur Kattner

Genesis

Magicians' clubs, like other organizations, have their ups and downs. The conventional wisdom, when a club is at a nadir, is that it will come back eventually. When a club is doing well the expectation is that it is a tree that will grow to the sky. It's my observation that both of these beliefs are wrong.

In 1984, Ring 15 was on its skids. Maybe six members would show up for a meeting; if it was a bang-up night, ten might be present. In our instance, there was an exodus before the genesis! Now we have over a hundred members with thirty of more present at meetings in the summer months, the vacation season. Perhaps this is the clearest evidence that something effective happened to rebuild the organization.

But why did it happen? Or more important: How did it happen?

The change was brought about because a few members were deeply concerned about the future of the Ring. It was decided to use a formula that had worked for our Ring at least three times before.

If the club had been healthy before, what happened that it became ill? I'm about to make a mess of a bunch of figures of speech, but bear me out: Once a club has a successful program it must have a corporate memory so that the knowledge of the ingredients of its success and the reasons for the presence of the ingredients are not forgotten. Corporate memories, like those of individuals, are fallible. Consequently, once a club has a formula for a successful program, it must have a way of remembering that formula. Each of our presidents for the past three years has prepared a plan and structure document, at the beginning of his term, for review by the members of the executive committee. This is an effective way of preserving that which was found to be good and of introducing new ideas that are consistent with past successes.

No claim is made that this recipe is the only one that is appetizing. There are many other successful clubs. Their brews may be concocted in other ways. What is different here is that WE'VE ANALYZED OUR SUCCESSES, AND WE ARE WRITING THEM DOWN. If the recipe is good as we believe, others should be

able to duplicate our results. So if the writing style is didactic, it is because those who write cookbooks, textbooks, and how-to books find that style to be most convenient. The principles and methods discussed are those that the Fort Worth Magicians Club, the Ren Clark Ring [Ring 15], has used successfully from time to time over a period of many years. Even though the club is not mentioned in connection with every matter, Ring 15's implementation of each idea is implied.

A Starting Point

A clear understanding of the objective of the club, and of its parent organization, if it has one, is the starting point. Reviews of these constitutions and bylaws generally are found to be a rewarding and inspiring activity.

The principles that will be address in this discussion are the following:

- (1) Contagious enthusiasm is essential.
- (2) For stability and growth membership must reach a critical mass.
- (3) The older members must demonstrate constantly their pride in the Ring.
- (4) To hold members, each member must be able to identify with the organization and not be intimidated by those with greater experience and expertise.
- (5) When the club program becomes successful, a corporate memory must be maintained so that the gains become permanent. Indeed, as experience grows, the knowledge gained from experience should be incorporated in the club's memory.
- (6) There are several elements that comprise good monthly meetings.
- (7) Certain other club-sponsored activities are valuable.
- (8) Good communication within the club is important.
- (9) Politics is to be discouraged within the club.
- (10) Other practices, consistent with these principles, can augment the club's program.

Enthusiasm is Essential

Most club members have enthusiasm for some phase of magic. A few come only to see magic performed; they are the club spectators. When too large a proportion of the members fall into this classification, the club is in trouble. True enthusiasm for the club's activities grows by having, stating, and practicing worthwhile and interesting objectives. Enthusiasm leads to more and more members participating in the club's activities.

The importance of the objectives which promote constant interest cannot be stressed too highly. Most constitutions include such statements as "promote magic as an art ... oppose exposing of conjuring secrets ... deplore maltreatment of livestock." These are worthwhile objectives, and their violations have been known to generate heated discussion. But these objectives alone are insufficient to bring members out to the meetings.

One of the objectives of the Ren Clark Ring No. 15 is to help all members to become better magicians. This means sharing some of the secrets possessed by older members, with neophytes! Shocking! But there are good reasons why this should be done. The more enthusiastic practitioners of the art, regardless of their status, the more numerous the potential audience for paid performers. (That almost everyone knows something about singing or playing music does not diminish attendance at concerts and musical shows.)

On the other hand, it's well known that inept magicians have killed many a potential playing date for professionals. The more skilled entertainers we have in our ranks, the better will be the image of magic and the markets for those who make their living as professionals. Closer to home, to the hearth of the club, it should be recognized that the meetings will be more interesting as the novices progress in skill and in creating interesting presentations.

Many clubs sponsor lectures and have short teaching sessions at some of their monthly meetings. These certainly are worthwhile and interesting activities consonant with the objective of helping all members to become better magicians. The creation of Special Interest Groups (SIGs) and the sponsoring of a Round Table, about which more will be said later, are two other activities that create greater interest and help all members to progress in skills and knowledge. One year, several very enthusiastic Ring 15 members volunteered to make our monthly bulletin, The Flash Paper, more interesting by including a trick section.

The effects and methods were purposely not to be of the mundane run one so often sees in club papers, magicians' magazines, and some books, but to be as novel in effect and method as possible. That goal was reached, and the trick section was lavishly embellished with photos. These pages eventually were collected, bound in soft covers, and offered for sale as Innovative Magic, Volumes One and Two. After the club portion of the project was discontinued the enthusiasm persisted, and Innovative Magic, Volume Three resulted.

You may have noticed that the names of the members who participated in these activities are not given. Names are omitted purposely to illustrate a principle. If a club activity is to work, it must be one which most of the members can identify. When some one individual becomes too strongly identified with the activity, it feeds his ego at the expense of filling broader club needs. When an idea is thrown out in a club activity, that idea should be recognized as club property, not the property of the one who offered it.

An important reason for this is that an idea without personal involvements may be discussed objectively, and a reasonable decision can be reached. Actually egos are neither augmented nor smashed when this practice is followed. Ultimately the members of the organization will come to recognize those who offered the workable ideas. So the ego satisfaction comes, albeit a bit delayed, and the recognition is more enduring.

Enthusiasm also leads to commitment of time and talent when the objectives are seen to be potentially rewarding. The more members who are so dedicated, the greater the participation will be in the club's activities. The enthusiasm becomes contagious; everyone wants in on the fun. But before this can happen, a small core must pool their enthusiastic efforts to make the club work and work well. This is a very important key to success.

Consistent with the maintaining of enthusiasm is to recognize that members are spread all over the spectrum of skills and the spectrum of interests. The mastering of a ball vase routine by a novice may be as much of a milestone for him as the performance of a coin start by one who has been performing magic for years. The recognition of this is important lest the club becomes divisive and drives its members away. The maintaining of enthusiasm, the creation of a feeling of identification, and the fostering of participation are all woven together with showing appreciation of the efforts of all members, regardless of their sophistication or skill level.

Ring 15 also recognizes special dedication and contributions to the club's activities by awarding certificates of appreciation, special plaques, and attractive gifts to outgoing presidents, its members, and others who have achieved special status in the world of magic.

Politics Must Be Minimized

Where there are strong egos and differences in opinion or aspirations for recognition, politics is likely to enter the arena. While the ensuing battle between personalities may be fun to watch, the mere fact that strife is occurring can tear a club apart. All members should recognize this truth. Avoiding divisiveness is constant with sound objectives. The use of an executive committee, as is discussed below, permits matters to be fully discussed and acted upon while helping both to control the club politics and to solve other club problems. The executive committee works better the more democratic it is. All officers and interested members are urged to attend and to participate.

New Members Must Perform

It is important that new members perform before the club as soon as possible. Their performances provide their entrees into the fellowship of the club; as a result of their performing they are seen to escape from the anonymity of being on the sidelines. Moreover, the demo helps them to establish their niche within the club. We know these niches exist; the niches are the steps on the ladder of recognition for skill levels, ages, interests, ability to drop names, and so on. As the members participate, they send out signals indicating which step on the ladder is comfortable for them at that particular time. The fast learners, especially, will benefit from frequent exposures in that they will rapidly win

acceptance and greater recognition by the subcultures within the club. That is probably poor sociology, but it's the truth.

In speaking about performing, perhaps the work "demonstrating" might be more appropriate. Collectors, builders of equipment, authors, and groupies must be considered. A person who is interested in the history of magic, for example, may be unable to perform; however, he can contribute significantly to the Ring. His demo might be a 10-minute discourse on some phase of the history of conjuring.

Membership - A Critical Mass Must Be Found

What is meant when it is said that the membership must possess a critical mass? This critical mass must be, and will be, the club's leadership. There must be enough members with the initial enthusiasm and dedication that even if one, two, or three of them miss a meeting, a good meeting happens anyway. This occurs because the others fill in. Backups are as important to successful magicians' clubs as they are in industrial organizations or sports enterprises. Obviously, no matter how committed one person may be, he can't serve as his own backup. The minimum critical number is two. But two leaves a lot of room for error. Both of these dedicated individuals should move quickly to infect as many other members as possible with enthusiasm for, excitement with, and commitment to the club's objectives and programs.

Some of the dedicated members will remain active over many years, many decades. Others will move in and out for such reasons as changes in job requirements, family interests, location, hobbies, and so on. For this reason, the leadership must be alert to identifying new members of the core group. Participation in the executive committee and attendance at the round table often provide strong signals from those who are ready to assume more club responsibilities.

In addition, the membership needs to grow for several reasons. The least important of these is that more members means more cash flowing into the club's treasury. The more important reason is that many serendipitous things happen as the membership increases. For example, it is easier to find a suitable meeting place when 30 people are searching rather than only six. It is easier to put a show together as well. There are more hands available to do whatever is needed to be done. And so on.

How does a club build its membership? Use the techniques the Baptist use to build up their Sunday Schools! There is more truth than jest in this admonishment. Ring 15 started in 1984 by making a master list of all known magicians within driving distance of our club. Divide the responsibility for calling these magicians among the dedicated members. Make sure that there is

something interesting and worthwhile to tell them, something that will capture their attention and excite them. Those whom you particularly want as members deserve special treatment. Somehow or other, bus them to the meeting. If they like the program, they will probably come back. Possibly they'll bring some candidate with them and join the core of the committed. It happened.

A very important factor in assuring that members will attend meetings is to have a regular meeting place. Having to search for a new meeting place for every meeting discourages attendance. A few repetitions will establish a practice of routine attendance.

Ring 15 was fortunate to have a magic shop in Fort Worth. The owner is an enthusiastic club member. We had a common cause. As the club's membership grew so did his business.

Our club also had a number of active excited members, so we ran a membership contest and gave desirable prizes to the winners.

It is clear from the above that to assure success, the President must delegate jobs and delegate them as broadly as possible to involve the maximum number of members. The delegation by, and leadership of, the president should be in the form of warm, friendly guidance rather than being directive. Delegation of tasks is a valuable means of increasing the size of the critical mass.

Members Must Have Good Reasons to Identify with the Ring

The essential step in having a new or prospective member identify with the club is for him to get to know some names and to become acquainted with some of the members. While this seems obvious, plans are seldom made and pursued to make sure it happens.

First, when a member brings a guest, he should introduce his guest to several members, making sure that at least one of the introductions results in a get-acquainted conversation.

Second, guests should be introduced at the end of the business meeting and given the opportunity to say a bit about himself and his background and interests in magic.

Third, the program chairman should find out whether the guest desires to perform in the program to follow. All of this is constructive engagement that leads both to the forming of friendships and to identification with the club.

In addition to these steps, the Ren Clark Ring has attractive name badges. The Sergeant at Arms serves as the custodian of these badges and as a greeter at the door. The names, written by a calligrapher, are large enough for all to read,

making it easy to call a new acquaintance by name. We also have a guest book, and all newcomers and visitors are invited to sign it, giving their addresses and phone numbers. The Secretary adds the names to the prospective member list and sends the prospects three issues of The Flash Paper. When he gets the club paper three times along with a letter from the president and information on how to join the I.B.M. and our Ring, he is sure to get messages that help him identify with the club and its members.

We take a break about half way through the meeting for light refreshments. This creates more opportunities for visitors to get acquainted. A recent innovation has been to show videotapes in the half hour before the meeting formally opens. We leave lights on so that people can converse while the tape is being shown much as one might do at home. Then there is a five minute interval before the meeting starts. This procedure has worked wonderfully to promote fellowship.

Benefits and Incentives Bring Bonuses

In addition to having worthwhile meetings, other inducements can be legitimately offered to encourage prospects to join the club and to participate in club activities. Certain activities may be closed to those who are not club members, for example. Some specific things that Ring 15 has found to be effective are:

- (1) Offer lecture notes free to Ring members, but charge those who do not belong to the Ring.
- (2) Offer lectures free to members in good standing while charging attendees who are not members.
- (3) Offering other freebies. One year we had a "Meet a Dealer" segment in the program. The segment allowed the dealer about ten minutes to tell about himself and his business. He was asked to bring something that could be given to each member present, e.g., a catalog, a special list of offers, of something he found to be excess stock. At the break and the end of the meeting (but not during the session) he was permitted to display and sell stock that he decided to bring with him. This worked out very well because during the course of the year the members in attendance received freebies exceeding in value what they had paid in annual Ring dues.

With regard to offering free lecture notes, we have arranged on several occasions with local lecturers that the club would pay for the printing of their lecture notes with the understanding that members in good standing would receive copies free. However, proceeds from the sale of the notes to non-members would go to the lecturer. When we have lecturers from out of town, members in good standing attend at no charge, but those who are not members are assessed a fee. This provides an incentive for non-members to affiliate.

Identification with the Ring Builds Membership

New members, especially, need some means of identifying with the club. As was mentioned before we use several methods to help to aid him in doing this. Our Sergeant at Arms serves as a greeter. Each guest is asked to sign the guest book and later is invited to tell of his background in conjuring.

For the really enthusiastic members the Round Table and the SIGs have proven to be the most effective vehicles in promoting identification. The reason is, we believe, that these two activities promote almost instant participation in an interesting activity. Moreover, their formats are very informal and thus encourage attendees to participate actively.

Pride in the Ring Maintains Membership

Identification with the club goes a long way in hooking a member so that he will stay with the club. However, if he has reasons to develop pride in being a member, that helps even more. Prestige! Is your club the biggest? Is it the best in something? (The writer attended a meeting of a club in Seattle years ago. The members met regularly for dinner and magic talk, and it was forbidden to perform in any way during the evening. That club was the best in bonhomie, eating, and talking a good performance.) Does it have a famous member? Is it located in the middle of nowhere? Does it have the best meetings? Never mind the meetings; does it have a Ring reporter who writes up dull meetings so that they seem to be full of fun and enchantment?

Regardless of the size or location of your Ring, you can find a reason to have pride in it. As it becomes more and more successful, members will find more reasons to be

proud of their affiliation with the Ring. This will be especially true if the dedicated members make sure that the Ring's programs are full of fun and learning.

Make certain that the program activities of your Ring are sent in regularly to The Linking Ring. Everyone likes to see his name in print, especially if he has done something interesting at the meeting.

If the organization and its program are important to you, show it by your words, actions, and dress. This implies that one doesn't badmouth either the club or individual members. Inculcate the idea that if one can't find something positive to say, it's best that he remain silent. Encourage members to take part in the activities that they like and to do, enthusiastically, what they can to make them even better. If you are the President, make certain that the business meetings are short, to the point, and interesting. A businesslike meeting says, in effect, "We have worthwhile things to do tonight, so we'll get these housekeeping matters out of the way as promptly as possible." The club should own a copy of

Robert's Rules of Order and follow it carefully so that everything is done fairly, democratically, and expeditiously.

Another action that shows one's pride in an organization is to make sure that nothing falls through the cracks. If a person is scheduled for a club activity and something turns up so that he can not do as promised, he should notify the person in charge of that activity immediately. A program falls flat when arrangements for replacements must be made at the last moment. Both the chairman of the activity and the expected performer have responsibilities. (Performer is used here in the broadest sense.) The chairman should be well versed in Murphy's law and all its corollaries; he will have backup performers or activities planned and ready in the event that someone putting on a part of the program is either delayed or unable to attend. Effective communication is an imperative.

Dress for the club's success. The clothes you wear tell a great deal about your attitude toward not only yourself, but toward the club. Lamentably the practice of looking good and smelling nice has fallen upon ill times amongst some of us. It's important, if one is to be a successful performer, to learn how to dress appropriately, especially if one is performing for others and for a fee. Wearing neat attractive clothing to the meetings says to all that you consider this an important event, one worth preparing for.

Several Elements Comprise Good Meetings

The fundamental consideration here is that the more members in the Ring, the more varied their interests are. To hold interest, therefore, programs covering all aspects of conjuring are important. One must appeal to the finger flinger, the mentalist, the illusionist, the clown, the collector, the name dropper, and so on if they are to renew their membership. If they are really pleased with what they see, they'll want to participate more and more.

So what is a good monthly meeting? First of all, get the business taken care of clearly and quickly. Adjourn the business meeting and get on with it.

Several people should perform at every meeting. This should not be an ad hoc show. ("Who brought something to do tonight?") Arrange for the people to perform in advance of the meeting. Planning for this at the executive committee meeting works well. New members doing their qualification acts or demonstrations may be part of this. The other part will be performances by older members. Seeing magic done well can be an enlightening experience, and if one is prepared, he can learn even from seeing magic poorly done, agony though it may be. Again, be sure that you have dependable backups.

In lining up performers, do not depend on volunteers. The same few will come to believe that the burden of the club's program rests on their backs. Moreover,

dependence on volunteers fails to involve the general membership of the club. Remember that one who gives to the club feels more strongly that he's a part of it.

We plan our general meeting a year in advance by listing the main activity for each month and by indicating whether it is an open or closed event. A closed meeting is defined as a meeting for magicians, but not for guests. (In closed meetings methods often will be divulged.) Our plans for 1984-85 were blocked out as shown on the following table:

<i>Month</i>	<i>Main Activity</i>	<i>Open / Closed</i>
October	Installation Banquet and show	Open
November	Lecture	Closed
December	Panel discussion	Closed
January	Clinic	Closed
February	Sweetheart banquet and show	Open
March	Auction	Closed
April	Panel discussion; elect representative to TAOM	Closed
May	Clinic	Closed
June	Lecture	Closed
July	Magic trivia pursuit	Closed(?)
August	Clinic & appoint nominating committee	Closed
September	Lecture & election of officers	Closed

Similar plans have been prepared and followed in the ensuing years. The detail plans for each meeting are solidified by the executive committee for either one or two months in advance.

A lecture, a lecturette, or a brief teaching / learning session may be either a minor or a major part of the program. We have also found that panel discussions

on subjects of interest to conjurers generate a great deal of interest. From time to time, over the years, we have found clinics to be exciting general meeting events. (The SIGs essentially are small specialized clinics.) Basically a clinic uses a group of performers and a panel of experts. The scope of expertise should be broad, including setting, technique, and entertainment value. The performers do their bits and may ask for general or specific critiques. The experts respond in a constructive way. A chairman conducts the affair, and he may ask for questions, suggestions, or comments from the spectators.

The Collectors' Corner has engendered a lot of interest on our Ring. In this five-to ten-minute segment, a member shows and discusses the use or background of a piece of apparatus or collectable literature. The success of the Collectors' Corner requires that the person making the presentation either be a knowledgeable collector or be willing to do an adequate amount of research. Interest will be lost when the historian displays ignorance of his subject. Members who previously had no interest in the older things have discovered a new interest. The Collectors' Corner has spawned an idea that we may try sometime; a member gives a brief biographical sketch of some magical notable and illustrates it with an effect or some item that is strongly associated with the famed person.

A "Meet the Dealer" ten minutes, as described previously, might be a segment.

In our 1987-88 year, a typical meeting might be composed of the following segments: business meeting; qualification demos; "Teach-a -Trick"; a performance done by a skilled magician; "Theatrics of Magic"; and the scheduled principal activity.

The Ring meeting reports in The Linking Ring are excellent sources of program ideas. To get an idea of the mix Ring 15 has been using in its recent programs, read its reports beginning about December 1984.

Having a regular, easily found meeting place will help bring the members out. The uncertainty of where the next meeting will be produces a negative response, also known as a no-show.

Another aspect of regularity is important. When the program elements reappear, albeit in different form, regularly at meetings, members will know what to expect. If the program elements are good, their anticipation of the next meeting will be heightened.

While the fellowship aspects of the club are important, extensive bringing of non-magician guests should be discouraged. A couple of events a year (a banquet and show and a public show for example), provide the opportunity to get an idea of what goes on in the club. All other meetings should be closed, should be for magicians only.

As soon as it is permitted to routinely bring spouses and children to the club meeting, the time bomb begins ticking for the club to go into a decline. The quality of the programs goes down, and the level of attention diminishes. There may even be several subsidiary meetings vying for the attention of those present. When gossip sessions and jocular conversations occur, the participants should be invited to retire to the hall until they conclude their discussions. It's a simple matter of courtesy. The better step is to discourage the situations in the first place by announcing that the meeting will be closed.

Other Worthwhile Activities Engender Interest

There are a host of other activities beside the regular monthly meeting that will stimulate the members. Those discussed are some that we have used very successfully.

Special Interest Groups (SIGs) have been among our most successful activities. We have had them on such varied topics as close-up magic, stand-up magic, illusions, finger-flinging, and how to become a magic intimidator. Each SIG takes on a character of its own. Generally we meet monthly in members' homes in an informal atmosphere. Sometimes we sit around a big table, at other times in a circle, and at others, mixed seating, on chairs, at a table, and on the floor. It doesn't seem to matter much as long as the attendees are comfortable and at ease in the meeting place. The secret to success if these SIGs is the same as that of the club: fun, enthusiasm, and worthwhile activities.

The background of our Intimidator SIG is interesting. One of those attending an executive committee meeting mentioned that he and some other newer members felt intimidated by the members with more experience and knowledge. Here clearly was a need that we needed to address before we lost the beginners. We discussed it for a while and finally concluded the way to satisfy the need was to meet it head on, to talk about intimidation. So we established a SIG called "Become a Magic Intimidator." In the second half of its meetings everyone must perform and benefit from constructive criticism. The emphasis in the performing and suggestions is on entertainment rather than on technique. One purpose of this is to help the applicants for membership prepare themselves for their performance or demonstration before the club to qualify them for full membership.

In the first half of the Intimidator meetings we have a round table discussion on some subject of interest to all. We discuss how the club works, magical ethics, attaining recognition from other magicians, the theory of conjuring, and anything someone cares to bring up. It's a free wheeling discussion, and the moderator makes sure that every person has a chance to raise a question or to voice an opinion. This is done simply by taking turns, going around the table or around the room. No one is left out, and each person knows when he'll be called on. Of course, once a topic comes up, anyone can contribute to the discussion. The

moderator turns the subject off when interest flags or the comments become repetitious. Between the two segments we have light refreshments, everyone taking a turn bringing in something. Usually the interest is so great that some of us go to some place where we can eat, visit, and wow one another until the small hours. Earlier SIGs have used other formats with success.

Our general club meetings are held on Friday nights, but some professionals perform on Fridays. The SIGs are held on Thursdays making it possible for the pros to attend. Ring 15 has had several SIGs going at one time. The number of SIGs that can be operated depends only on the diversity of interests and the enthusiasm of the core members of the SIGs. One should not be discouraged if only a few come to the first meeting. One of our most successful ones started with four attendees. The word quickly got around, and the attendance grew rapidly.

One of the advantages of a Round Table is that it's another activity in which those who perform on meeting nights can participate. If possible find a place to meet that is near a good magic shop. The Round Table attendees will have two reasons to attend, and the shop can shunt interested prospects to the luncheon. Nothing is planned but to get together because of a common interest, but something interesting never fails to come up. Some members contribute greatly to making the Round Table interesting by regularly bringing items to show or perform.

Other members work with the proprietor of our local magic shop in holding magic classes and a beginners' magic club at a nearby school. These activities stimulate interest in conjuring and are potential sources of new members. In the classes, the basics of magic are taught; later prospective members are introduced to the club by giving them information sheets about the Ring and the I.B.M. Those interested are then provided with application forms.

Public shows are gratifying and worthwhile. Their features and problems are well enough known that they will not be discussed here. One cautionary note, however, is that it is well not to plan to do a public show until your club has enough strong performers to make the event one of which everyone can be proud. The activity must not drain the energy of the club members so that the growth or rebuilding process is sacrificed for the show.

Putting on a convention is even a bigger undertaking. If the club is not strong enough, a convention can be a financial and artistic disaster. When your club contemplates such a project, talk to as many experienced convention producers as you can to learn the joys, the work, and the pitfalls. Take notes either by hand or with a tape recorder. Do not be tempted by vanity to put on a convention!

When the membership becomes strong in creating routines and effects, the club may consider either preparing a Hocus Pocus Parade for The Linking Ring or

writing a book. Ring 15, as mentioned previously, was responsible for the Innovative Magic series of books. Preparing them was a lot of both work and fun.

Good Communication is Essential

If members are to feel that they are a part of the club, they must know what is going on and what is planned. If activities are to be successful, members must be aware of them in a timely manner. If officers are not going to be burned out, they must let those with whom they are working know of developments of plans as soon as possible. These truisms are often forgotten or overlooked. Their implementation is important, and there are several means of insuring that communications are good.

A membership roster with addresses and telephone numbers is an invaluable tool. Computers are so common, that it is likely that some member of your Ring has one with a printer and a data base manager. Some data base programs are powerful enough that they can move names and data from the prospective member list to the membership roster. Such tools make it easy to maintain an up-to-date membership list.

The membership list is the source of names and addresses for mailing of the club's monthly newsletter. The use of a computer is a dandy way of preparing mailing labels for the letter. In addition to informing members of upcoming activities, the newsletter may also include other news of interest to members and prospects. The timing of the mailing of the newsletter is important. Our Flash Paper arrives about one week before the monthly meeting. Thus it is current and does not arrive too late for members to make plans. If the meeting date is changed, make sure the schedule of mailing is changed accordingly.

A recent issue of The FlashPaper included:

- (1) a letter from the president
- (2) the location and time of the next meeting
- (3) a map showing how to get to the meeting place
- (4) an announcement of a Max Maven lecture
- (5) a Thank You from Ren Clark
- (6) announcements of SIG activities
- (7) a run down on the program for the next general meeting
- (8) an announcement of the next Executive Committee meeting
- (9) written and visual calendars of the month's activities
- (10) Round Table News
- (11) announcements of the next Dallas Club meeting
- (12) news on the updating of the telephone committee
- (13) a dues reminder
- (14) a welcome to new members

An executive committee is a powerful tool for communicating. All the club officers and trustees are members of our committee. Members of the club are encouraged to attend and to participate in its considerations. At the meetings of this committee, plans are made, problems are discussed, and policies are established. That it is open to all makes its work democratic; decisions are presented at the monthly meeting. Those actions that merit discussion may be considered and voted upon. Our experience has been that when matters are thoroughly explored by the executive committee there is seldom disagreement with the decisions reached when the rationales for the decisions are explained. At the present time the Ring 15 executive committee meets on a Monday night each month. In the past, it has met early in the evening preceding the monthly meeting. The amount of business to be transacted will determine whether a separate meeting night is required.

We have established the practice of discussing matters until a consensus is reached. This means that seldom do we have a formal vote. A difference of opinion remaining is an indication that the matter needs to be discussed further and other solutions than those already discussed be explored. Each attendee is invited to participate.

The report to The Linking Ring is a powerful means of communicating and building pride in the Ring. The reports should be as honest as good manners permit and should include names of all participants in the program. The activities of the business meeting should not be in the Ring report; they should be recorded by the Secretary in the minutes of the meeting.

Sometimes the need arises to notify all members of some unexpected event or change of plans. A telephone committee, organized in a pyramidal structure, makes possible getting in touch with all available members quickly and on short notice. Those at the top of the pyramid should be those dedicated to the success of the club. Do not wait until the need arises to form this committee. Establish it and the responsibilities within it immediately so it can be used effectively from the start.

Other Matters

It is amazing how all of the features which make for a successful club are interwoven. As a consequence it is difficult to discuss one aspect of the formula for success without mentioning other aspects. Thus, there are portions of this discussion which are repetitious by necessity.

Records are very important, without them one can lose track of important facts. If ALL is going well it is unlikely that the actions taken will be questioned in the future. However, if something does go wrong, even though it may be minor,

someone may recall that the action taken seemed to be somewhat different than that agreed upon by the club as a whole or by the executive committee. For this reason the Secretary should (must!) maintain minutes of the executive committee meetings and of the business portions of the club meeting. Motions made and passed should be recorded accurately. The minutes of each meeting should be read, amended if necessary, and approved at the next business meeting. If the matter has any complexity, the name of the person making the motion should be recorded so that he may be called upon to clarify what was meant by the motion.

The minutes of meetings are also invaluable in planning. A review of the business activities of the club over the previous two or three years will remind the planners of action which must be taken in certain months. For examples:

- (1) annually we must elect our representatives to the TAOM and notify the TAOM secretary who they are
- (2) the cycle for electing trustees is different from that in the electing of other officers
- (3) review of previous experience in putting on public shows and conventions reminds us of the planning and working time spans required in putting on these events.

Records of all financial transactions are important as well. The Treasurer should (must!) keep a detailed record of all receipts and disbursements. It is best to make all transactions by check. Money paid out should be backed up by proper bills. If the expenditure is questionable in any way, the disbursements should be approved by the executive committee of the membership.

If a budget has been prepared for the year or a specific activity, expenditures within that budget are OK if the budget was previously approved. Each club must establish its own method of working, but the procedures should conform to good business practice. The horrors are many when a club fails to maintain good audit trails for all receipts and expenditures.

Membership records, too, should be carefully maintained. This is relatively easy with the aid of a computer and a data base program. A card file or a ledger book can work well too, but they lack flexibility compared with a good data base program. Find a computer freak in your club and put him to work.

Providing your club with a group of trustees is an excellent strategy. An appropriate section of your constitution is required. The trustees should be experienced hands who have seen what works and what doesn't work. They can provide an important part of the corporate memory and wisdom. If one or more of them has business experience, that is all to the good. As your club grows in size and success, it will develop some reserve funds for educational purposes,

putting on a convention, giving awards to deserving members, or other needs. The trustees can serve as custodians of these funds for the club. Ring 15 trustees serve for a period of six years, one being elected every two years. Thus each trustee serves over a span of several administrations.

Surplus funds give your Ring options that are lacking when money is tight in the same way that a family has more options with greater discretionary funds and in the same way that serendipitous things can happen as the core of dedicated members enlarges. (It may be of interest that our Ring has three funds: (1) a working account; (2) an education fund; and (3) a reserve fund to help in putting on conventions.) Invest those funds which are available to the club in such a way that they will grow - and they will grow as your Ring develops both qualitatively and quantitatively.

Check List

What evidence do you see in your club of:

- Contagious enthusiasm
- A critical mass of dedicated members
- Reasons for pride in the Club
- Ways that old and new members can identify with the Ring
- A corporate memory
- Planning of a variety of activities to satisfy members' needs
- Good communication
- Lack of politics and disagreement

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