

# Membership Made Easy

## *A. The Players*

*“Suppose you were an idiot and suppose you were a member of Congress. But I repeat myself.” Mark Twain (1835 - 1910)*

### 1. A2 - (Type A Squared)

A2s are the people who are ready, willing, and able to take assignments, run committees, or invade a country with limited direction. A2s are the backbone of an organization because they get the job done. The only problem is that no one else knows how the job got done, why the job got done, or what the job was in the first place. For years I was firmly in the A2 camp, but after a while I realized that too many A2 projects hurts the organization. Everyone in an organization should feel that they have a role to fill. If an A2, as a committee chair, organizes and runs all the group's programs, the other committee members feel like pet rocks. This practice also causes the group's success to have ebbs and flows. When an A2 runs the committee it is successful, but the next year the committee may well be less successful if the committee chair is off the committee because no one else has a real connection with the committee's programs. A2s have to delegate to ensure that programs are shared by the group and not the sole property of the A2.

### 2. PPWLD - (Potted Plant with Limited Direction)

Potted Plants are found in every group. These are individuals who want to be associated with a group without any real commitment to the group. These individuals are valuable if they are willing to take some limited assignments and actually follow through. If a potted plant is unable or unwilling to provide any assistance to the group, the member should not be involved in running the group. Groups should have guidelines about removing members who miss a certain number or percentage of meetings. A member who fails to add value to the group can cause resentment among other group members who perceive (usually correctly) that they are doing more of the work than their fair share, especially if there are others who might want to serve in that role. It is probably better to have a position vacant, than to have it filled by a person who does not participate; at least, this gives others the chance to fill that position.

### 3. MY (Mellow Yellows)

In my parents' household when I tried to get my way, my dad would often say that there were “too many chiefs and not enough Indians.” MYs are the Indians. These are your “go to” people who are not in a leadership role by desire, limited exposure to the group, or other factors. MY people have no problems taking a role in a committee and taking on responsibilities. You need a lot of these people to have an effective group. MY people provide much needed energy to a group.

### 4. Borgs (Resistance is futile)

Borgs, although frustrating, serve a purpose. Borgs can provide balance to a group. I currently serve on a non-profit board. During my first meeting with the group, one of the new

members raised a number of questions about conflicts of interest policies and referred to a number of new regulations which apply only to large for-profit corporations. Even though the questions were off target, the group developed conflicts policies which it otherwise would not have done. If everyone is of the same mind, the group can implement policies which are not well thought out. Having a naysayer in the group helps vet important issues.

### ***B. Developing the Group Mindset***

*“I do not care to belong to a club that accepts people like me as members.”*

*Groucho Marx (1890 - 1977)*

#### 1. Diversity

If your group represents a wide range of members, the governing body of your group should also be diverse. Our YLS council includes representatives from every bar association district, but it also includes sole practitioners like Marc Sedwick, small firm lawyers like myself, and members from larger firms. Our members include prosecutors, Legal Aid attorneys, and others. We recently polled our council and also found a broad range of practice groups - from bankruptcy to criminal defense. If a state wide group is made up of only members from Indianapolis, regardless of its success or programs, it will probably be regarded as an Indianapolis only group.

#### 2. Establish Value

Do you know why you belong to the groups in which you are involved? As lawyers, we have the ability to be involved in local, state, and national bar associations, in addition to practice specific groups such as ITLA or DRI. What value does your group bring to its members? It's hard to develop a good membership base if no one can put a finger on why they belong. One of our members, Dirck Stahl, calls it the “elevator speech”. The theory is that you should be able to convey your group's mission statement in the time it takes to get on the elevator and get off on the next floor. Our section focuses on 3 things - providing practical information to younger lawyers, networking opportunities, and public service opportunities. No group can be all things to all people, but you can attempt to distinguish your group from other groups. The flip side of this is to choose your groups carefully. If you are involved in so many groups that you cannot participate in any of them successfully, why bother? Stretching yourself too thin also leads to resentment if you can't deliver.

Several years ago, I was asked to do a seminar for the American Bar Association -Young Lawyers Division. I was paired up with a lawyer from California who was to prepare written materials and do half the presentation. During the months leading up to the seminar, I received assurances from him that draft materials were almost done, but no documents were forthcoming.

I left messages without any real response to my questions. A few weeks before the seminar, I had a sinking suspicion that I was going to be a solo performer. A few days later, the committee chair gave me the news that my California colleague was overwhelmed, but was too embarrassed to let anyone know. I did the two hour seminar by myself and felt like doing everything in my power to prevent this lawyer from every taking on a similar project. The lawyer, however, dropped out of the seminar, the committee, and the section itself, without any action on my part.

### 3. Maximize Personal Contact

A number of years ago, I was involving in a group in dire need of artificial life support. The group had a number of problems - poor membership participation, limited programs, and inconsistent leadership. Over the next year, we offered a lot more programs, including informal meeting at local watering holes with local judges and community leaders. We offered programs at different times - one program involved breakfast with a different judge every month, another program offered lunch time CLE. Our regular meetings were held in the evenings. We had a sign-up sheet for every activity. After every activity, we would make a personal phone call to each new member who showed up for the meeting and asked for their input about better ways for us to do our job. We brought in member of the ABA/YLD's Affiliate Outreach Team to give us ideas about how to improve our organization.

In an ideal situation, everyone who is in a leadership position has a personal connection with most of the other leaders. All of us want to develop a network of relationships where you can field out inquiries outside your area of practice or geographic area. If the leadership group knows each other well, they can provide that network to each other and to the members at large. One of our former section chairs would open every meeting with a short exercise designed to get members to know each other better. At first it seemed somewhat gimmicky, but it did help to develop better relationships within the group.

### 4. Praise much, criticize little

Organizations depend upon volunteers who have day jobs, family commitments, and other hobbies. Unless members are recognized for their achievements, it's easy for them to lose interest. Nothing is wrong with creating personal PR for your members, such as recognizing Randy Wyllie for the great work he's does on the Network and his flexibility in holding people to submission deadlines. It reinforces the value of the organization to the member. If a member is not producing anything for the group, consider replacing the member. If the member is not following through on particular tasks, gently remind the member to follow through. After numerous attempts to contact a speaker I needed for a particular seminar, when I finally got hold of him I apologized saying that "perhaps the ball was in my court and that's why I hadn't heard back from him." The speaker laughed and said "you know that's not true, but you're trying to give me a way out." The speaker completed the seminar without a hitch.

## ***C. The Plan***

*"Your life can't go according to plan if you have no plan."*  
**(Author Unknown)**

A group can't survive with just one good year. If you have a good mix of members and a good group mindset, but don't have a plan, the group will inevitably stalemate. It's difficult to plan one year in advance, but ideally you should be looking three or five years down the road to determine: future leadership, future group projects, and future obstacles. I believe our section is successful because we have a good combination of these three elements, but we are always looking to broaden our membership base. Although sometimes time consuming, bar involvement is very rewarding. If you would like to be become more involved with our section or the Indiana State Bar

Association at large please don't hesitate to give me a call.