

Opportunity for Guidance: Engaging the “New Breed”

January 2016

Appreciative Inquiry

January 9th marks the 157th birthday of LWV founder Carrie Chapman Catt. In honor of that milestone, we ask you to consider the following quote from a 1915 speech by Catt:

Behind us, in front of us, everywhere about us are suffragists, -- millions of them, but inactive and silent...There are thousands of women who have ...been members of our organization but they have dropped out... Many have taken up other work whose results were more immediate...There are thousands of other women who have never learned of the earlier struggles of our movement. They found doors of opportunity open to them on every side...almost without exception they believe in the vote but they feel neither gratitude to those who opened the doors through which they have entered...nor any sense of obligation to open other doors for those who come after...There are still others who, timorously looking over their shoulders to see if any listeners be near, will tell us that they hope we will win...but they are too frightened...to help. There are others too occupied with the small things of life to help...There are men, too, millions of them waiting to be called. These men and women are our reserves...the final struggle needs their numbers and the momentum those numbers will bring.

- What does this quote evoke in you?
- How does it seem relevant to your League’s work today?
- How do we engage the “reserves” that Catt identifies?

Guidance

Volunteers of the 21st century are a different breed than the “reserves” that Catt identifies in her quote. In order to effectively recruit, engage, and maintain volunteers for your League, it is important to present the League’s mission effectively and to understand the motivations of volunteers to get involved and make a commitment.

Think back to when you were new to the League. Were you given tasks and projects that were engaging to you and made you feel like your skills were useful? Did members ask you about what types of work you were passionate about? Creating positive initial experiences for those who are looking for opportunities to engage is crucial to the success of the League.

An individual’s early experiences with the League will determine whether they will become a member and whether they will feel empowered to take on a leadership role in the organization. Ensuring that they are engaged with the League in ways that they find interesting and exciting will lead to better events, a more positive League and a more impactful organization.

About 100 years ago, Carrie Catt declared that the time to push for final victory for women’s suffrage had come, “How can it be done?” She said, “By a simple change of mental attitude.”

Who is the new breed of volunteer?

- Very busy, has many obligations, and often volunteers for multiple organizations
- Wants flexibility
- Expects to be empowered
- Wants to have a positive experience
- Is tech-savvy
- Wants to have an impact -- to make a difference
- Doesn’t want to be micromanaged

Based on The New Breed: Understanding and Equipping the 21st Century Volunteer by McKee & McKee

One possible shift in thinking starts with how we build our capacity as an organization. Let's consider two terms: **engagement vs. recruitment**. We use the word recruitment a lot. What is the implication of 'recruitment'? It is not hard to see that recruiting puts the needs of the institution first. We recruit new leaders and new members because the institution needs them to serve institutional purposes. Rather than engaging people in activities that put our democracy first as the reason to be involved and build the organization for that purpose. Recruitment is more akin to what the military does – recruits people to sustain a force itself.



Engagement is a different concept altogether. *People* get engaged. The notion of engagement puts the people first. When people want to get engaged, they focus on making themselves attractive, available and visible. There is an aspect of mutual benefit in the concept of engagement. The **relationship** becomes the focus. We all know from our own experience that we have to seek out relationships and that they can't be forced and they can't be rushed. We have to permit relationships to develop and hopefully deepen into ever greater commitment. And we know, from our own experience that it is only at the point that people commit to a relationship that they begin to discuss dividing up the chores. In the organizational context, that means we have to be visible; we have to be inviting and for a purpose, to have impact; we have to be available in the places that people go to seek out relationships with organizations.



According to McGee and McGee, as organization leaders, we need to approach engaging new volunteers or members much like we would approach dating.

The Dating Method

First date: A tour, an opportunity to serve, a chance to experience your mission, an experience where they hear your passion

Our goal: Give them a taste, gather information, get a second date.

Second date: Listen to their heart, find a fit, share roles and responsibilities; be honest

Our goal: Engaging, building the relationship for future engagement or securing a future date.

Future dates: Understand that "no" doesn't always mean never; appreciate them

Our goal: Engagement; transform "them" to "we"

Additional resources:

[Building the League of Tomorrow](#)

The New Breed: Understanding and Equipping the 21st Century Volunteer by McGee & McGee (2012)