

## Building a Successful Organizational Culture By Chuck Sweeney

Don't let your Chapter die, "...Like flowers in the fall. Don't take away the smiles and leave the tears."<sup>1</sup>

The Color Guard is the face of a Chapter. The soul of a Chapter is what we do. Lifeblood is the link that connects the face and the soul. It is the indispensable factor which gives a chapter vitality and continuity.

When Color Guard, Soul and Lifeblood come together as part of a Membership Promotion and Retention Strategy a Chapter begins to build a healthy organizational culture which furthers success. What's most important for the success of a chapter, as defined by smiles, participation, and results?



Most successful organizations have as a minimum three understandings. One, what they do is supportable. Two, they do not do everything. And three, great things have small beginnings.



So it is with creating and maintaining a culture within an SAR Chapter that produces participation, smiles, retention, successful outcomes and limits the prospect that your chapter will die. The purpose of this article therefore is to stimulate thought and to create awareness at the chapter level of factors that assists in achieving success and that facilitate the

---

<sup>1</sup> These quotes are the second and third lines of the Ricky Skaggs song "Don't Let Your Sweet Love Die."

creation of a meaningful Membership Promotion and Retention Strategy.

Granted, the Color Guard is also what we do; but, it's not the sole generator of smiles and successful outcomes. What makes a chapter effective is knowing how to minimize to maximize opportunities; knowing



how to calculate the numbers of Compatriots a chapter needs from year to year to do what it does; and knowing the danger signs that signal a chapter is about to spiral into nonexistence. Key questions here relate to making a determination if the membership numbers are rising or falling.

Like the Laffer Curve<sup>2</sup>, either the rising or falling of membership numbers could likely result in the same outcome; namely, members are reluctant to step forward and lead. In a rising membership scenario, the question that needs to be asked is: "Are we recruiting too many



acquaintances?" In a member decreasing membership scenario the question that needs to be asked is: "Are we

---

<sup>2</sup> Simply stated for our understanding, they are points on a bell curve where the increase of action on the upside of the curve has the same effect as a reduction of action on the downside of the curve.

asking our membership to do more than they are willing to do?" And in either scenario, the question that needs to be asked is: "Do we have an effective MP&RS, which complements our chapter's points of focus for bring on line programs we can support?"

The litmus test here is to conduct an analysis of the chapter's roster to determine who fills top leadership positions and important committee chairmanships. If any of these Compatriots are dual or triple hatted, you need to be concerned that your chapter could be on a road that leads to a spiral into nonexistence. Yet these



*Associated with a spiral into nonexistence is this reality: "There comes a time in your life, when you walk away from all the drama...."*  
Anonymous

failings or such reality need not happen, for the solution to these danger signs is the same.

Coming to the conclusion that there is something stale in the way your chapter is doing business or that the same people are doing all the work doesn't come easily. But as you read this, and as you notice that your head is shaking up and down in agreement, it's time to take action.

### **Minimize to Maximize**

Gather your key leaders who are likeminded. Hopefully these are your President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, Registrar, and Sargent-at-Arms. Review what the SAR is all about, focusing on the fact that the Sons of the American Revolution is the leading male lineage society that perpetuates the ideals of the war for independence. As a historical, educational, and patriotic, non-profit corporation, it seeks to maintain and expand the meaning of patriotism, respect for our national symbols, the value of American citizenship, and the unifying force of "E Pluribus Unum."

Then Evaluate the makeup of your membership and the receptiveness of your local community to your chapter doing activities that perpetuate the

ideals of the war of independence; that maintain and expand the meaning of patriotism; that respect our national symbols; and that demonstrate the value of American citizenship. Now begin to rebuild, taking action to discover what your MP&RS is going to be. This can be done in four steps.

### **Big Things have Small Beginnings**

**Step One.** Begin by placing on paper the size of the chapter you want, based upon current numbers and past experiences. Eliminate all jobs and committees. Then fashion an orientation that key leaders need to be free to do their primary jobs, and that no member needs to become a chairman or serve on more than two committees. Then establish your points of focus to bring on line, one at a time if necessary, only those programs you'll support because they are consistent with what is receptive in your community and because they are national programs that work well due to funding and backing at the highest levels.

For example, to expand and foster the meaning of patriotism in your chapter, elect the point of focus to participate in the Americanism Elementary and Middle Schools Poster Contests, and/or the Knight Essay Contest.



*Miss Caroline Gans, Poster Contest Winner.*



*Miss Nola Berish Knight Essay Contest Winner.*

To perpetuate the ideals of the war of independence focus on Joseph P. Rumbaugh Orations Contest and/or

the JROTC Enhanced Essay Contest. Both of these programs involve community interaction and are supported fully at the State Society and National SAR Levels.

presented to future Cadet leaders.



Shown below is Cadet Colonel Shannon Hunihan with her parents. She was a previous Saramana Chapter and FLSSAR Enhanced JROTC Essay Contest winner. She participated in the National Contest during the 123<sup>rd</sup> Congress.



*L-R Miss Hannah Stimson 2011-2012 Naples Chapter and FLSSAR 2011-2012 Winner. National SAR Contestant at the 122<sup>nd</sup> Congress. Miss Branden Causey 2012-2013 Saramana Chapter and FLSSAR Winner. National SAR Contestant at the 123<sup>rd</sup> Congress. Mr. Jerad Paprella 2013-2014 Saramana Chapter and FLSSAR Winner.*



To further respect our national symbols establish a point of focus which enables your chapter to honor participants in the SAR Eagle Scout program.



*Naples Chapter Joseph P. Rumbaugh Orations Contest participants with parents.*

To perpetuate the ideals of the war of independence also plan to participate in the ROTC/JROTC Awards Program, which consist of the (1) JROTC Bronze Medals and Certificates Presentations Program, and (2) the Enhanced JROTC Program, aka the JROTC Outstanding Cadet Essay Contest. This program was created eighteen years ago by own Florida Society member and Past President General (1997-1998) Carl Hoffmann.

In the following photo Chapter honors are rendered to JROTC Cadets and Senior military Instructors of the eight High Schools in Naples, Florida. JROTC Bronze Medals and accompanying Certificates were



Eagle David Hager of the Jacksonville Chapter receives the National SAR Eagle Scout of the year award from FLSSAR Eagle Scout Program from Chairman Charles Day.

To exhibit to your community that you value the ideals of American citizenship by those who serve, sponsor a program that honors Law Enforcement and Fire Fighters.



Center Top Photo, Saramana President Vic McMurry renders honors to Police and Law Enforcement Personnel. Bottom Photo Far Left, Vic McMurry extends honors to Fire Fighters and Emergency Medical Services Personnel.



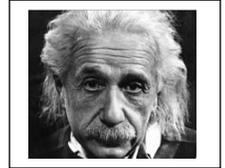
To put a face on all your activities establish a Color Guard as the unifying force. You don't need many. Three to four will do.



The NSSAR Color Guard Handbook gives guidance for the minimum number of men that form a Color Guard unit. That number is four: Two (2) Color Bearers of which one carries the United States National Flag, and the other carries either the State or SAR Flag; and two (2) Musketeers or Riflemen who escort the Color Bearers. Further, it's authorized that should a Florida SAR Chapter not have Musketeers or Riflemen in attendance, the Color Guard may have a minimum of three (3) members with at least one, usually the Color Guard Commander, marching to the right of the National Colors. The left side of the National Colors shall be covered, where practical,

either by a second Color Guard member or by another Color Guard Bearer who carries another flag (most often the state flag or an SAR flag). In formations exceeding four Compatriots, the Color Guard Commander will march ahead of the National Colors separate from any other rank.

**Step Two.** "Make things simple not simpler." This is a paraphrase of a famous quote attributed to Albert Einstein. It has several interpretations. Its value to us, however, is imbedded in the understanding that focus nets significant positive outcomes. The depth of this understanding is found in the words of the late Steve Jobs. "Simple can be harder than complex. You have to work hard to get your thinking clean to make it simple. But it's worth it in the end because once you get there, you can move mountains."



Any one or all of the aforementioned programs will add meaning and depth to your organization. You don't have to do everything, but focusing on one or more bread and butter programs of the SAR will not only spotlight those who are participants but will cause those members and guests in attendance to smile.

**Step Three.** Re-evaluate the work you did in step one, with an eye on determining the status of your chapter's organizational culture and the degree to which it will harmonize successfully with the programs you believe are supportable and which encompass the culture of the National SAR.

For our purposes, organizational culture (OC) includes values and behaviors unique to a chapter and the community in which it resides. Furthermore, it includes a chapter's vision, habits, beliefs, and managerial leadership style/structure. Two noted researchers in the field of OC wrote in a 2006 article that OC is a set of shared assumptions that guide what happens in organizations by defining appropriate behavior for various situations.<sup>3</sup> Stated differently, OC affects the way

<sup>3</sup> [Jump up ^](#) Ravasi, D.; Schultz, M. (2006). "Responding to organizational identity threats: Exploring the role of organizational culture". *Academy of Management Journal* **49** (3): 433–458. doi:10.5465/amj.2006.21794663.

compatriots and other groups interact with each other. For example, an excellent source for recruitment in a chapter's community is the cultivation of new member referrals from DAR members.



*DAR Lady Alice Hornback is awarded special recognition for her recruiting and referrals of new SAR members to the Saramana Chapter.*

**Step Four.** Know how to calculate your chapter's continuation rate (CR). This is essential, for it gives a numerical benchmark regarding the possible number of Compatriots who will remain with the chapter in the next year to carry out its membership promotion and retention strategy (MP&RS). For our purposes the CR is a comparison of empirical data regarding the end-strengths of the two most recent years. It's the first and foremost activity a chapter should consider during its development of a MP&RS.

For example, end-strengths of the various Florida SAR chapters are listed at <http://www.flssar.org/FLSSAR/testCounts.asp>. Review the data for the Saramana Chapter. Its CR is the product of the membership number for 2013 divided by the total membership number for 2014. This calculation is 87.6 percent.

It makes good managerial sense to know the current number of Compatriots in your Chapter and the likely percentage who will remain with the chapter in the following year. If for no other reason, knowing the chapter's CR gives leadership a recruiting number that must be realized to grow or shrink in size.<sup>4</sup>

Logically speaking, if a chapter wishes to grow, then its recruiting effort beyond its status quo number has to increase. In the previous example concerning the

<sup>4</sup> To shrink in size might be just as important as to grow in membership numbers. Effective leaders know what's in the best interest of their chapters and the SAR that will enable them to remain successful for years to come.

Saramana Chapter, if the current existing membership number is 159 it is likely that 139 Compatriots will renew their membership in the following year. Thus, the Saramana Chapter's MP&RS must have a recruiting objective of at least 20 newly joined Compatriots if it wishes to maintain its status quo membership size. If, however, the Saramana Chapter wishes to grow to 165 members, it must set its recruiting objective for at least 26 new members.

The CR should not be confused with growth or decline rate; it refers only to the existing numbers of Compatriots on hand for a specific moment of time. Its value, however, is the planning dimension it offers. Namely, it provides an estimated recruiting/retention target for a chapter to adjust its membership numbers so it can manage programs it considers essential for successful outcomes.

***In Sum. Don't let a chapter die. A Chapter's journey for building a successful organizational culture, which reverses or prevents a spiral into nonexistence and helps in the creation of a meaningful Membership Promotion and Retention Strategy for success, is a function of the following:***

- 1. Know the danger signs. Avoid doing everything.***
- 2. Know your people. Assign them to responsibilities and tasks sparingly. But do so with focus to capture their strengths and your chapter's objectives.***
- 3. Develop an organizational culture, ensuring that it is supportable in the community in which the chapter resides; initiate and sustain the objectives of the SAR through selective participation in its "bread and butter programs."***
- 4. Minimize what you do to maximize success; realizing great things have small beginnings.***
- 5. Know how to compute a continuation rate, so to ensure that an estimated number of needed members can be calculated for the execution of an effective MP&RS.***
- 6. Make thing simple, which ensures you aren't taking away the smiles and leaving tears.***