Retaining Leaders in Your Chapter Checklist

1. Understand why people leave leadership teams.

    a. Common reasons given for leaving include:

        i. "I don't have the time"

        ii. "You have enough people already"

        iii. "I'm not a good fit for the organization"

        iv. "My husband/wife/partner thinks I spend too much time on volunteer work"

        v. "I'm already over-committed"

        vi. "I'm moving out of the chapter's area and there's no chapter where I'm going"

CAUTION

Do not accept these answers at face value. While they might be true, often they're used to avoid revealing the respondent's true reasons for fear of offending the listener or "burning a bridge." It's important to dig deeper, even if the answers turn out to be uncomfortable. This is where real leadership improvement begins.

---

2. Honestly evaluate your leadership performance to identify where you need to improve

    a. Determine which, if any, of the following situations apply:

        i. Lack of professionalism

            1. Personality conflicts

            2. No sense that the volunteer is valued, that they:

                a. Are "just a warm body"

                b. Are mismatched to the job they've been asked to do

                c. Have no flexibility in volunteer opportunities

        ii. Lack of good leadership, including:

            1. Lack of direction

            2. Not listening to volunteers' ideas

            3. Lack of clear communication

            4. Unproductive meetings

            5. Lack of training

            6. Not having a succession plan

3. To determine which of the reasons above apply

    a. Ask open-ended (NOT yes/no) questions, such as:

      i.   What would you like to see change in the chapter?

      ii.   If you could do something else for us, what would you like to do?

     iii.   What are the values of other organizations you volunteer for that appeal to you, and how are we missing them?

     iv.   What is the most pressing issue you think the chapter is dealing with… or failing to deal with?

      v.   What projects did you work on, and did you feel you got the support you needed?

4. Develop an improvement plan to address shortfalls. Examples:

   a.   Better use volunteers' talents:

      i.   Ask them what they want to do, do well, and enjoy doing

      ii.   Describe the organization's needs and ask how the volunteer could best help with them

   b.   Listening:

      i.   Have a "round table" discussion at the end of meetings to solicit thoughts and ideas

      ii.   Take notes, ask the person with the idea if they'd be willing to lead or be part of the action suggested

     iii.   Recognize everyone for their contributions

     iv.   During meetings, request recaps of events from event leaders

      v.   During meetings, ask event participants for their feedback on how the event could be improved

     vi.   Outside of meetings, make occasional personal contact just to see how people are doing

   c.   Preventing leadership stagnation:

      i.   Be open about your leadership development plan

      ii.   Rotate people to different jobs within the organization

         1.   Ask people what new job they'd like to try

     iii.   Reach out to non-participating members to try to bring them on board

   d.   Avoid overtasking willing volunteers:

      i.   Make and keep a promise to each volunteer that you will ask them to do only ONE thing for the organization. THEY may volunteer for more but you will not ask them to do more.

5. Create leader development plans

   a.   Jointly develop with each ExComm member a plan based on their talents, interests, and aspirations within AFA

   b.   Get each leader to participate in activities that will expand their experience base and knowledge of AFA

    c.   Hold a workshop to discuss different roles available at all levels (chapter, state, region, national) within AFA

    d.   Provide the training necessary

    e.   Mentor them or help them find a mentor

    f.   Give them the freedom to lead their projects their way, so long as they meet its goals

    g.   Reward and promote them when/as appropriate

6. Make leader retention part of your organization's annual and strategic plans

    a.   Identify leadership needs ahead of time

    b.   Include a succession plan

        i.   Ask the team for suggestions on who would be the best fit for each position

        ii.   Pick more than one candidate whenever possible