

Approaching Your Prospective Members - Part III

By Ted Robinson

“WHAT IS WORTH DOING IS WORTH THE TROUBLE OF ASKING SOMEBODY TO DO IT.” AMBROSE BIERCE

How do you approach the membership prospects you have identified? It's the next step in the search for private club members and one effective process is similar to college fraternity and sorority recruitment.

Earlier in Part I (*The Boardroom Magazine January/February 2012*) we discussed the critical brand position statement – assuring your club (the product) matches the market's demand and defining your points of differentiation, and Part II (*The Boardroom Magazine May/June 2012*) addressed finding prospective members – from referrals by current members and available technology.

There are a variety of other techniques, but whichever you select must be filtered through your club's brand position statement. Your goal is to get them hooked – to get the prospective member to recognize the quality of life enhancement provided by your club and to get the prospect physical to the club where you can have their undivided attention.

Your first step must be in deciding whether or not your club should create a special incentive such as a payment plan, unique application gift, reduced initiation fee, etc. Next you have to determine whether or not your current members are willing to engage in the membership process - recognizing that personal member-to-prospect invitations are always the most effective.

If you get member “buy-in”, your next step is matching up current members with your prospects – determining which members know or have an acquaintance with any prospects. A good way to do this is may be by forming a committee (call it a membership, host, ambassador or something similar) as motivating groups is easier than encouraging individuals.

Creating fun events to review prospect lists (with willing members) builds camaraderie and generates effective results. However, if you have limited member participation, you and your fellow department managers will have to fill these members' roles.

In either case the process begins with a personal telephone call, followed by a snail mail invitation (direct mail) to visit the club for a special club introduction event where the prospect can meet with others “who may have an interest in joining with us.”

The style and quality of the invitation again depends upon your brand – ranging from a simple postcard to an engraved formal invitation - and certainly includes your conventional, web and social media addresses.

The invitation has to be closely followed by another personal call and perhaps an offer to drive the prospect to the club introduction event, and email reminders.

Your event must be carefully orchestrated using a room that makes the event appear crowded; shows off the club's positives and has impressive refreshments, along with a welcome speech from the club president. Be certain multiple prospects will be there as well as more host members than prospects (ideally 2:1) along with key department heads (GM, chef, professionals, superintendent, fitness, and catering).

Every prospect must be with a member at all times (just like a fraternity or sorority rush smoker...probably not a politically correct term – but they sure were fun!). When each event is over convene the attending members and assign at least one member to follow up with each prospect, inviting them to dinner, tennis, golf or wherever the prospects' interests lie. Ideally, this process will be repeated bi-monthly or more.

Following up the member assignments and staying with each prospect by the membership director is critical and this may be where the term “herding cats” originated.

As intense as it can be, creating this member-to-member approach provides the highest probability of successful membership marketing. **BR**

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