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How To Get Members Into A New Club (And Actually Keep Them There)

Introduction/Overview

Amongst the many ruffled papers and endless meetings, a high-school teacher gives a surprising notice to a student: "CLUB APPROVAL NOTICE". A student has just been chosen to start running a club at their school. However, they have no experience. Although there might be a lot of stress amongst students like them, that experience is way more common than what may be realized. First off, a club needs to have members. Right now, they do not have any members at all. Second of all, how could that club live when there are no members? As a man named Mark Williamson – an owner of a 50+ year-running club – best puts these feelings as: "Every journey starts with a first step. But that first step must begin with clarity." (Williamson). Today, many organizational tools are available to help clarify the process of attracting new members to a club. One of them is called the five-step "SMART" process. The steps are defined as "Setting The Foundation, Marketing A Club, Reaching Out and Retaining, and Taking the Club to the Next Level". Now, most other tactics focus strictly on recruitment for the present; however, "SMART" focuses on the present and the future. Therefore, by employing the "SMART" process, a beginner club leader can start to easily accumulate members as well as retain those members for the club's longevity.

Special Terms

To fully understand the language of a club leader, here are some basic vocabulary listed below.

1. "SMART"

    a. "SMART" is defined as "Setting The Foundation, Marketing A Club, Attracting Members, Reaching Out and Retaining, and Taking the Club to the Next Level".

2. Outreach

    a. Outreach is defined as the "act of reaching out" to club members.("Definition of OUTREACH").

3. Recruitment:

    a. Recruitment is defined as "the process of adding new individuals to a population" of an organization/event, and more. ("Definition of RECRUITMENT").

4. Active Media

    a. Active media is defined as advertisements that contain visually appealing demonstrations through color, shapes, and more that aim to engage the viewer more effectively than normal media.

5. Mediums

    a. Mediums are defined as a general category for ways that a club can be advertised. For example, this includes posters, videos, announcements, and more.

6. Faucet

    a. A certain technique or process that is metaphorically similar to a water faucet: a certain path that lets a specific result occur.

Sequence of Steps
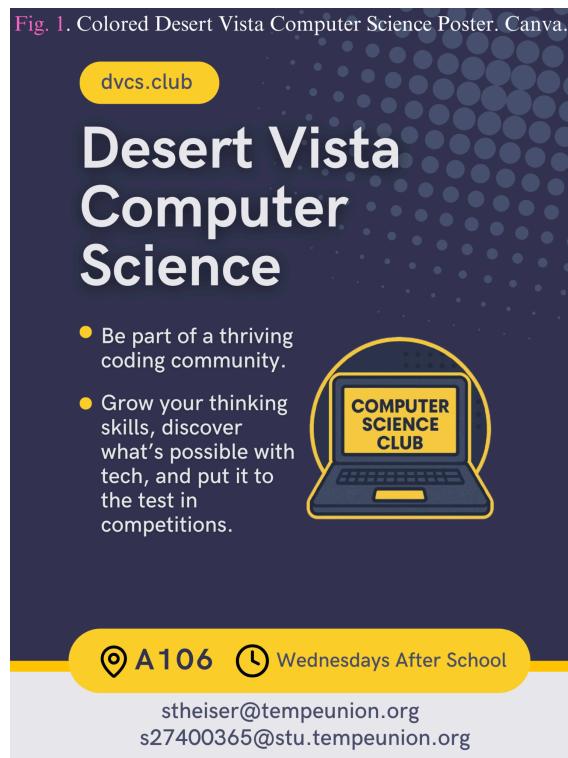
1. "S" - Setting The Foundation:

Setting the foundation – the first step of a club – is a necessity; a club cannot even commence without clarifying the focus of that club. For instance, will it be a religious-based

club? Will it be a sports-based club? Once the main premise of the club has been established, the leader must then entirely mitigate their position as a leader. It seems radical. However, a leader must "understand [to incorporate] member's behaviors, what is the main motivation to join a particular club [and] which values are important to them." (Butler). There is no club without members. Humbling oneself to be in the viewpoint of a member is not just crucial, it is necessary to understand how – and why – a member would choose that club out of all of the other ones that are offered. (Butler). For the third substep, a club needs to define a purpose. What would a person joining this club want to get out of it? By having goals and a purpose to be pursued in a club, it proves to be one of the most effective analyses to keep members motivated and have them continue to stay in it. (Butler). With clearly defined goals, defined purpose and acknowledgement from the perspective of a member, setting a foundation for a club can be easy, and is necessary for the rest of the steps to even begin.

2. "M" - Marketing A Club

Marketing a club, the second step, comes right after knowing what a club will engage with; now, the question lies in who will attend this club. The first substep lies in identifying a potential audience. As the next substep, it should be known that advertisements lie heavily in relaying the value of a club to that audience . The main question to answer in making advertisements is: Why would someone join that specific club over the other ones that are offered in that school? The third substep is then to choose the mediums that the club will then be advertised. For instance, schools may permit social media to advertise on, club posters to hang up, school announcements, and more. ("How to Promote"). One very popular used tool these days is called Canva, a website that allows for printable high-definition graphical posters, and more through templates. (Erstad). Although printed posters may be costly, the result is worth the

cost. To make these advertisements worthwhile, the leader should make these advertisements "active". What does it mean for a poster to be "active", however? That comparison should be demonstrated through an example. For instance, if a person was walking alongside a poster in a crowded hallway, would Fig.1 or Fig.2 stand out the most to them? (see Fig.1 and Fig.2 below).

Fig. 2. B/W Desert Vista Computer Science Poster. Canva.

Fig. 1. Colored Desert Vista Computer Science Poster. Canva.

Mediums like these have been proven to draw more attention and more longer glances than just simple, black-and-white mediums. (Decker). Active media that prioritize their mission have a greater tendency to have a "greater number of glances on average", and provide "greater effects" on attraction for a club. (Decker; Packer et al). In summary, every club leader should take full advantage of the possibilities and resources available to them today. Although this step can take some time, effort, and resources like money, the payoff of marketing a club is undeniably worth it to start attracting members in a club for now, and for forever.

3. "A" - Attracting Members

Attracting members – the third step – is more than just having people continuously show up; it is about making those members feel a sense of belonging and keeping them interested enough to actually keep returning. In fact, it has been proven that when students feel needed in a club situation, they are more likely to stay engaged and are less likely to stray away from that club. (Chang, et al). With meetings, which should be "regularly scheduled", they should be a "warm and welcoming environment", be low-pressure, and be fun. (Williamson; Butler). One faucet that is the best way of easily attracting members is teamwork. However, what makes it different from just doing certain activities? Why would teamwork be the best out of all of the other ways to attract members? What makes teamwork different from other activities, is the results it gives. In fact, "eleven studies" across factors like business, sports, and military support the fact that "within teams", members engage in "more efficient, effective, and viable behaviors", proving that teamwork is the best way to promote success and make the club more attractive to members. (Salcinovic et al). By prioritizing team efforts within clubs, members are able to feel a sense of belonging, and will want to return in the best – and easiest – way possible.

4. "R" - Reach Out and Retain

Reaching out and retaining members, the fourth step, is the next step to be accomplished once there are members that can be recruited. To understand how to retain members, it should be first discussed what drives members away and target those issues. The leading reasons for members leaving are "the inability to achieve goals, lack of interest/motivation, and [the] lack of attention from staff". (Williamson). Clubs with high retention "have a system that allows them to check in on how these members are progressing". (Williamson). By targeting these three steps

and also gaining feedback from members with a planned system, club members can be retained and the club can have vital feedback for improvement. In hindsight, the big picture is to help members achieve realistic goals, keep motivation alive, as well as promoting healthy staff-to-member relationships. The first substep is to set realistic, attainable goals and milestones for members. With this, members are able to feel a sense of pride and accomplishment of their growth, which will keep them motivated. The next substep is for staff leaders to check in with members and promote intimate staff-to-member communication and a relationship. With this, members feel valued by the most important staff members of that organization. As a result, this builds loyalty and reputation. All of these methods are effective due to its results. For instance, there was a study done which measured the effectiveness of sports clubs in college, and researchers found that when "regular involvement in tournaments [occured], participants' skills and interpersonal relationships improved significantly". (Chang, et al). As a result, retention functions at its best when there is a personal connection and involvement, as it keeps commitment lit like the sun. By targeting the lack of interpersonal relationships and the lack of motivation, a club can start to build a reputation, and future members for itself.

5. "T" - Taking The Club To The Next Level

Now that a strong club identity has been established, as the last step, clubs need to be open to feedback to keep improving for its future. The three final substeps here are to promote involvement, a strong group identity, as well as motivation to gain – and keep – members in that club. For the first faucet, when members are engaged and involved, they are more likely to stick with the club. As an example, "the level of club involvement will significantly enhance the effect of participation motivation" as demonstrated by a female college sports team. (Chang, et al). For the second faucet, a strong group identity is necessary as it diminishes "team conflict" and "team

failure". (Salcinovic et al). As a result, a group identity glues members together and keeps the club from falling apart. As the last substep, motivation ultimately drives whether or not someone returns to a club. Clubs that give motivation and a reason to come back ultimately win, as "students' zeal for clubs come from the fun and elevated emotion during the time of activities… which motivates them to remain in clubs". (Chang, et al). As a result, these three faucets prioritized will take a club to new heights and beyond for now, and for forever.

Examples/Results

(Fig. 3. Maestas. "ASU 2024-25 FBLA Regionals Group Photo")

I – the writer – am currently the secretary of the Desert Vista High School Computer Science Club and have been leading a team of over 30 members (see Fig. 3). There has never been a clear moment for me when I got to learn how to help my team members help recruit new members. However, the "SMART" acronym has revolutionized recruiting for the Computer Science Club. There exist over 50+ members, at least 15 more than the recruitment last year without the beneficiary with the "SMART" acronym. This year, there has been more engagement, more teamwork and collaboration, and this year there is a lot to be looking forward

to starting solely from this year. We used the "SMART" process. With "S', obviously our club was based on Computer Science. However, we wanted this year to deliver more real-world experience, as well as doing competitions. For "M', our team decided to follow this rule in creating our posters around our school, focusing primarily on our experience from last year and the goals we diverted towards this year. (See Fig. 1). With "A", "R", and "T", we decided to make our club's future into a work of art by diving headfirst into doing personal – alongside team – projects, giving our members a taste of what the real world of programming looks like. With our results with the "SMART" process, we have more than twenty people competing in competitions this year. (See

	A	B
1	Name	Has Paid?
2	Zeke Mitchell	Yes
3	Jadan Pousson	Yes
4	Tao Li	Yes
5	Quincy Nash	Yes
6	Tristan Itoh	Yes
7	Dylan Yu	Yes
8	Bukyung	Yes
9	Rumi Islam	Yes
10	Mateo G.	Yes
11	Luis	Yes
12	Reyna	Yes
13	Keegan Neid	Yes
14	Aurelius Bendle	Yes
15	Schloak	Yes
16	Campbell	Yes
17	Zander Coffman	Yes
18	Noah Yi	Yes
19	Harper	Yes
20	David P.	Yes
21	Ryan	Yes
22	Andel	Yes
23	Massimo	Yes
24	Madden Guimond	Yes

(Fig. 4. Yi. et al, "FBLA Spreadsheet for who has paid").

Fig.4). As another example, a friend of mine has started their own new club: the "Desert Vista Game Dev Club". They had no experience of how to run a club whatsoever. However, by following the "SMART" process, they are starting out their first year strong. They have a collection of members who love the niche topic of making games, and have motivation to start – and engage – with the club. The "SMART" process has no argument against it. It has been proven as a process that has feasible results, as well as realistic results to make a club go from being begun to being reputable for its future.

Conclusion

Many leader-oriented students these days would like to start a club but have no idea how to start. Many of them do not have experience and are too worried to start because there are many factors that go into getting members into a club. After all, there is no club without members. However, with the "SMART" process, an ordinary person who might not even begin to think they can run a club, can now easily run one with five organized steps. The first step is to clarify. It may seem like an unnecessary step. However, a lot can go smoothly by having an organized plan, mission, and goal, as the next steps bleed from the first step. The next step is then to market a club. The main idea of marketing is to engage an intended mission, as well as put lots of effort into the design and outreach. No entrepreneur ever got successful by acting like the majority. Next, when there are potential members, they need to be kept and retained with teamwork being the easiest – and most effective – step to use. Next, by having more feedback, getting real-world advice, and more, gaining members for a club can be an easy and simple process to be completed. All of these steps are intricate, necessary, and need to be completed in order in order to reap the benefits. Ultimately, the "SMART" process is not just a simple five-step process, it is a woven, intricate environment that takes effort to fully be at its maximum potential to benefit a new beginner leader to a club. With the "SMART" process, even the most ruffled of papers and meetings without end can have a clear path to follow that works the best for a club: a club that plants itself in the ground, a club that waters itself to grow big and strong, and a club that continues to grow for its lifetime.

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