

Women's Council of REALTORS®

NETWORK First-Year Member Communication Strategy

Introduction

Why should we have a special strategy to communicate with members in their first year of membership? New members, especially those who have had limited experience or knowledge of the Council before joining, have many questions: *What will this group be like? Will I fit in and be accepted? Will this help my business? Will membership be a good investment of time and dollars?* With so many groups to join and resources available for REALTORS®, Council membership has to quickly and substantively prove its value. It is no wonder that for Women's Council networks (and for all associations) attrition in the first year of membership is very high – higher than any other year of membership -- and with all the effort it takes to recruit a member, loss of a member in the first year is a tremendous drain on resources. For these reasons, the new member's experience in the first year of membership is a critical time and deserves special attention!

The Stages of Membership

To develop an effective first-year member communication strategy, it's helpful to think ideally about the various stages of the first-year member's relationship with the local Council network from the time she joins to the time she renews, and what she must feel, believe and experience in order for secure her renewal. Ideally, the first-year member would move through three stages in her relationship with the local chapter: New Member stage, Active Member stage, and Renewing Member stage. What must the member feel, believe or experience at each stage? Consider the following.

<p>A NEW MEMBER must . . .</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feel welcomes • Become familiar with the value of membership and how to access benefits/services • Get 'connected' in some way to others that results in business value 	<p>An ACTIVE MEMBER must . . .</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See how participation and involvement can meet personal and professional goals • Have access to a range of ways to participate 	<p>A RENEWING MEMBER must . . .</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Believe that promises made when recruited have materialized • See sufficient value to reinvest in membership • Have an affinity for and a 'relationship' with the Council • See the Council connection as indispensable to business success
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In summary, during the first year of membership, the new member must: 1) understand the business value of membership, 2) have a sense of 'belonging' to a professional community of peers, 3) feel connected to other members through productive professional relationships, and 4) achieve tangible personal growth and/or business results.

The Suggested First-Year Member Communication Strategy

Following is a suggested first-year member communication strategy that complements current ways National Women's Council communicates with members during the first year of membership. These are *minimum* guidelines representing the most critical contact points between the network and the first-year member. The strategy also calls for establishing a volunteer position called the "Ambassador". Networks can certainly do more than the guidelines suggest, and can assign the responsibilities listed to other positions within the network (see notes at the end for additional options).

FIRST-YEAR MEMBER COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Contact Timing <i>(from start of membership)</i>	National Communication	Network Communication <i>(suggested minimum contact)</i>
<p>Month 1 Welcome</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome e-mail from National President, includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Message that membership in Women’s Council is a ‘business investment/ opportunity’ ○ Link to welcome video on “how to get the most from your Women’s Council membership” ○ Instructions on completing the Member Profile ○ Contact information for network leadership and link to network website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After National welcome e-mail has been sent, Network Ambassador calls or visits the new member to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Offer a local welcome ○ Encourage/assist the new member in completing the Member Profile ○ Interview the new member to determine: reasons joined, expectations for the membership experience; business interests, goals, needs; areas of expertise/business success the member could share with others (see Interview Template below) ○ Share information on next network new member orientation ○ Personally invite the new member to the next network meeting/event (make plans to go together or to meet there) <u>Other Ideas</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a welcome note or e-mail sent from the Network President or President-elect • Send a Starbucks gift card as a fun way to say ‘let’s meet for coffee’ • Send a hand-written welcome card
<p>Months 2-3 Orientation/ Engagement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First monthly e-newsletter from National 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New member’s first network meeting/event: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ambassador ensures new member is comfortable and meets/sits with network member(s) who in some way can provide a business value or business connection (based on interview conducted at first meeting) ○ Introduction of new member at first network meeting/event (self-introduction or Ambassador introduces member to the group) • New member orientation is conducted (when sufficient number of new members recruited). Focus of orientation should be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How members can maximize the value of their membership to achieve their business goals ○ Helping members build productive business relationships (considering including a business networking activity as part of the orientation session) • Ambassador shares information about new member with those leading the orientation gleaned from initial interview with new member • New members are invited to a reception with network officers/governing board and Ambassadors so leaders can get to know them and encourage appropriate involvement opportunities • Short bio of new member posted on network website and/or highlighted in network newsletter and on Facebook page <u>Other Ideas</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a laptop available at the network meeting to help members complete their profile • Present member pin to new members at their first meeting • Use a phone tree to call all members to boost meeting attendance; text reminders

Contact Timing <i>(from start of membership)</i>	National Communication	Network Communication <i>(suggested minimum contact)</i>
Months 4-6 Engagement	Monthly e-newsletter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call or visit from Ambassador to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Assess the new member's membership experience thus far and to ensure the new member is getting value; if not, redirect and facilitate connections as needed ○ Position involvement/ volunteerism as a business strategy and suggest appropriate volunteer opportunities ○ Facilitate connections as needed and follow-up on involvement <p><u>Other Ideas</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a network officer call the new member after attendance at her first meeting to say 'great to see you there... how was your first network meeting experience?'
Months 7-10 Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First-Year Member Survey from National (to track trends, better understand reasons for attrition of first year members, and test effectiveness of first year member communications strategy). Results provided to network. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call or visit from Ambassador to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Check in on business goals/interests and if the new member is getting the support needed; if not, redirect or facilitate connections ○ Check in on volunteer experience or continue to encourage involvement, including, for example, sharing of new member's expertise/experience as part of a network program ○ Mention first-year member survey to be sent from National and stress the importance of completing ○ Mention upcoming renewal <p><u>Other Ideas</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have incoming network President call or send a note encouraging the new member's continued involvement and renewal for the coming year
Months 11-12 Renewal Process Begins		

NOTES:

- The First-Year Member Communications Strategy is initiated every month based on the month in which the new member joins
- About 50 percent of Women's Council new members join between January and March, placing a heavy demand on Ambassadors to make contact with new members at this time of year, and likely requiring support from others

The Role of Ambassador

Ambassadors can be part of the network Membership Committee or a separate volunteer position. This role can also be assigned to the VP of Membership or as a duty of the network Line Officers depending on the size of the network and the number of new members to be contacted during the year. The principle roles of the Ambassador include:

- Making personal contact with new members
- Facilitating the new member 'welcome, orientation and engagement' process
- Helping new members gain the most business value from their membership
- Observing new members and 'scouting' for future network volunteers and leaders, and sharing that information with network leadership

First-Year Member Communication Strategy

New Member Welcome Interview Template

Name of New Member

Date Joined

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Current Company/Position

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Years in Real Estate

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Market Niche/Specialties

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How heard about Women's Council

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Major reason(s) joined/expectations for Council membership

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Business goals/needs for the coming year

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Members or Types of Members Would Like to Meet (experience, expertise, etc.)

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Business Skills, Experience, Expertise Can Share

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Preliminary Areas of Interest for Network Involvement

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Name of Interviewer

Date Interviewed

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