By Linda Boone
Interim National Secretary
American Legion Auxiliary

In 1992, when I was installed as national president of the American Legion Auxiliary, I was concerned about the consistent decrease in membership for over 20 years in our organization. I challenged our members back then with the question, “Where would the organization be in another 20 years if this trend continued?” Now, 27 years later, this membership decrease continues, and we are suffering from a lack of resources (people, things and dollars) at all levels of the organization.

Potential members of both organizations see us truly as a “family” of organizations. The public makes no distinction between The American Legion and the American Legion Auxiliary. Out there, in communities, we do not have two separate identities but function instead as one entity. We are a multimillion-member organization with one name, one identity, one purpose. We are held to common beliefs. Our programs are unified. We work for common causes. Ideally, all members are on an equal footing with one another as volunteers in service to our veterans and communities. We are, by definition, a family … but are we?

Why are so many of our Legion spouses not members of the Auxiliary? Why do Legion members outnumber Auxiliary members by nearly three to one? We must work side-by-side if we want to accomplish our goals. There must be mutual respect, cooperation and tolerance between the men and women of the Legion Family.

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Every member of the Legion Family, regardless of age, sex or level of leadership, has their own unique and valuable contributions to make. We must have one priority and one agenda to ensure the success of our mutual goals. Only through a united, committed effort by both the men and women of The American Legion, Sons of The American Legion, and American Legion Auxiliary, will we succeed in recruiting all eligible members.

Legion members who are reluctant to accept Auxiliary assistance and participation, or to help in recruiting efforts for the Auxiliary, need to understand what can be achieved by involving Auxiliary members in their programs. Our mission and goals are similar, and with much to be done to achieve, we cannot afford to waste a single, potential volunteer because of preconceived notions, prejudice or bias. An active, growing Auxiliary provides more hands to share the work, total Family involvement in a worthwhile effort for the betterment of our own communities, more money, more community support, more outside contacts, and better promotional opportunities. We should be growing together, and it makes good sense to promote membership for both organizations.

Dissension or misunderstanding within the ranks of the Legion Family hinder our growth. That which divides us will also weaken us. At this most critical time in our organizational lives, at 100 years, we cannot afford to allow our image and credibility within the community suffer because of discord or communication breakdowns. What we do now can and will have far-reaching effects on our membership recruiting capabilities. Indeed, our very survival hangs in the balance.

The American Legion Auxiliary pleads for The American Legion’s assistance in growing our membership by ensuring every eligible female member of your family is offered membership, that posts without a unit partner to establish one, and increase awareness within their communities of the Legion Family accomplishments toward the mission.

Linda Boone, Interim National Secretary, American Legion Auxiliary. Past National President, American Legion Auxiliary.

- Honor those who served before
- Serve those here today
- Prepare for those who are yet to serve

Ready to Engage (Train)

CHECKLIST

☐ Most recent approved script?
☐ Most recent appropriate presentation?
☐ Helpful handouts?
☐ Appropriate attire?
☐ Your current American Legion cap

FIND IT ONLINE : myLegion.org is a FREE website designed to connect members of The American Legion to their post and department leadership.
Inspiring a new generation of Legionnaires is an art form that will require 360-degree close-quarters engagement by every member. Continued retention of Legionnaires will require a depth of leadership and sky-is-the-limit imagination like never before. The fact is, the social construct of our nation is far more complex, diverse and interconnected than ever before. However, that interconnectedness, realized with the many social media platforms of today, is having a negative effect on our resident community behavior—including participation in our local posts and communities. The illusion of kinship from interaction on social media platforms is a formidable opponent to the basic human need of personal communication. Often, we present to the world on social media an ideal version of ourselves—an avatar of sorts. I believe that social media is giving our fellow warriors a false sense of brotherhood—lacking the vital intimacy needed at the critical point of friction. This is where The American Legion steps up and in.

This last September another Marine brother of mine took his own life. All but one of my fallen warriors over the last 20-years were “Facebook friends.” Their Facebook façade was not unlike my own; smiling faces of family, the occasional polarizing political post, arts and entertainment opinion, or recent culinary achievement. From time-to-time, especially on anniversaries of hard-fought battles or reflections of days “in the dirt,” there would be an exchange of brotherly affection. There was, of course, the occasional divorce, new marriage or birth of a child. A few times there would be an obvious cry for help; an expose of the demon that haunts them—resulting in an immediate phone call or road trip. Mostly though, there were no obvious signs of trouble.

The false sense of togetherness that social media incites is cause for concern, and collaterally a reason for decline in active post participation. Yet, some posts have done excellent work with their social media and website footprint which has enabled greater outreach to veterans than boots-on-the-ground alone. We should view social media as today’s most dangerous and necessary weapon. Used properly in our hands, the weapon can help us gain and maintain the initiative—taking The American Legion to new heights. Used improperly in our hands, it may expose vulnerabilities that hinder our appeal to veterans both young and old. Used in the hands of our competitors alone, without the benefit of matching them weapon-for-weapon, will result in fratricide by irrelevance.

Social media is not a negative. It is possible that social media outreach is preventing far more tragedy than we give credit for, but I also think that we have to consider the very real need for kneecap-to-kneecap, eyeball-to-eyeball social interaction. I’m not confident that my fellow warriors know they need it until they experience it; that enormous weight that is lifted when you tell an attentive and empathetic person of the chaos roaming in your head. Facebook will simply never replace that.

Like many, I viewed The American..continued on next page.
Legion as the place I would go to socialize when the kids were out of the house and the wife needed a break from my ego. This implied I would be welcome at a time just before social security eligibility and just after my tolerance for new cultural norms hit rock bottom. I had it in my mind that (eventually) I would stumble into the nearest post seeking out the only other people in the world that understood my “isms.” With the advent of social media and the ease of modern communication, I even wondered if The American Legion would be around when I was ready. Now I can say with 100 percent certainty that The American Legion is more important than ever before.

While social media has gripped our youth and made comfortable the new revolution of expressive isolationism, it is also the new battleground that we must adjust to. However, we must also fight to preserve the vital personal communication and warm embrace of the post culture from generational warrior to generational warrior. Sometimes what we need are new relationships with like-minded warriors from generations new and old to complement our existing network. The living history of Legionnaires breaking bread together helps to vindicate our service and reminds us that while the road we travel is definitely the least traveled, it has been traveled before.

*Bob Sussan (VA)* on post operations and management—best practices (a multi-part series)

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Ron Neff of Fishers, Ind., is a Member Engagement Coordinator for the Southeast Region at National Headquarters.

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Are YOU a Trainer?
Have a hot training tip? We need your submissions! Send your training ideas to train@legion.org.

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MISSING AN EDITION?
Go to http://www.legion.org/training/newsletters and read or download any past edition you are missing!
National training under development

ALEI now stands for “American Legion Education Institute,” the forthcoming package of advanced American Legion online coursework for Legion Family members and youth program participants. The expanded ALEI will soon offer online training, YouTube videos, LEAD training videos, lesson plans for department instructors, and assistance for department Legion Colleges.

American Legion Basic Training — only the first step. The former American Legion Extension Institute (ALEI) course was renamed to “Basic Training” to indicate it is the first step of training. The original ALEI was an American Legion correspondence course designed decades ago to give members a history and description of the organization. The new Basic Training course is better defined as an introductory training course within the American Legion Extension Institute (now the new ALEI) explaining our mission, history, programs and basic skills. It is the anchor course for future training under ALEI. Basic Training is available now and is free at www.legion.org/alei.

District Training In A Box

To effectively implement District Training In A Box modules departments should maintain a cadre of approved educators, subject matter experts, facilitators, and trainers to develop members and progress the mission of the department through training. Graduates of National American Legion College and Department American Legion College are an excellent source for this group, but many of this group could be qualified based on their knowledge or expertise on a particular subject or profession. Many essential presenters at national workshops are members of the Sons of The American Legion and the color of a presenter’s cover should never be an assumption of their ability to promote training in a department, regardless of their connection or association to the American Legion family.

National Staff is developing and assembling training on the following topics:

PHASE ONE  Projected Phase Completion Date:  From National Membership Workshop to 2019 Fall NEC Meetings

- Membership Development / Retention, Post adjutant, MyLegion.org, Membership Recruitment, Post Finance Officer, Leader Development, Post commander, Post Service Officer, Developing a Post Vision

PHASE TWO  Projected Phase Completion Date:  2020 Spring NEC Meetings

- Post Chaplain, Post Filing Requirements, Post Sergeant-at-Arms, Resolution Writing, Growing a Post, Running a Meeting, American Legion Etiquette/Protocol, Growing a Program, Food/Beverage Management, Helping Veterans and Their Families/OCW, Messaging to Your Community Fundraising, Constitution/By-laws, Best Practices, Mentoring

PHASE THREE  Projected Phase Completion Date:  2020 Fall NEC Meetings

- American Legion Riders (ALR), Oratorical Contest, Scholastic Scholarship, Sons of The American Legion (SAL), Boys State/Nation, American Legion Baseball, Disaster Preparedness/NEF, Scouting, Junior Shooting Sports, AL Foundations (TFA; CWF; NEF), Youth Law Enforcement Cadets, Color/Honor Guard Amateur Radio (TALARC), Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps

While this training has the word “district” in the title, success of this training initiative lies squarely on the shoulders of the department level of the organization for coordination of facilities and trainers to conduct the training.
American Legion National College Class of 2019
November 3-8, 2019
Visit [http://www.legion.org/college](http://www.legion.org/college) for more information about the National American Legion College, now in its 20th year. Applications and selection process will be launched in the spring of 2019.
Interested in attending? Contact your post and department commanders.

Training Events Calendar
is now active! Check out [http://www.legion.org/training/events](http://www.legion.org/training/events) for training events in your area.

Are you a department or district trainer and want your event on this calendar?

Add it today!

Don’t see the training you know should be there? Contact your department training team and ask them to add the training event to the national calendar.