

**REPORT TO THE
NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
OCTOBER 15-16, 1997
by the
AD HOC COMMITTEE
21ST CENTURY OF THE AMERICAN LEGION**

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**Impressions from Active Duty Military Focus Group
(Washington, D.C., March 2-3, 1997)**

Young veterans know The American Legion through family members, or because someone they work with told them about The American Legion. Outside impression is The American Legion is too white, too male, and too old. One military participant stated although she was a member of The American Legion, she still felt it was not catering enough to diverse cultures in The American Legion Magazine. When looking through the Magazine, she only saw articles and pictures that dealt with white males. She mentioned that she had been invited to join an all-black post located a considerable distance from her home. She felt that she should not have to travel miles away, just to fit in because of race, gender or creed. A veteran is a veteran. The Legion should start

looking at issues of this nature when recruiting for membership. Young veterans don't want to be pressured into programs but want to belong because they want to give back to community, or the Legion has a service they can use.

An American Legion Post in the 21st Century

Every post should have a mission statement.

Every post needs to know who they are and what they need to do.

Posts should be reminded of the Legion bonds; and be reminded of the Legion purpose (basics), and refocus mission accordingly.

That statement should include an attitude statement--the members of a post should have a positive mental attitude, be flexible, willing to make needed changes.

Retain reasons we are a veterans organization--our preamble is a marvelous mission statement in itself.

All post officers should be familiar with and have available manuals including the *Officers' Guide*, and be graduates of *The American Legion Extension Institute*. As part of local leadership, post officers should appreciate knowledge and execute the mission in a competent fashion. Post officers should get to the point where they look for answers rather than excuses.

A local post can achieve its mission without necessarily having a permanent post home facility.

Specialty posts should focus on The American Legion programs rather than on their particular specialty.

Every American Legion post should be visionary.

Have a five-year planning committee consisting of good, informed Legion members as well as civic leaders, business people, and minorities from the community. This group should look at post activities, profit projections, budgets, membership, and should meet quarterly, at a minimum.

Each event/program should be the best organized and executed in the community. If a post has only one community activity a year, be sure it is done well. Be there for the veterans and their families. Create an environment in which Legionnaires can be their best. Don't be afraid of change.

Every post should be legal.

1. Retain a good CPA -- be sure taxes are properly and currently filed, a good check and balance system is in place to monitor finances, conduct audits.
2. Have current, viable constitution and by-laws.
3. Be incorporated and have papers current.
4. Charters (including Supplemental Charter) in order.
5. Have proper insurance (liability, property and event).
6. Have tax exempt status and paperwork in order.
7. Post/Club, and gambling activities properly conducted and documented.
8. Have Compliance Officer.
9. Employees and officers who handle funds should be bonded, and the post leaders should have a clear knowledge of conditions for reimbursement under that policy. Usually charges must be pressed before a company will pay a claim.
10. File all reports including Consolidated Post Report to National.

Make every effort to fill all post officers with emphasis on having an active, aggressive Service Officer.

The American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary, and the Sons of The American Legion need to be partners.

Sometimes these entities are at odds with each other.

Every post should have some effective method of Public Relations/ Communications.

At a minimum, a post should have a Public Relations Chairman and ideally a Public Relations Committee, and those representatives should develop a rapport with local newspapers, television and radio stations.

Every post should be conscious of image.

The image of The American Legion is a community based veterans organization. It is one of veterans helping veterans, families and children. Focus remains at the local post level. The pride and service of the organization should always be first, membership second. Provide a reason for members to come (e.g. have the Boys State representative give a report rather than presenting the gambling report).

The bar activity should not supersede the organization. Image should not be the club but rather programs. Use the word “post” instead of “club.”

What goes on in the local post affects its perception in the community, be it positive or negative. Every post finds its niche in the community.

Avoid the “good ol’ boy” concept.

American Legion posts should join the computer world.

The National organization has developed a Home Page and posts should position themselves to readily tap into this resource and be prepared to meet future technological advances in communications.

Mentoring --

The younger, computer oriented member should mentor the older member in technological areas and the older member should teach the younger the organization.

Every post should have a copy of the official history titled, The American Legion written by Thomas A. Rumer.

Every post should have a color guard/funeral detail.

Color guards should be available to honor deceased veterans at funerals and memorial services at no cost.

Posts in small communities should make it a point to get together at least once a month for a meeting/social activity.

Every post should be active and have active committees.

At a minimum, a post should have a Children and Youth, Americanism, Legislative (to include National Security/Foreign Relations), Public Relations, VA&R, and Membership Committees.

Someone in every post should be knowledgeable in resolutions--how to write them and content of resolve clauses resolutions currently in effect. Resolutions should be initiated from the post level. Their needs and concerns should be reflected in a resolution.

A post should form a Community Service Committee.

The Community Service Committee is to attend town council and school board meetings, maintain contact with fire/police/churches, and be an outreach to veterans.

Involve someone in city politics, the local businessman and/or woman, someone from the school system and the fire and police departments. Have a chaplain in touch with the churches in town.

A post should form a Welcome Committee.

Consider a Welcome Committee. Make it a family effort by using members of the Legion, Auxiliary and S.A.L. Utilize "You Have a Friend in The American Legion" by adding local resources to welcome each new member/transfer and establish a relationship with the Welcome Wagon to greet new residents into the community. The Welcome Committee's purpose is to explain post programs/activities.

Additional observations for Post consideration:

Seek all eligible veterans without regard to war/conflict, age, race, sex and creed. A veteran is a veteran.

Establish contact with active military, national guard, or reserve units in immediate area of the post. Focus on recruiting more in-service personnel. Structure programs to draw this focus group to the post.

Do not overload one individual with too many responsibilities, but rather, encourage that person to focus on one specific area of service.

Strive to get each member involved in some way. Why a member keeps coming and why he or she becomes involved is probably more important than why he or she joined. Treat others the way you want to be treated.

Cater to the younger crowd on some nights and on others to the older. Be family oriented.

Attend District and Department Conventions and charge convention delegates to make reports on resolutions to own post and others (all levels).

Put more of our purpose in our activities instead of competing with other social establishments.

Be more focused--don't be all things to all people.

Have a meeting/program chairman who will consider entertainment/information, family, and a concise business meeting. Survey posts for meeting program ideas; provide list to all members.

Have a bulletin board, information area in each post.

Put together a list of best practices of posts, but not all things will work in every place. One answer will not work for everyone.

Do not be dependent on someone else coming up with the answer.

Smoking vs. non-smoking is a "real" issue.

Get out and spend time with veterans, listen to their concerns and do something for them and about their concerns.

Post officers should be properly trained.

New post officers should be provided proper manuals and instructions early on concerning post responsibilities and procedures. Prospective post officers are encouraged to attend one of eight annual regional National Information Conferences where a variety of basic subjects are taught for post officers. On-going training/review should be practiced at the post/district/county levels.

Post officers must recognize Legionnaires who are doing a good job.

Provide assistance to all members in need.

**The American Legion District/County
of the 21st Century**

How the district should support the post varies from department to department; however, this level is where the opportunity is greatest for leadership to interact with the post--the blue cap Legionnaire.

Legion Departments should be in partnership with the Auxiliary, Sons of The American Legion, and Juniors.

District/county officers are expected to visit their posts.

Districts/counties vary in size, geography, and number of posts/membership.

The district/county officers should be the cheerleaders and communicators for organizational programs, reports, goals, policies, and dues structure. They should

have the attitude they will be successful only if the posts in their districts are successful. District/county officers are privileged to be in this place of service and have a responsibility to provide guidance, inspiration, share expectations, department and national goals (including membership), make sure the posts understand what is expected of them, and generally know their posts.

Goal expectations need to be transmitted to posts.

District/county officers need to be knowledgeable about their posts and should always say something good about that specific post, develop a team spirit, give information and encouragement. At times they must serve as a coach and policeman; they should impact the reporting process and be a positive residual. These officers need to be more than a greeter at post meetings.

These officers need to be quality Legionnaires, backed by knowledge, interest, and professional demeanor.

Every district/county should have a post development committee where revitalizing posts and developing new posts are handled.

Posts should be reviewed on an on-going and annual basis, and district/county officers are expected to visit their posts.

Someone closeby needs to go back, visit, and mentor the struggling post on a reoccurring basis.

Must know where new posts are needed. There is no validity to the concept of hurting an existing post by building a post next door.

Franchising and attitude problems should be put aside for the betterment of The American Legion.

Determine areas where there are high schools but no Legion posts. Goal is to have a post for every high school. Attached is a market penetration report with posts versus high schools in a state (*Appendix 1*).

Eliminate barriers to building new posts and new individual members. Live up to the words in our preamble, "justice and freedom" for everyone. Everyone eligible for membership should be invited and welcome.

District/County Commanders need to know all programs and promote them.

District/County Commanders should provide leadership training at the District/County level.

Training should include legal aspects to posts including the need to be incorporated, completing Consolidated Post Reports, key officer responsibilities, protocol, etc.

Officers should know where every cent of dues go and be informed of policies.

Membership goals should be set on market penetration as well as previous year's performance.

Review of goal setting should be reviewed to ensure post and districts are penetrating their fair-share of the veteran market in their area.

District/County commanders maintain liaison with active military, national guard, and reserves posts/bases/facilities within area of responsibility. Check on posts to ensure they are targeting this population for membership.

District/County officers must take the time to let the person know who is doing a good job.

Districts/Counties should be conscious of image.

Provide assistance to all members in need.

A Department of The American Legion in the 21st Century

Department officers and appointees must be of the highest professional quality.

Departments should make extended effort to appoint qualified, interested, trained, energetic, knowledgeable chairmen for all committees and programs.

Appointments should be based on merit, trust, and ability, approved by the Department Executive Committee, so the department can be run in a professional manner.

All Department officers and employees should be encouraged and/or required to complete *The American Legion Extension Institute*.

Departments, as well as districts, should have a viable post development committee.

Departments should review established New Post Formation Policies, remove barriers which prevent post formation to meet the needs of the veterans/communities.

Legion Departments should be in partnership with the Auxiliary, Sons of The American Legion, and Juniors.

Departments should be up-to-date electronically.

Departments should conduct a Legion College.

Departments should establish training requirements for department/district/county officers.

Departments should be involved in public relations.

Public relations is less important at higher levels where mainly news issues are handled. Training and guidelines should be provided to district/county/post levels.

Departments should develop ongoing relationships with politicals.

Department officers must recognize Legionnaires who are doing a good job.

Praise is worthwhile. Establish relationships with and thank police departments, Congressmen, and other organizations who do something good to help the organization.

Departments should encourage focus groups/discussions at the department and post/community levels with segments of veterans populations.

All eras of war veterans should be covered in focus groups. Represent all veterans.

Departments establish working relationship with state adjutant general. Membership plans should include actions to recruit more active duty, national guard, and reservists into The American Legion.

Departments should be conscious of image.

This is the age of leadership. Bring along the youth in sufficient quantity; the young leadership will take care of itself.

Provide assistance to all members in need.

**The National Level of The American Legion
in the 21st Century**

The American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary, and the Sons of The American Legion must work together as a team.

The national level must address minority barriers.

VA Minority representatives should be considered. Address female veterans', non-veteran spouse (nonentities).

National must continually explore all avenues of computer technology/communications.

National should provide the greatest possible technological access to Departments, Districts, Counties, and Posts.

Enhance technology in Washington office so that they can keep pace with VA and the Legion.

The Internet should be used to the fullest extent with all programs, sales, information on-line. A catalog of available materials and brochures should be on the Internet.

Teleconferencing, satellite and cable television, etc., should be utilized where cost effective.

National Information Conferences should offer a module on computer operations.

Emblem Sales needs to provide the best products for the best prices.

Emblem Sales should provide more quality jewelry and items for women Legionnaires.

Review the entire convention process -- What should a convention look like in the 21st Century?

Provide activities/events appropriate to the interests, concerns, and needs of delegates and their families.

The National organization should change the timing of National Conventions earlier in August. Even though moving convention to an earlier timeframe would raise prices considerably and only second tier cities could be considered, this change is essential to survival in the 21st Century. Younger veterans with families and school teachers need to be considered and accommodated.

Add to the national convention value to compensate for higher prices. Perhaps conduct some type of training normally done at workshops and conferences.

The *Dispatch* is a good means of communication and should be circulated to a greater number of people.

Have bulletin board inserts in *Dispatch*.

The Magazine, an important symbol of our history and organization, has old news and cannot be used as a tool to get the latest information to the greatest number of members.

Put the *Dispatch* on the Internet.

Make histories available from time to time.

National should be involved in public relations even though most important at lower levels of the organization.

Be mindful of the image of the organization.

Develop direct lines of communication to local PR chairmen on an on-going basis.

National should review the billboard program which was successful a few years ago.

The Legion song should be made available and promoted.

National should provide training to improve PR/communications at the post level (e.g. billboards, PSA's, PR Handbook). Much of this information does not currently reach post level.

The Legion Internet address should be included in all publications.

We need to find a way to get schools to read our Internet home page, where "Need a Lift" information is available.

The National Information Conferences should reach those who do not know the information.

Training of our volunteers should be on-going.

Training at convention might take the place of attending a National Information Conference; however, audiences at this time are probably different.

Timely surveys/polls of former and current members to determine what they want and need.

Provide assistance to all members in need.

Continue to explore healthcare needs of veterans and provide for same, as feasible.

Process of organizational review should be done on a regular basis.

Ad hoc committee be appointed to review direction of The American Legion.

Continue focus on all aspects of membership.

Membership goals should be based on market penetration and prior performance.

Examine and evaluate the organization on a regular basis.

Review conditions where National Guard and Reserves are eligible for membership.

Review information processing procedures with view of reducing timelines and saving resources.

National officers must take the time to let the person know who is doing a good job.

The national level must be conscious of image.

Appendix 1: 1997 Membership Eligibility Statistics

Distribution: National Officers
National Executive Committee
National Commander's Advisory Committee
21st Century Committee