

**Notes from Mark Levin's Workshop,  
"Developing and Growing Your Membership"  
Submitted by Kit Willis,  
City Librarian, Ojai Library**

Mark Levin's excellent workshop covered these topics:

- **Purpose of a library Friends group**

The purpose of a library Friends group is to support and give voice to the public library. Thus, the more members a Friends group has, the stronger and more effective the library's voice will be.

- **Why people join a Friends group**

People want to be affiliated with an organization they know and respect, and one that is getting things done.

People want value in an organization, not "stuff"!

- **Why people re-join (or don't re-join) a Friends group**

Levin says the people who are most likely to drop out of a Friends organization are first-year members and those who haven't participated in any of the group's activities. One remedy is to keep track of member attendance at library events and fundraisers, etc., in a database. It would then be easy to target non-participating members with a simple survey or letter before they drop out. Survey questions wouldn't be, "Why didn't you participate in anything?" but "What good book have you read recently?" or "What library services are most important to you?" or "How has the library changed your life?" etc. Bottom line: reach out to likely drops before the renewal letter goes out.

- **Strategies for maximizing a Friends group's human resources**

Levin suggested that upon joining a Friends group, a new member should receive a call or email that is more than an orientation. The new member should be surveyed about their areas of interest, ways they'd like to participate, their 3 best strengths, or recent accomplishments they are most proud of (i.e., helped raise money for a library in the town they moved from, worked on a political campaign, planned daughter's wedding, etc.) This information would then go into the Friends' membership database for future reference, and could be used for volunteer or board recruitment, etc.

- **How to create the most effective recruitment literature and program**

Effective membership campaigns and literature are personalized and customized, and empathize with prospective members. Levin says organizations need to have an understanding of the prospective member's feelings and motives, and need to tailor communications to different groups of prospective members. Some of those groups might be: parents, seniors, business owners, educators, students, Latinos, former members, etc.

Membership communications should be personalized and signed by a known person such as the president of the Friends group. People should see themselves in the first paragraph. Levin suggests

having one brochure for everyone, but accompanying it with a letter tailored to a particular group. That letter can guide the prospective member to the brochure section that applies to them. According to Levin, people read who the letter is addressed to, who it's from, and the postscript, so those lines are especially important.

Levin says former members want to hear about what's new since they last participated in the organization.

- **How to use technology to personalize recruitment efforts**

Technology can be used in many ways: to personalize correspondence; for rapid, same-day acknowledgement of membership, survey response, or change of address notification; as a way to sell other programs and activities; to say thank you or to honor member participation or achievement. (Levin described a library's webpage that has a "heroes" icon you click on to go to a thank you page. There, the library has listed everyone from the guy who used his truck to pick up a load of donated books to the Mayor who supported more library funding. Everyone whose name appears on that webpage has an instant web presence, and can be Googled. He also suggests that a recognition chair be appointed for every event.)

- **How to run a member-to-member recruitment campaign**

The most powerful means of member recruitment is the "member-get-a-member" campaign. To run this right you need to give members the tools for success: comebacks (not arguments) for various excuses they might hear.

- **How to turn around the turn-down**

Levin stresses that one must never argue with a prospective member! Instead, use the "feel, felt, found" approach: I know exactly how you feel; I felt the same way myself; I found that joining the library's Friends group was one of the best things I've ever done for myself and the community.

- **Eight things Friends leaders can do to increase membership**

- 1) Lead by example by recruiting 3-5 new members this year
- 2) Be sure that membership is on all Friends board meeting agendas as an action item rather than as a report
- 3) Staff a Friends of the Library membership information booth at community events
- 4) Contact non-renewals and ask them to re-join
- 5) Establish relationships with and/or serve as a liaison to key partner organizations
- 6) Write a recruitment/testimonial letter to prospective members or to be used in membership literature
- 7) Recruit active membership committees
- 8) Send the names of prospective members to the membership committee on an ongoing basis