Knights of Columbus
Keys to a Successful Council
Key Number 2 – Program

Any Company, to be successful, needs to have a quality product or service that it sells to its customers. If we compare this statement to the operation of a Knights of Columbus Council the product or service being offered is the Program. One of the key factors to insuring that the product or service is of the highest quality is to start with employee satisfaction, as the bottom line simply stated is that happy employees produce a quality product. In order for a Company to understand how their employees feel toward the organization they would to do an employee satisfaction survey. So to, a Council should do a Survey to understand the likes and dislikes of its membership and by so doing gain a better understanding of what actions need to be taken in order to gain greater participation in Council Activities. Having understood the likes and dislikes will then better prepare you to work on the Council Program.

The tool which can help you get started on your Council Survey is contained in the Leadership Guide for Membership Recruitment booklet from Supreme. This publication contains a Membership Satisfaction Questionnaire from which you can determine the likes and dislikes of your members. This Questionnaire is a fill in the box type of response. It needs to have additional space for members to express their positive and negative feelings in order to get a better understanding of the any problems that exist which in turn will assist in arriving at better solutions.

Every Council does not get the kind of participation in our Programs that we would all like to have and therefore the first issue with the Survey is how do we get the participation responding to it which is required to give us the information we are looking for? There are two answers that can be given to this question; 1) Take what we get back and form our actions based on it, or 2) Take the time to call those that do not respond in writing so that the response rate gets as close to 100% as possible. Obviously, answer number 2 is what we would like to have but it will require considerable more work. Think back to our first article - Keys to a Successful Council – Organization: and the key attributes required for the Grand Knight, Deputy Grand Knight and Directors: Direct Involvement, Personal Commitment, Energy and Organization. Answer number 2 requires all of that. The follow-up required to get a high percentage of respondents lets the membership know that you the Grand Knight and your team of Officers are serious about improving the Program of the Council and hearing their concerns allows you to dig deeper, share ideas and discuss possible solutions. It also gives you a chance to talk with a Brother Knight that you may not know. In reality, if the Officers of the Council are not willing to commit to answer number 2 above they might as well not conduct the survey as you will not know the full story of your Councils feelings.

By doing the Survey, and especially if you have taken the time to call those Knights that did not respond via mail, you have peaked the interest of every Knight in your Council. It’s now time to share with them the results of the Survey. A dinner meeting is probably the best way to communicate the results of the Survey. It seems that serving food is a great enticement to get men to a meeting. But before you schedule that Dinner Meeting there is a lot of work that the Grand Knight and his team of Key Officers need to do. You need to remember that this may be your one and only chance to turn your Council Program around so you need to plan for this
meeting and not just do it off the top of your head. The best way to summarize the information you have received from your Survey is to compare what your Brother Knights are telling you to the Program laid out in the Surge… with Service pamphlet from Supreme. In so doing you will find that the answers too many of the comments and recommendations that your Brother Knights are making are spelled out for you in the Surge… with Service. You will find it amazingly simple and scratch your head saying why didn’t we look at the Program this way before. This conclusion should give you the impetus to review your Organization Structure to make it happen. This will then make your next area to focus on who can we get to be the Directors to lead these areas. Having had discussions with the men that you feel can do this job, coupled with a simple summary of the wants and desires that came from the Survey you are now equipped to have that Communication Meeting with your Council and give them the results of the Survey. You need to realize that the attendance will probably be better than ever before but not outstanding as people are not always convinced immediately. You need to be prepared to have a true communication meeting that is structured in such a manner that on-the-spot verbal feedback by members is readily welcomed and accepted. This will give all members the opportunity to “get it off their chest” and this should lead to buy in for the Program you are then going to put in place. Celebrate the success you have with this meeting and then very quickly afterward communicate the results of the Survey as well as the Dinner Meeting to those who were not there. Communication is one of the Key’s to a Successful Council and will discuss it further in another Article.

Just as in business, a start-up operation requires much time and effort. So too will the re-start of a Council’s Program require much of the Key Officers and Directors time. It is important for the Grand Knight to discuss this with his new Directors and emphasize that once things are in motion the time requirements will diminish greatly. Also, emphasize the rewards that will come from the time and effort spent.

As the Directors begin to build their plan it becomes important that all the Directors sit down together with the Key Officers and review their ideas so that they can formulate a Council Calendar of Events. Some important things to remember are; (1) to have at least one activity per Director each Quarter and (2) not to have too many fund raisers, impacting the Parish, in a short period of time. By having at least one Activity per quarter the Council will achieve two things; (1) it will start making itself more visible to the Parish – this in turn will pull in some of those members who have not be active of late and it will make it easier to recruit new members. We will talk more about Membership and Visibility to the Parish in a latter Article. (2) It will help the Council earn the Columbian Award which is a predecessor to the Star Award. Being able to construct a Calendar of Events will then let you Communicate the Council Activities to each member and get it on their Family Calendar. With today’s busy life style every family has a Family Calendar by which they function. Having a Calendar also allows for follow-up communication in the form of an email with an update of Activities as they get closer. We will talk more on this form of Communication in a latter Article as well. The Calendar is a vital part of the planning process for each event and also serves as part of the Agenda for the Monthly Business Meeting.
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As each Director builds his team of Committee Chairs he may find it easier to have two men share the responsibility as Co-Chairs. This will help ease the burden, however, it is also important to make sure that the job gets done and that things don’t fall through the cracks as the Co-chairs feel the other co-chair is handling that part of the activity. Each Committee should construct a Project Plan for the Activity that their Committee is going to lead. This Project Plan does not need to be very sophisticated but it should cover the following:

1. Purpose of the Event
2. Materials/Food Required
3. Who are the Team Members
4. Responsibility of Each Team Member.
5. What Budget do we have to use for this event
6. Capture the names of all volunteers, both Knights and non-Knights for thank you notes and future uses.

This information can be utilized the next time the event occurs so that the wheel does not need to be created each time. The best method for insuring that each subsequent event gets better and better is to do a Lessons Learned Meeting of the Committee within a short time period after the event has occurred. The simple questions to be asked are:

1. What went well?
2. What could have gone better?
3. What do we need to do to make the answer to number 2 better?

When conducting a Lessons Learned Meeting inviting the wives of the Knights is a great way to get some really great ideas for the next time you try that event.

Once a Preliminary Calendar is prepared and Committee Heads volunteer for given events it is critical to construct a Council Budget. Having a Council Budget that can be reviewed and approved by the Council early on in the year saves time at subsequent Council Meetings. The presentation and approval by the Council gives every member a chance to better understand the entire Program and what it will cost to make it happen. The budget will give the parameters of what money can be spent on a given activity and should present an individual going off and spending a significant amount of money to do something the best way possible when the Council funds do not permit that particular treatment. Tracking the expenses by Director and Activity first by Budget and then by Actual Expense thus creating a Variance to Budget will give the Council an excellent tool in preparing the next year’s Council Budget.

Things won’t be perfect but with some Commitment and Energy it is truly amazing how successful the Council Program can be. Remember, the easiest way to gain new members is for the Council to be Visible and for the Parishioners, husband and wife, to see the good works your Council is doing with your Program and the impact it is having on the Community and Church.