

## RETAINING YOUR RING MEMBERS

For any Ring to continue to be successful, members need to come to meetings, participate and keep on attending the meetings, not once or twice, but on a regular basis. If attendance begins to drop off, then Ring leadership must address this as an issue.

This booklet examines that issue and suggests a variety of practical ways to keep Ring members active, involved and satisfied with what Ring leaders provide for them during each and every meeting. Regular attendance and active participation are good for both the Ring and the members. Meetings will continue to be vibrant and alive and exciting! Members are stimulated in their interests, and are motivated to develop, grow, and expand their knowledge, skills and technique. The Ring grows as a result as do the individual members by their association.

### ***KnowWhatIsHappening.***

When Ring members drop away, Ring leadership needs to determine exactly what has occurred before the issue can be addressed. Even before that, they need to decide just what it means to be “lost.” Are dues-paying members who never show up “lost” members? If so, what do you define as being “active” again? Attending just one meeting? Attending half of the meetings each year? Attending and working on a committee or work team? Answers to these questions help you decide just what to do about each situation.

Remember that a dues-paying member who never shows up for a meeting really is not an active member. The Ring needs regular attendance and active participation. For successful growth the Ring needs regular contributors to Ring activities.

### ***KnowWhyPeopleDropAway.***

How do you find out why members drop out or do not attend meetings? How do you find out what can bring these delinquent members back? The simple answer to both questions is to ask them. Develop a simple list of 2 or 3 questions to ask on the phone. Ask,

“What should this Ring be doing to keep its members?” “What do we have to do to get you to attend our regular meetings?”

Avoid asking lots of questions and gathering large amounts of information. This simple telephone survey is not an extended analysis of people, relationships and their lives. Focus only on why they are not attending and what it takes to bring them back. Replies can be analyzed easily and results quickly reported.

When making this simple telephone survey, also ask similar question of those dedicated Ring members who DO attend and participate regularly. Their interests and needs continue to be important and should be acknowledged and responded to.

### ***Create a Plan to Save Members and Follow It.***

When survey replies are available, create a schedule of activities which responds to the replies members say would bring them back to regular meeting attendance and participation. What does it take? If they want lectures, provide them. If it's more close-up, or card or rope magic, try to provide it. If they are convinced the meeting site is wrong, change it. No request is too big and none too small.

Based on these responses develop a list of activities covering an entire meeting year. Then, organize these activities to cover meetings month-to-month. This is your “ideal” plan. The more of this plan you commit to paper, the easier it can be used to organize activities, plan events and get other people to help. Be sure to share this plan with members and those people you need to lure back to regular meeting attendance. Verify that this is what everyone wants to happen.

This entire plan needs to fit within the Ring's ability to really make it happen. That means costs must be identified and decisions made regarding the Ring's ability to support all these things financially. You'll also need to determine the extent of member support for all these activities. Identify who is to be in charge of each effort, and which members are willing to help make it all happen. Any plan is

useless until it is realistically scheduled with assigned responsibilities, any budget required, and member support clarified.

Your plan may even extend over several years if goals are complex and the number of delinquent members is large. Plans that extend over several years need to set interim achievement goals, so progress can be noted along the way toward full accomplishment of the created plan.

### ***Set Real Goals and Check Progress.***

Unless there are clear and distinct goals you will never know if you have achieved anything. Of course, you may have some sort of “feeling” at year’s end. But if you make a specific goal like “Increase regular total attendance by 20 percent through the end of the year,” or, “Have seven delinquent members attend three or more regular meetings by year’s end,” these are easily measured, and you can quickly know if the Ring achieved those goals.

Record findings and report them to Ring officers and to the members. Report regularly and frequently. Ring member attendance and participation are important efforts so report results often.

## **REVIEW MEETING MANAGEMENT BASICS**

### ***Are the Meeting Location, Day and Time Right?***

First, take a close look at where your Ring is meeting, the day of the week, and the time. Is the location conducive to magical performance? Is there some kind of platform or stage? Are tables available for close-up magic? Even simple lighting? Is it quiet and private? Can members get there and home again, easily? Is it safe? Can young members attend at this site?

What day of the week seems best? No day chosen can satisfy everyone, so select a day that seems to attract the most people most of the time. Consider meeting on weekends, on Saturday mornings or afternoons, or even Sunday afternoons. Time of the meeting, too, has to please the most members, regardless of when it is. Why not include this topic in that telephone survey of members not attending? Ask about the

timing of the meetings (day, time, and frequency) and listen carefully to what they tell you.

Whatever location, day and time you choose, stay with them. Avoid repeatedly changing meeting sites and certainly avoid changing the day and time of the meeting. Members need to get comfortable with these three elements, so they develop a mental “habit” of recognizing the Ring’s meeting location, day and time, month after month. Attention to these elements alone should build a modicum of attendance. Ring 21 (Hollywood, California) found that having its meeting on the same consistent date, i.e., first Thursday of the month, helped significantly.

Experience suggests that some delinquent Ring members do not attend for one of two reasons: long business meetings and/or a lack of magic at meetings. These two issues are easily addressed, aren’t they?

### ***Begin Promptly and Have Short Business Meetings.***

Whatever events are scheduled during the meeting, begin them on time. Avoid punishing members who made the effort to be there from the beginning. Consider using some kind of start-up activity designed to gather members early so they can be in their seats for the “important stuff” that follows. This could be a short clinic, demonstration of a move or an effect, or even a book or trick review. Ring 49 (Hamilton, Ontario) provides a hands-on workshop at the beginning of each club meeting. Ring 92 (Vancouver, British Columbia) uses this approach but they try to make these workshops more of a round table group effort rather than a lecture. This gets more people involved. Start and end this part of the meeting on time so everyone can move into the next important element.

Business meetings are necessary but need not become exceedingly lengthy. Yet, often they have a way of just getting longer and longer. This need not happen. Advanced preparation can be the answer. Ring 2 (Youngstown, Ohio) keeps its business meetings to just 10 to 15 minutes, as does Ring 45 in Miami, Florida and Ring 54 in Lansing, Michigan. Hollywood’s Ring 21 limits Treasurer’s reports to the Board meeting. Members who want that information can attend those

meetings, leaving more time during the regular meeting for the discussion and performance of magic.

From a business perspective, the “work” of a Ring may be achieved mostly OUTSIDE of the regular meeting. A formal meeting serves to receive reports and to take actions. Running the business of a Ring this way requires advance work, and even some homework by both officers and members. Officers for Ring 54 in Lansing, Michigan keep meeting items to a minimum by conducting as much business as possible by telephone calls and e-mail. Committee work can be distributed in advance of the regular meeting, for individual review. Then, during the meeting, action is taken without a hassle. Reports from officers and committees can be prepared in advance, duplicated and distributed. With brief attention to these items at the meeting, action required can be quickly taken. Ring 189 in Galion, Ohio finds that basic and essential Ring discussion can be achieved in committee (including the executive committee) prior to the meeting. Then, reports are made, discussed and voted on without slowing down the meeting. That leaves more time for the magic!

### ***Resolve Personal Conflicts Quickly.***

When conflict arises, as it always does, attack it boldly, quickly and head on. Avoid allowing each business meeting to become a forum for personal “ego excursions,” vendettas, and arguments. Individual complainers who interrupt repeatedly need to be controlled. Astute Ring leaders must address these occurrences early, maybe even before they arise. When they do come up, move on, but take the offenders aside afterwards to discover, address, and resolve their issues. To avoid any argument that officers aren’t being “fair,” follow rules and meeting management guidelines from the latest edition of *Robert’s Rules of Order* or a similar source of meeting protocol.

### ***Have a Budget and Financial Responsibility.***

Every Ring needs to plan and develop a budget for the year. Income is limited, so cautious and prudent spending takes some care.

Fiscal responsibility keeps a Ring financially healthy. A planned budget demands timely input from committees which spend the money. Quick decisions from officers are also required when a draft budget exceeds the Ring's apparent ability to fund it. Once more, regular reporting of income and spending against an approved budget needs to occur. Regular, frequent monitoring helps avoid money-related surprises when it's too late to turn them around.

This kind of planning also tells members that elected officers are open and honest and handling dues money wisely and with forethought. Rings don't need members to suspect that funds are being spent with careless abandon. The Malta Magicians (Ring 202) emphasize the importance of this approach. Members need to recognize that officers are running things openly, honestly, and are worthy of continued trust.

## **ADD EXCITEMENT AND VARIETY TO MEETINGS**

### ***Focus on the Magic To Make Meetings Fun!***

After all, that's what a magic club is for, isn't it? Build in the magic learning, the doing, the talking, and camaraderie that flows from within an eager group. These members and guests are all interested and excited about the same thing: magic. Involve everyone in the magic. Some Rings have an unwritten rule that "everyone performs." Ring members know that, during some part of every meeting, each one of them is required to contribute an idea, an effect, a presentation, a little clinic, a demonstration, or even just a new or old move. Everybody means everybody, no exceptions. No one goes home until every member has made a presentation!

### ***Every Meeting Needs a Theme.***

This shows members that there is structure and planning, and ensures that regular Ring meetings are changed from time to time. If silk magic is your specialty, you can shine at that theme meeting. When it's sponge ball night, you will learn something new. "The Linking Ring Night" forces members to fool each other with effects that are already

in everyone's hands. Ring 259 in Lincoln, Nebraska involves the entire club in choosing a topic for monthly meetings.

### ***Variety is the Spice; Add New Activities Every Year.***

Even though the Ring finds a successful formula for meetings and their organization, sooner or later, they can stagnate. That's human nature. So continually search for new and different themes to use year after year. Try fresh, new activities once in a while. OK, so they fail occasionally. At least there was an attempt and you introduced some new or different thoughts into Ring meeting planning.

You also should find lots of useful "thought-starters" in the I.B.M.'s booklet *Ideas & Activities for Ring Meetings*. Request a copy from the International Office, or from your Territorial Vice President.

For some other new activities, look to your own members. Some magic enthusiasts are lifelong collectors and gladly present their treasures for the enjoyment of others. Some members specialize in a unique type or form of magic, which also bears examination. You will be amazed at what new themes and different ideas are there already, right within the Ring itself.

### ***Find Out What Excites and Bore Members.***

Here is an occasion in which a simple, quick annual survey provides timely feedback that you need. Some Rings ask what their members want, during every meeting, so ideas are continually gathered for planning subsequent meetings. When the members tell you NOT to do something any more, stop doing it!

Magic club meetings must be planned for the members and their wants and needs, not what officers or committees believe they should be. Committees and officers are there to provide leadership and direction, but they can't (and shouldn't) do it all. So, ask members often and heed their suggestions.

## *Increase Learning Experiences.*

There is one activity that should appear in each and every magic club's regular meeting plan; that is some form of learning activity. Do not shirk this responsibility, since every magician joins a Ring to learn something new. Each regular Ring meeting should include some kind of learning opportunity. This may be a lecture by another member or by an outside professional. It may be a clinic or mentoring session during which skilled members help others. It could be a briefing session that addresses a new move, trick, effect, or publication in which everyone gets a chance to practice and learn. Ring 334 in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina sets up a teach-in table at which a member does or talks about something related to magic or entertainment and explains it to the group. Ring 180 (Richmond, Virginia) finds it effective to schedule a lecture for the first two meetings after dues are to be paid. This generates excitement for the coming year, and boosts both attendance and membership.

Do not neglect the rich and valued experience that a learning activity brings to each meeting. Ring members continue to enrich themselves as improved and informed performers as well as learn new effects. These members become more valuable to themselves, to other Ring members and to the entire field of magic.

## **KEEP YOUR MEETINGS AND ACTIVITIES FRESH**

### *Participation Helps Build Commitment.*

Participation is enhanced when many members become involved in a variety of task assignments each year. More people learn more jobs and all can feel that they have become important cogs in the wheel of Ring leadership.

A dangerous precedent, which traps many volunteer organizations, is complacency, especially when it comes to elected and appointed leaders. Groups tend to stick with a "good thing" and continue re-electing and re-appointing those same members who do a good job for

the club year after year. Leadership rarely changes; the same people run the same activities, exactly the same way, year after year.

This is a bad practice, and should be avoided. Elect and appoint some new people every year. If you want Ring members to continue being active, they must feel wanted and a part of the club. Continually using the same people over and over destroys that strategy and eventually leads Ring members to lose interest and drop away. "Why should I go? It's the same people doing the same stuff all the time."

### ***Use Member Talents in All Activities.***

For greater involvement and commitment from newer Ring members, use their talents in lots of different ways. If assigned tasks are complicated, appoint 2 or 3 people to do them. Include an experienced member along with several newer members. This way, the inexperienced and untested members learn jobs from the inside. They grow in their ability to take over by themselves in later years.

Nearly every Ring brings in lecturers, pros who present their ideas and wares for the regular members to see, enjoy, and learn. Ring 59 (New Haven, Connecticut) has some of its members present these lectures. Ring members present for about 20 to 45 minutes, and feature some aspect of magic they are familiar with: a specific card trick, illusions, Ring history, or tales of performers they know or admire. Ring 2 (Youngstown, Ohio) brings in 8 to 10 outside lectures a year, but never schedules them on a regular meeting night. These regular meetings are reserved for Ring members' activities.

Involvement can strengthen commitment. Many Rings provide major events conventions, public shows -- all with great success. Such activities demand lots of work and willing hands to get the jobs done. With all participating Rings members focused on the common goal of success for the event, these activities can build friendships and club commitment. Such events require cooperation and effort toward a common goal for success. Rings around the globe all say the same thing these events take lots of work, but it is worth it. These activities bring Ring members closer together and end up being lots of fun!

Ring 259 in Lincoln, Nebraska occasionally takes the entire club out to “work a line.” They pick a movie theater, the post office at tax time or during the busy holiday time. Older members help teach younger members how to “work the line” or to table-hop. The experience teaches them how to approach someone, and more importantly, how to perform under these conditions.

### ***Make Members Feel Wanted.***

There always are more and more jobs to be done: The Ring needs talent for the next show, stage crew, writing Ring reports for *The Linking Ring* or articles for the newsletter, organize and run a meeting activity, room arranger, and clean-up crew afterwards. Spread these assignments around and get more Ring members involved.

### ***Praise - - Personally and Publicly.***

What “pay” do volunteers get? Simply put, they get the satisfaction of a job well done, along with thanks, praise and recognition by their peers.

Praise is so easy, and it is extremely valuable, especially when given freely, openly, honestly and publicly. Thank members for their work at meetings and in front of their peers.

### ***Put Members’ Names in Print.***

Ring members always enjoy seeing their names in print. When they perform, mention it in the newsletter. Have your Ring Scribe include names of members who perform and achieve in monthly Ring reports published in *The Linking Ring*. (Be sure you always spell their names correctly!)

Special achievements, with Ring member names mentioned, should be included in regularly prepared news releases sent to local, neighborhood, community and regional newspapers. Results are twofold: members’ names get into print once more and the Ring gets even more publicity for itself. News releases, for example, can be prepared and distributed to recognize the election of officers, attendees

at the national convention, award winners, public Ring shows and member and Ring donations of time and talent.

Consider awarding certificates of appreciation, signed by the Ring President and presented in person. Ring 21 (Hollywood, California) has created Certificates of Performance, and gives them out at the meeting following each competition or performance night. Rings also might provide this recognition at a special event, such as an end-of-year appreciation gathering. Make members feel proud, and satisfied that they have worked hard, accomplished something and that their efforts really are appreciated. Be careful that these awards and certificates aren't just passed out to everyone. This cheapens their value and makes them seem hackneyed and worthless.

### *Use Prizes and Awards.*

As further stimulation and incentive to achieve, consider using prizes for individual achievements during the year. Prizes are presented for accomplishing those things that the club considers vital and important. When the Ring offers magic performance contests, give prizes (cash or merchandise) to the winners. Prizes could be awarded to Ring members who bring in the most new members, for ticket sales or for regular perfect meeting attendance.

The Lansing, Michigan club (Ring 54) sells raffle tickets up until the time of each meeting, and then has a drawing. Ring 59 (New Haven, Connecticut) also has a raffle at every meeting. Ring 19 (Minneapolis, Minnesota) uses a system which awards attendees with tickets for promptness, performance, hosting activities and supplying refreshments. Door prizes are awarded at the end of each evening, so the more tickets members collect, the greater their chance of winning. The Little Rock, Arkansas club (Ring 29) uses this approach and invites other members to buy tickets for \$1.00 each. The Little Rock Ring also uses a system of awarding points over time, which add up to free admission for Ring lectures.

The "Inner Circle" concept, as provided by Ring 27 in New Orleans, Louisiana, deserves mention. It's an award program, administered by a

Ring committee, which recognizes members for promotion of magic and the Ring. Points are awarded for attendance at Ring events, performance, securing new members, attendance and participation at local and other conventions, providing publicity, articles submitted for publication and involvement in arranging club shows. Benefits include reduced rates and preferred seating at lectures and special events, and even a special name badge. Ring 31 in Madison, Wisconsin has developed a similar system to recognize member achievements which the Ring considers important. Activities can be tailored to emphasize activities and achievements that contribute to Ring growth and member attendance and participation. See *The Linking Ring* for September 1999 (page 98) for further details about this system.

Competition among Ring members always seems to garner interest and attention. Harrisburg, Pennsylvania (Ring 20) has a monthly competition. They also provide an annual competition for stage and close-up, to which the public is invited. Ring 92 (Vancouver, British Columbia) has a trophy competition for members at almost every meeting.

Ring 45 in Miami, Florida finds a magic trivia and information contest extremely popular with its members. Ring member teams answer questions on magic related topics. The lights light, the buzzers sound, and score is kept. Winners get prizes donated by other members.

## COMMUNICATION COUNTS

The critical message about communications is: “Always use lots of different ways.” Limiting communication to just one medium severely restricts its overall effectiveness.

### ***KeepMembersInformed.***

Ring members need and want to know what is happening. They should get reminders of when meetings are scheduled and the meeting themes. A simple newsletter can do this even just one page. Postcard reminders are easy to run through a computer, and mailing them remains inexpensive. Develop a telephone tree, to allow last-minute

changes and new information to be dispatched quickly. Use that same telephone tree to remind members of upcoming meeting dates and themes.

The Internet also is an effective tool to reach more members and to remind them about forthcoming events and details. The more communication approaches that Ring leaders use, the greater the number of Ring member responses and that translates into regular, frequent attendance and participation.

### ***Personally Invite Members Not in Regular Attendance.***

Take a particular interest in Ring members who pay dues regularly but rarely attend a meeting. Call each one of them personally. Don't just leave a message, but persist in talking to each one of them individually on the phone. Pitch the forthcoming meeting, invite their participation, and try to help remove any barriers they may have to attending. In Ring 153 (Billings, Montana), this "personal touch" has been successful. All Ring members are called reminding them of meetings and the theme of that upcoming meeting. The Harrisburg, Pennsylvania club (Ring 20) and Ring 21 in Hollywood, California use a simple personal phone call to urge delinquents to pay dues and to participate in upcoming club activities.

## **CELEBRATE OCCASIONALLY!**

Running an effective, successful I.B.M. Ring can be hard work. The tasks get easier as more members become involved to share the workload. When the meeting year ends, that's the time for celebration.

### ***President's or Award's Banquet.***

A year-end banquet celebrates a year of achievement, and provides an occasion to recognize Ring members again. This is the time for officers to once again thank members (by name), and to recount important accomplishments.

Here, too, is an occasion to present the outgoing officers, to welcome new ones and to recognize members who have “gone the extra mile” to move the Ring forward toward success and maturity.

### *Ring Anniversary.*

Every Ring has an anniversary, and it deserves a celebration. As the years mount, there can be an ever-growing sense of accomplishment that this club has achieved and prospered over many years. That’s an essential reason to celebrate. And that celebration also gives rise to an occasion to recognize accomplishments and growth to recall and reminisce about events and members long past. What an appropriate time it would be to schedule it around the calendar date this Ring received its original charter from the I.B.M.

Invite the Territorial Vice President as a special guest. Have the Territorial Vice President or Ring president request a special anniversary certificate from the I.B.M. Headquarters Office. The International President will sign the certificate. Certificates are available for each decade anniversary, i.e., 10, 20, 30, etc. and for 25, 50 and 75 year celebrations as well.

Keeping the Ring active for 1, 5, 10, 20, 25, 30, 40, 50 years, and even more, deserves to be recognized and celebrated. Be sure to prepare and send out a press release about each anniversary event.

### *Pizza or Pot Luck Party.*

Who does not love a pizza party? Or what better way to bring Ring members together, at little expense and preparation, than a pot luck dinner. The cost is low, and the planning is simple. Such an event reinforces the important values of everyone contributing and working together.

### *Spouse or Member Appreciation Party.*

Do not forget the spouses, who tolerate all of our magical meetings and activities year after year. Consider a night out for spouses and significant others. Pick a nice restaurant, and use the evening to thank

and openly recognize these special people. Some Rings schedule these appreciation dinners to coincide with other special holidays and celebrations -- a great idea!

Thanking members for their work is another reason to celebrate. That event usually brings out most of the members, since they want to be recognized, too.

### *HolidayParty.*

Holidays provide logical occasions for Ring celebration. It often means a party, a catered buffet dinner, and a good magic show. Maybe even include an activity or something special for the kids.

### *Don'tOverlookNon -MagicSocialEvents.*

Some Rings really appreciate the social interaction with other magicians. For example, as friends in magic, members of Ring 2 (Youngstown, Ohio) eat together and do other social things. They go to baseball games as a group, and have an annual golf outing. The club in Lansing, Michigan (Ring 54) has its regular meetings at a local family restaurant, and members gather an hour beforehand to have dinner together. Ring 20 in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania schedules summer picnics and a party at holiday time, to bring members together. Spouses are invited, too. The Ring in Miami, Florida (Ring 45) attended the IMAX Siegfried and Roy presentation, as a group. Tickets had been provided by a member who traded a show for the tickets.

As an integral part of each one of these celebrations, there should be a magic show! Use Ring members, and/or invite Ring members from nearby communities and from other magic clubs, to perform on a reciprocal basis.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY**

So, what does it take to retain Ring members? It takes planning lots of activity, plenty of participation, distributed workloads and lots of magic! Ring 259 in Lincoln, Nebraska sums it up: "Try to keep it fun

and not too formal and your club will succeed every time.” That’s a truly magical formula for an active and successful I.B.M Ring!

### **JUST REMEMBER THESE 15 POINTS:**

- 1. *Survey and Analyze Membership Trends.***
- 2. *Find Out What Members Want; Give It to Them.***
- 3. *Develop and Follow Membership Goals and Plans; Monitor Progress.***
- 4. *Create an Annual Activities Plan and Budget; Publicize It.***
- 5. *Inform Members; Communicate Often and in Many Different Ways.***
- 6. *Find the Best Meeting Day, Time and Place; Stick to It.***
- 7. *Start Meetings on Time.***
- 8. *Keep Business Brief.***
- 9. *Focus on Teaching, Learning, Showing and Performing Magic.***
- 10. *Add New and Exciting Programs; Keep It Fresh. Keep It Fun.***
- 11. *Involve Everyone; Use All Members’ Talents at Meetings, Events and in Activities.***
- 12. *Resolve Personal Conflicts Quickly.***
- 13. *Praise the Doers and Contributors, Privately and Publicly.***
- 14. *Adopt a Personal, Friendly Touch; Call a Member.***
- 15. *Use Awards and Prizes; Celebrate!***