

Subject: Preparing for Growth and Member Retention – Work Process and Capability

Overriding Business Principles:

- 1) **Prove success before investing.** Test ideas in valid ways. Have the right analytics available to measure impact objectively (number of recruits, number of re-enlistments) and not based on activity (I worked on recruiting, I worked on re-enlisting lapsed members).
- 2) Invest where there is **success** and a **capable team** for the work required. Not every club or Unit deserves support.

Here are some ideas that might add to your thinking about steps to change the trajectory of membership growth and retention.

1. **Members have value to the ecosystem. Establish the value of a member.** Determine who light users, medium users, and heavy users are. Focus efforts on heavy users first, and medium users second. Some light users are simply not worth pursuing. BE able to define value to clubs, teachers, and tournaments – three stakeholders with different objectives.
2. Develop the metric for **lifetime value of a member**. This will help define the effort and support for recruiting club players, and for identifying who become tournament players with a meaningful tournament lifetime – will they play tournaments long enough to compensate for what we invest in them. Here is one example: <https://bridgewinners.com/forums/read/acbl-advisory-council/who-is-the-most-valuable-member/> also <http://www.district11bridge.com/20170201%20Most%20Valuable%20Member.pdf>
3. Identify **where recruits are generated, what clubs/teachers they are associated with and what infrastructure advantages** these top performers have. Foster reapplication of current best approaches. Focus resources where success pays out (avoid sending money to places where a payout is not possible). Visual mapping (heat maps) are a great help in Matching hot spots with their underlying source.
4. **Identify target personas** / groups who represent the heavy user, the club player and the tournament player (have your personas represent your most valuable members). It's really not enough to pick an age range and employment status – the better we can express the many personalities who comprise players valuable to the ecosystem, the better we will reach them and hold them.
5. **Clubs have personalities.** We should have **clear personas for clubs** – are they exclusive and remote? Are they welcoming and socially outreaching? Can they easily find volunteers and local leaders to Unit and District assignments? Or are people simply there to push cards? Do club owners invest in growth and expansion of their business? Or are they content to milk their cash cow and have area volunteers struggle with growth and retention?
6. **Clubs have value** to the ecosystem – they provide table fees to the organization, new members, and experiences that affect retention. Indeed, they probably impact trial and retention disproportionately. **Establish a value system for clubs** – again, high value clubs get outsized support and attention. Low value clubs not so much. Do club owners work closely with proven teachers to grow membership? Do they spend time in the community reaching out to social games and community Centers to attract people to their clubs? Do they sponsor social events and pro Am events that help bring new people in and help newer members feel comfortable and a part of their club? Do they encourage players to try Sectionals and Regionals? Do they encourage players to play in major grass roots events? Do they run a large number of special games to support the Ed Foundation, Youth Bridge, etc.?
7. Define **what role Units and Districts can have in recruitment and retention**. Directly: They can invite the public to see a tournament and participate in a LBIAD class. They can offer space for Teachers and Club Managers to share their offerings with prospects. They can give side games to clubs so that they do not suffer the full force

of a week's loss of income during a tournament. They can promote recruiting directors and club managers for games throughout the Unit/District. They can establish 501c3 charities for bridge education in their areas.

8. **Provide useful metrics and diagnostics to District/Unit/Club leadership.** The current QUIP Report aren't it. We need to know how and when new prospects engage teachers and clubs (and online too). We need to understand who is not playing and whether we can remove any barriers in their way. We need to understand when a member drops out, what their value was to the ecosystem – we cannot afford to spend too much for people who weren't playing much in the first place. It would be very useful for any In/Out Report to include how many in-person sessions and online sessions an individual who has lapsed or is on their way to lapsing has played in the past three months. We focus on the heavy user and avoid wasting resources on the light user.
9. **Break the information barrier between Units and Clubs.** If we are to have the Clubs (and Teachers) as our Sales Force, we need to **equip them with ALL THE INFORMATION that they need.** The current Privacy Policy and Terms of Use are not written for growth. They are written to avoid law suits. Time to rewrite them with growth in mind. Get all prospects within a 50-mile radius of a club to that club owner immediately. Expect them to make contact professionally. For prospects showing interest in lessons, do the same for teachers, and include valid online options with proven results in training players, attracting members, and helping prospects engage in-person play.
10. Follow up with prospects on their experience with clubs and teachers. What worked and what didn't? Provide **feedback and corrective action** for clubs/teachers where necessary. Drop clubs/teachers that poison the prospect well.
11. *I'd be willing to pay \$10-20 more per year if that meant that a guest member would get at least one maybe two copies of the ACBL Bulletin magazine in the mail.*
12. **Raise the skill, impact and effectiveness of Membership Committees in Units.** Develop a comprehensive set of Membership Committee guidelines that emphasize developing social bonds sufficient to retain members. These skills and activities are NOT about responding to a monthly In/Out report. No, it's about enveloping members in a social connection that is more compelling than going to a movie or out to dinner.
13. **Separate recruiting from teaching** – they are NOT the same, and teachers have not proven themselves to be effective membership recruiters. They are effective at getting people equipped to play bridge. Better to have Membership Committees own recruiting in a way that teachers can benefit when they participate.
14. Define how **online bridge and in-person bridge BOTH contribute to recruiting, retention, and new player satisfaction.** This will require redefining who partnerships and teams form themselves.
15. Provide real **support for partnership development.** The inability to find a compatible partner is a major contributor to dropping membership.
16. Do not launch or invest in recruiting unless **the ability to engage the prospect is proven** and of high quality. Bringing in hundreds of people to ill prepared teachers or clubs is a sure-fire way to destroy what we are trying to create.

Brainstorm: Target Markets

- People with disposable income and time are more valuable than those without.
- 8–18-Year-olds can be very valuable lifetime contributors, but require substantial support from family. Be careful here. Easy to lose focus and over invest.
- Clubs will want recently retired and empty nesters – they represent disposable income and time available for immediate payoff in any onboarding investment. This does not help replenish tournament players.
- Unit and Districts should want 18-50 Year old recruits because they represent the source of tournament players that 65+ year old prospects can never be. (Districts are too focused on their Regional and Sectional Incomes and do not assume an appropriate role in developing tournament players for their future. They expect these tournament players will magically arise out of club players and the competitive/ego fulfilling chase for higher ranks. Remember, a system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets). We lack effective data about Unit

efforts and their true impact on recruiting. Online bridge can fill in those years where in the past, people dropped membership because of family and professional demands on their time. (Very short games, anyone)?

- Consider how to attract social groups to appropriate club and tournament venues. Country clubs, professional organizations, senior groups, community groups, universities, and retirees from major corporations are targets our members might be able to help us reach. There are 15-20 tables per week in community centers around greater Cincinnati that are NOT sanctioned but play duplicate for fun. Often \$20 per year, or up to \$3 per game. Emphasis on social interaction and loose rules. FUN – no “serious” players.

Brainstorming: Moments of Truth

- First partner and first game must be a positive experience. Preferably with some clear sense of accomplishment and FUN. Low Risk / HIGH REWARD.
- Club must be friendly and welcoming – genuinely interested in meeting the needs of new players.
- Club Manager should be attentive to the socialization need of prospect and newbies. More than Pro/Am games or mentor programs, there needs to be a means for social introductions that break the ice with a room full of strangers.
- Feedback from prospect/newbie should be sought and patterns of issues with onboarding experiences should be reviewed and corrected where possible. This can be done privately, between the ACBL and the club. Both the ACBL and the club can mitigate some bad experiences if there is proper attention after the fact. Clubs that assign a “bridge buddy” a peer volunteer to help engage the prospect generally do well. This requires ample willing volunteers.

Leading the Ecosystem – Develop INTERDEPENDENCY

- See Steven Covey for the operating definition of interdependency. Basically, it’s the realization that while businesses are independent for liability and profit, by working together in the best way they stand to earn more than if they pursue zero-sum strategies.
- We are all in this together. We have to begin to realize that the interest of the ecosystem is more important than our own self interest.
- The ACBL has some ~\$17MM turnover annually. If we assume ~3MM tables of club bridge, of which ~2 MM are in-person (pre-covid levels), then there is some \$4-5MM BBO Bridge and \$56 MM in in-person club bridge (assuming \$7 per person on average – no basis for this estimate). That’s roughly \$60MM spent on club bridge. In 2018 there were 133K regional tables. At \$13 per person (unfounded estimate #2), that’s \$6.9MM. There were 115.5 Sectional Tables at \$10 per person (unfounded estimate #3) that’s \$4.6MM leaving this picture:
 - Club Games: \$60.0 MM
 - Regionals: \$ 6.9 MM
 - Sectionals: \$ 4.6 MM
 - Total: \$71.5 MM
- Of the total ecosystem turnover of \$88.5 MM, the ACBL accounts only for 19%. Clubs account for 68%. **Members of the ecosystem should shoulder a proportionate share of the burden** that growth requires. Growth consumes cash and effort.
- This estimate does not include teacher income which remains inestimable.
- Clearly **the ACBL has a central position for influencing how all stakeholders harmonize their efforts** (the **metaphor – orchestra leader** – is very appropriate). The ACBL can harness the powers of 1) **Information** and 2) **Business Services** to engage the stakeholders and create the interdependency that will lead to sound growth and integrity of action across the network.

	Information	Services
Prospect	Why Bridge? What's in it for me? Social, personal, and intellectual benefits. Easy enrollment Teachers and Clubs nearby that are highly rated for new players. Other people they might know who are playing bridge or beginning their bridge journey.	Partnerships Coaching / classes / other learning opportunities. Socialization opportunities Fun travel opportunities Join-ups with other newbies. Social media connections. Amazon for bridge – learning, games, tournaments.
Player	Membership status & dues service Masterpoints Games available Promotions & Events Tournaments available Results	Partnership Travel packages for bridge players Find clubs and tournaments Find teachers and books Find coaches and professional partners
Club Manager	Special Event Schedules Software for managing club games Prospect contact information 50 mi. Member contact information 50 mi. Player contact information Membership and player analytics Most valuable players	Who is my competition? Advertise club Promote special events Locate prospects Special games & awards Report game results Hand analyses Partnership services Find teachers and Directors Effective communication
Club Director	Updates on rulings & regulations Cases for decisions Competing games within a 50 mile radius. Movement tips and shortcuts How to do a web movement Popular game formats Building a U50 game. Handling players that kill FUN for others.	Player memo incidence report MUD players who play in Unit/club Software for game management Financial Tech services for cash-free games Training and updating Effective communication
Unit Boards	Current best approaches - recruiting and retention How to build an effective Membership Committee. Effective planning Effective Leadership Development	Prospects in past 3 months Prospect contact within Unit High Quality Moment of Truth Training Director and Club Manager Training Effective communication
District Boards	Current best approaches - recruiting and retention Creative use of Regional Tournaments for engaging new prospects. How to knit together Unit Membership Committees with the District How to knit together Education Committees within the District.	CBAs from other Districts Tournament Quality Standards Training for Membership and Education Committees Training for Club Owners and Directors. Effective communication

- **Interdependence requires that change be embraced, coordinated and managed collaboratively.** All stakeholders have a role in making change happen. Avoid the trap of throwing new projects over the fence expecting someone to catch them and run. Too often no one is there.
- Doesn't do us any good to recruit 50-100 prospects and have no place for them to go, no games for them to join, no classes for them to enroll, no teacher or club owners to interact with, and no peer group for them to engage. **When a prospect decides to try bridge, we need to provide a range of options immediately.** Delay is not

acceptable - it causes prospects to disengage. If beginner classes are available 3 times per year, then recruiting prospects should plan accordingly. Coordination anyone?

Communication is critical to gain attention and alignment from clubs, teachers, Units and Districts, and to help players/ members understand why this effort is underway. Creating the vision for this journey is important. This lighthouse discussion will likely require focused town-hall like communication with many repetitions. We cannot ask the guppy to swallow the whale. Instead, we break the journey into a logical sequence of small palatable steps, gaining trust and engagement along the way as people begin to experience tangible benefits in small manageable doses. Big change threatens.

Until the ecosystem engages collaboratively, recruiting initiatives will be less effective than they should be. We risk wasting effort and resources until we get everyone pulling together.

I make no projection about how the advent of online teaching and online bridge will change the **member lifecycle** and the **bridge ecosystem**. They will. The opportunity is to use all venues to create members.

Submitted Respectfully,

Steve Moese

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