



CREATING A ‘VIBRANT’ PHOTOGRAPHIC CLUB

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To the Club Secretary –

Ensure every member of your committee is given a copy of this following your AGM. With the explosion of interest in digital cameras, Photographic Clubs have never had so much potential for growth since the beginnings of PSNZ over 50 years ago. Is your club experiencing this growth? If not, why not?

Have you asked yourself ‘Why is it that one club is ‘vibrant,’ has no problem attracting and retaining members, has big attendances at meetings, while another struggles to achieve any of these?’ Almost without exception the difference is the style of the leadership team.

Leadership styles –

We must understand that successful club leadership in voluntary organisations is a team effort. Even with the best motives and ideas one person cannot achieve success without a strong support team around him/her. If you have accepted nomination for any club position, you must accept that along with this goes an obligation to support, encourage, and assist the other members of your team.

A leader in a voluntary organisation needs to foster a strong team spirit, and that comes through encouragement, support, and recognition of the efforts of those around him/her. In our new digital age it is vital that leaders are aware of the varied needs of the membership and are open to new ideas and change. Unlike a remunerated leader in a business organisation, our leaders can only encourage support, not demand it. Ensure all meetings are controlled and follow an agenda.

Forming your committee –

A good leader will have already approached people he/she wants to become part of the leadership team before the election commences. Too often, no prior approaches result in an election where people are nominated, seconded, and appointed without any thought at all. We don’t want the ‘Yes, ok, but I haven’t got a lot of time’ person on the committee because that person only increases the workload for the others, or even worse, vital areas of club activity are neglected.

One successful club leader issues nomination forms to all the membership 2 months before the election, giving time for members to consider, discuss, and lobby the ‘right’ people to be involved.

Attracting new members –

Visitors and new members, must be made especially welcome. Some successful clubs have two ‘outgoing’ people who greet all members as they arrive, record attendance, and issue nametags. Visitors are signed into the registration book and given a nametag and ‘club welcome’ pack, and introduced to the Master of ceremonies who will formally welcome and introduce them to all members during the meeting.

By recording their names into a registration book the club immediately has the visitor’s postal details so they will receive the next club newsletter, and the President or one of the leadership team can phone them to encourage attendance at the next meeting or club activity.

Usually visitors can attend two or three meetings before being officially invited to join the club. Many successful clubs have a ‘buddy’ system where each new member is allocated an experienced member ‘buddy’ who takes that new member ‘under his/her wing’ and helps them until they are fully integrated into the club activities.

Nothing discourages a visitor more than coming to a meeting and being ignored.

Naturally they never want to come back, and in addition you can be assured they will tell their friends about their experience.

The very best recruiting is by referral. Current members enjoying their involvement will pass on their enthusiasm to friends and acquaintances.

Retaining existing members –

Members who have been involved for a longer time generally need new challenges to keep their interest alive. A good leader will ensure all members are given opportunities to extend themselves through activities such as:

- * Running workshops for the newer members
- * Becoming a new member ‘buddy’
- * Becoming involved in organizing club field trips or other events
- * Arranging a club set for a Regional or National competition
- * Attempting to achieve Honours recognition
- * Organizing an interclub ‘raid’ during a meeting, without warning except to their MC.
- * Being involved in organizing a Regional or National convention or exhibition.

Suit the challenge to the member - easy ones first, and praise success. Not all members want to be challenged, but a good leader ensures the opportunities are given.

Club programme and activities –

Most successful clubs annually survey their members to discover the areas of interest and needs of all members. This survey forms the basis of the programme decided at the beginning of each year. The results of the survey should be collated in a database of members.

You should ensure your programme offers all members the chance to satisfy their needs at some stage during the year.

The club exists for the enjoyment, friendship, and satisfaction of its members. Social, and ‘fun’ activities are what members will remember and value. Club activities must be varied, entertaining, and enjoyable if you want members to continue their involvement. Always remember clubs need to have fun.

Members will define this in different ways. For some it is doing their own thing with camera and tripod. For others it is getting together after a field trip. For others it is purely the 'camaraderie' that comes from belonging.

Here is a list of ideas some clubs have used successfully. Perhaps you may decide to adopt some as new ideas for your club:

- A panel of 3 or 4 experienced members answering member questions.
- An interclub challenge for a trophy. Each club puts forward 20 prints and points are allocated individually by a judge. The clubs meet for a social and the competition judging.
- Field trips. If the trip is to have a 'landscape' theme hand out a landscape 'help sheet' beforehand [or whatever theme applies.]
- 'How to set up a group photo workshop.'
- A 'Day in the life of your town' project is fun and provides an invaluable historical record. Present the finished results to your Historical Society or Council. You may even be able to get a community grant to cover the costs!
- As an option to the above – record the significant street scenes and buildings of your town, or province as at the year 200? You will be amazed how quickly these photographs become historical.
- Run a 'Get to know your camera' basics course for the public. Every attendee is a potential new member at the end of the course. If you haven't got a suitable tutor, enlist one from a nearby club, or local photo shop.
- '12 shot' competition. Participants are tasked with 6 different subjects to be captured within 24/48 hours. The photos are judged at a club social event.
- 'Pot luck' dinner – perhaps mid winter?
- 'Fish and chip' meal before a workshop, theme or meeting.
- 'Pizza and wine' meal before a meeting – a good one to ensure good attendance at an AGM!
- 'Black and white' night. Competition, dress, decoration, and supper all in black and white.
- BBQ at the end of a field trip with families joining in.
- Print or digital 'circle' within your club, or interclub.
- Apply to have the PSNZ 'Touring Exhibition' displayed in your town. It will provide excellent PR for your club.
- Christmas end of year dinner/social and prize giving.
- Sponsor the formation of another club in a town near you. [See helpsheet 'So you want to form a new camera club' available from the PSNZ website.]
- Fundraising projects to purchase a club data projector [eg], or to assist a team from your club to attend a Regional or National event or to visit a major exhibition?.
- Put a club entry together to enter one of the PSNZ National or Regional competitions.
- Offer to run the photography section at your local A and P show. It can be a great recruitment opportunity with 'handouts' about your club and its activities.
- A 'Photo rally' for members and the public is a great recruitment tool as well as a fun day out. It is run in two parts with the rally one day, and the judging about a week later when all participants come to the club meeting to enjoy the fun and

- handing out of prizes.
- Have a joint meeting with similar interest groups such as painters, 4WD club members etc.
 - Offer to provide a photographic record of a significant happening in your town.
 - Develop a club website. This could include a display of the Honours entries from your recent club competition.
 - Encourage members to participate in a national print or digital circle, or the digital ‘on line’ competition.
 - Remember to send Press releases of your activities to your local media!

The club meeting -

Firstly, your venue must be warm and inviting – no one wants to sit in a cold ‘school hall’ on hard seats! If your venue isn’t good find one that is!

Many successful clubs provide a mix of educational workshops or speakers, competition, and social interaction at each meeting.

It is important that all members are welcomed on arrival and all should wear nametags handed out by a ‘greeter’ so that new members and visitors can put names to faces.

Start the meeting on time. If people know that meetings usually begin late they won’t arrive until late making the problem worse.

Don’t assume that the President must run the club meeting. Sometimes an excellent leader is a poor public speaker. One of our most successful clubs, Christchurch Photographic Society has a suitable MC, not the President, who runs the meetings. The MC should welcome and introduce new members; introduce and thank guest speakers, judges and delegates for specific activities such as competitions or events. Some clubs have a ‘Popular choice’ image. All members cast a vote before the judges comments.

A small prize goes to the author. Raffles are fun and in some clubs members are encouraged to donate an item/baking/magazine or similar. This allows more than one prize to be given. The raffle proceeds could be used to provide something of benefit to all – maybe wine at the Christmas social?

Based upon results of your membership survey, provide instructional workshops led by an experienced club member, the competition judge, a local photo shop expert, or maybe one of that shops visiting product representatives. Another great source of instruction is the extensive selection of Recorded Lectures available to all clubs and provided by PSNZ.

Try and relate your programme to what is happening nationally by preparing for the Laurie Thomas landscape award, the Photojournalism competition, or one of the Regional or National competitions.

Monthly competition results should be an excellent tutorial to all members as they listen to the judges comments on each entry. To encourage all to enter, only announce the author of merit, or honours entries. Encourage judges to maintain a positive, encouraging and helpful environment in all image assessment. The committee need to be aware that not all members are competitive and their interest needs to be catered for in other ways. Always finish the evening with supper so that members have an opportunity to socialise.

Keeping in touch with members –

A regular newsletter is essential to keep members aware of what is happening. The newsletter should include promotion of coming events locally and nationally, competition results, project reports, humour, and ideally a brief tutorial. The tutorial could simply be a 'Top Tips' section, but could include reprints of articles from the 'Club Liaison' newsletter or 'Cameratalk' magazine. If you have access to previous club records a 'What were we doing 10 years ago' section would be of interest.

The newsletter must be delivered to all members before the meeting as a reminder. It is too late to be handing them out at the meeting. To avoid the cost of posting, have members deliver to members in their area. And don't forget to print extra copies and have them available to the public from the counter of local photo shops.

Set up a phone roster system to 'network' all members for appropriate messages.

The PSNZ 'Cameratalk' magazine, and 'Club Liaison' newsletter are invaluable to keep members informed of activities outside your club scene. Make sure 'Cameratalk' is distributed with your club newsletter, and ensure that at least all your club committee members, and your newsletter editor, receive the 'Club Liaison' newsletter.

The attendance register from each meeting will quickly reveal any members not attending. If this happens more than twice in a row the club president should contact that member promptly to discover why. If appropriate send a 'get well' message.

Maintain an email directory of members, and distribute extra items of interest by email.

Your club and your community –

It is recommended you appoint a suitable club 'publicity officer'.

Ensure your club is known within the wider community. Free publicity is always available through community notices and news items in local media. Invite the public to view exhibitions, participate in workshops, or attend a 'Come and see us in action' meeting.

Your local media is always keen to have items supplied informing of your club activities, and successes of the club or its members. You should have club introductory flyers available at all public events, local photo shops, picture framers, citizen advice and information centres. You could have a joining/ subscription postal form on the reverse side. Many clubs have a display board at a photo shop, bank, or library showing this month's winning images.

Many clubs arrange a member discount with local suppliers.

Have fun leading your club to success.

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2009