

## **EDUCATION AS A MEMBERSHIP TOOL?**

*By Joe Roberts- Membership Committee*

When we think about membership tools, what are we usually thinking? Probably ways we can contact our existing members to ask them to renew or ways to attract new ones. We need renewals, and of course we can always use new members. But how do we go about doing that? Most of us would likely say sending emails or letters. Phone calls too if you have their information. Maybe a membership drive to attract new members. But education? How does that work?

It works in many ways, on many levels. You're reading this because The Sons of The American Legion is an organization you believe in and want to participate in. And that is because you have seen the work we do, the causes we support, and the difference we make. But you could know more. We all could. And that knowledge can be used as a membership tool, maybe without you even realizing it.

Why are you a member of The Sons of The American Legion? I am because my father signed me up when I was about 8 years old. But he didn't sign me up and leave me at home. He saw to it I participated in things, attended meetings, honored veterans on Memorial Day, and generally got involved. When I got my first squadron handbook, I saw these things I was eligible to achieve, the Ten Ideals and Five Star Awards. Participating, studying for those awards, and achieving the awards made me appreciate the organization. If we are signing up our youth, we need to make sure they don't just carry a card. They need to be educated in the patriotism we believe in, the Americanism we cherish. If we have young members that are not being shown these things, we will likely not retain them as they get older. Retention is key and education works.

And as our younger members grow up, and for those who were not fortunate enough to be raised in the organization but are adult members, The American Legion offers ways you can get that additional education. Having been a member of The Sons of The American Legion for 45 years, I thought I had a good idea what this organization is about. I heard about the newly revised online education tool called "Basic Training". It's free for any member of The American Legion family as long as you have a valid member ID number by visiting [www.legion.org/training](http://www.legion.org/training). It made me realize how little I knew about the history and intricacies of our organization. But as a result, I can now recruit members with a wealth of knowledge that I had been missing all this time. And as you sign up new members, urge them to take the course as well. Much like what happened to me as a child, when they learn about the organization and the work we do, they will WANT to renew, not drag their heels until the last possible moment. Recruiting and retention are vital and education works.

And for those who want to take that extra step, The American Legion College is available to you as well. Established at the National level and offered annually at National Headquarters, this week long training is designed for those who want to advance within the organization at the District, Department, or National levels. In addition, many Departments have adapted this training to suit the needs and schedules of their respective states. This is also a live, in-person course stressing the core values and contributions of The American Legion. These are generally available to members of The Sons of The American Legion, on a space available basis. The curriculum typically centers on the core values of the organization and also considers topics such as media relations, membership recruiting and retention,

community relations, and tips for serving today's veterans. Members completing this course will be well suited to take on leadership positions, and have the knowledge to promote the organization and inspire those around them to follow suit and seek further education themselves. Leadership is critical and education works.

As you can see, education works as a membership tool. When the young are educated, they become inspired. They are retained. When the adult is educated, they share that knowledge with others which leads to increased membership. They are recruiting and retaining new members. And when our leadership is educated, they inspire others to follow in their footsteps. The educational tools are out there. Remember to use them as membership tools as well.