

DRIVING PARTICIPATION

with Beth Brodovsky



SESSION 011

BANNING THE "V" WORD WITH PEGGY HOFFMAN

Beth: Okay Peggy. Thank you so much. I really appreciate you doing this with me. So I'd like to just start off with you telling me a little bit about yourself and how you got into doing sort of the member-focused and marketing work that you're involved in.

Peggy: First of all, thank you for inviting me. So Mariner Management—we're an association management company and half of our business is all about working with small non-profit organizations, membership based organizations and giving them the infrastructure administrative support to really be able to drive their mission and then the other half of the business is working with national organizations that have or want to have member communities such as chapters or online communities or specialty interest groups to help them actually make those things happen and be effective. I'm somewhat traditional association exec in that I sell into associations. I came out with a PR degree out of college and then found my way into the non-profit sector and pretty quickly found myself in the association world.

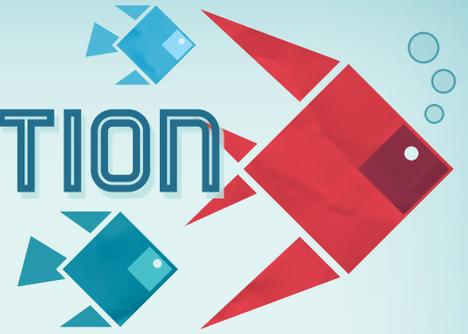
Beth: In the way that we do.

Peggy: It was pretty standard and boy that was, not to show my age, that was in the 80's and just stayed in it forever. I worked inside associations for a while and then back in 2002 my business partner, who is also my husband, we decided that so many chapters, small organizations, don't have the support that they need so we built Mariner Management and really we felt to fill a need.

Beth: Wow! There really is a need out there. When you were in associations, what type of roles did you focus on?

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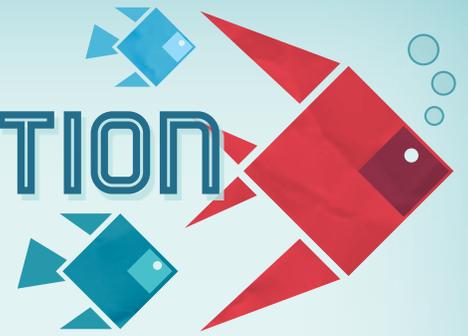
Peggy: I started as one might imagine with a PR degree in the communications department and pretty quickly realized that the perk of the organization was the membership department, so while I came with this natural, I had a dual degree in PR and Marketing and so came from the communications side of things, I was able to take and morph into the membership and ultimately moved up to a number two position in a trade organization. I really, I did a little bit of everything because if you're gonna be in a small to medium sized organization you do so, but my love was really in helping to develop the member programs and services and really drive member engagement and as part of that I obviously got very involved in chapters and communities of interest. How do you help members find their space in the association, which of course is all then connected seamlessly to the volunteer question. If I had to say where my passion is, my passion is in member engagement, communication and member communities.

Beth: That's why I knew I had to talk to you! That's exactly where my passion is. What gets people involved and the reason why we're doing these calls is to kind of learn a little more about how involvement can trigger success for an organization and so the big question to you is: Why does participation matter? Have you seen in your current management organization at Mariner that there is any sort of connection with an involved member being a longer term or a more sustainable member or just being someone that is just a really great fit and produces for an organization?

Peggy: I think what we've seen at Mariner is we talk a lot about what we call the continuum. There's the joiner who becomes the member who if you do everything right becomes a citizen and it isn't until you're at that citizen level that you literally switch from what I call being a joiner to being a believer. It's really human nature to get involved and when we don't get involved, we don't have that loyalty or that commitment and so in a membership organization, involvement is going to be the trigger. One of my favorite books that I now pull out and tout to everybody came out of the ASAE Foundation Research series and it's called "10 Lessons for Cultivating Member Commitment". The author is of the position to join and they basically make the decision to join research, which was back in 2008ish.

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Beth: It's a great book.

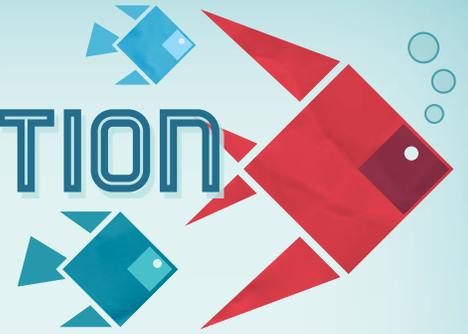
Peggy: We ran the thing in 2011 and what I loved about this, in this latest iteration, is that they went back and they looked at the question of how does involvement, how does involvement handle or affect retention and acquisition. They found that even pre-economic explosions, meltdowns, to the current post-, if you will, economic meltdown, the one variable that didn't change was people's net promoter score as it related to whether they'd been involved in the organization or not, so in other words and saying it a lot more smoothly is that when you're involved, your net promoter score in an organization goes up more than ten points. Just the very act of doing a small simple element will literally take someone from being silent on your association to being a raving fan. I think what we found in the research and then what I found out anecdotally is that people become the citizen and they get involved in the organization they just get, it's like glue and it connects them to the association in a way that is just incredibly meaningful.

Beth: I love that term 'citizen.' I've never heard anyone use that word before. I think it's terrific. It's so apropos of that feeling that you're trying to generate. Do you have any thought on, is there any commonality about what makes somebody make that switch from just signing up and being I've checked this off the box to I am a citizen of an organization? Have you seen some of the things that do that or is there any commonality among all the organizations that make that happen?

Peggy: You know the thing that I've seen over and over again is when someone moves from being a participant to a contributor and that trigger could be anything from when you've asked somebody to write an article, when you've asked somebody to host a meeting for you at a local level for example, when you've asked somebody to present at your conference. That act of getting them from a user to a contributor is kind of, that's the turning point and we don't ask members often enough to make that switch. Often times all we're doing is marketing to our members and saying, "Okay come to this meeting" or "Log on here" or "Earn a badge on your online community" or "Buy this book." We're asking people to use our services. We're not asking people

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to contribute to our services. It is that moment when somebody contributes that all of a sudden they're now on the path. Now, admittedly often too many times the person contributes and then nothing is said or acknowledged or followed up and of course the trigger is only gonna work if it's tweaked a little bit so I'm not saying, "Oh my gosh. If you get somebody to do one thing, they're gonna be forever in your, they're gonna be a citizen", so there is that notion of for better use of words, rewarding that contribution because then you acknowledge that they've done it, they feel acknowledged and they are more likely to do it again, but really it's moving from user to contributor that I've seen and the neat thing is that it is the components of your organization. By components, that's a word I'm not sure I really like, but we kept in the association world looking for a better word than chapters since not everything is a chapter, but the components are member communities that you have are a hotbed of opportunities to go from being a user to a contributor and that's where I think people, many associations under-resource and under-utilize their member communities. That's where you can make that trigger happen.

Beth: Absolutely and it's interesting how you describe that. It sounds a lot like what we call donor communications, which is another sort of membership area. The similarities are really amazing, especially how you mentioned the difference that a thank you makes I can't tell you because I do a lot of speaking and writing articles and they go out there and it's the same thing. You never get that thank you, but one time I did and it made such a difference in my feeling of appreciation and engagement with that organization. I think that's really interesting that if some of the philosophies on acquisition and on thanking and showing appreciation. Even some of what we call donor-centric language really focused on you and what you're getting out of it and your contribution, I wonder if that applies in an association membership in a chapter involvement aspect of things.

Peggy: Yeah, I think it does and I think that we spend so much time looking at the marketing pitches and think, "How is L.L. Bean getting me" or "How is Starbucks getting me" instead of looking at "How is the American Cancer Society getting all these people to do the Relay for Life"? I've been doing their Relay for Life for twelve