

The Role of a Membership Director in a Successful School, Part One

Known by many names, the “membership director” at your school may be a program director, enrollment director or general manager. Your head instructor or you, as school owner, may fulfill the duties of a membership director.

Regardless of who he is or his exact title, someone at your school must be responsible for planning and implementing a comprehensive program to generate revenues from various sources. Simply put, that is the primary role and responsibility of your membership director.

Whether a membership director is a full-time staff member, focused solely on revenue generation, or just a portion of the duties of you, your head instructor or other staff member, he has a tough job that requires a broad range of skills and one that is easily measured—in dollars and cents.

If your school is large enough to require a full-time membership director, then you probably offer a comprehensive selection of programs, upgrades, equipment, extras, special events, etc. You have built a successful school, but to maintain and increase that success, your membership director must be able to “feed” your growing enterprise with an ever-increasing revenue stream.

If your school is of a more moderate size or even new, then you probably don’t require a full-time membership director or don’t have the personnel budget for one. Your smaller school may not need as much revenue as a large school, but you need to generate any revenue quickly as well as develop a constant flow of revenue to cover operating expenses. Only then are you able to advance to the next level of revenue.

The Qualities and Skills of a Membership Director

Learning how to hire the right membership director for your school really requires a separate report, but

a membership director must possess certain qualities and skills to be successful. The following list may not be complete, but it will help you when you are deciding who on your staff is able to fulfill that role for you plan to hire a membership director.

1. **Communication skills:** The membership director is your “front man” (other than yourself!), so he must be able to communicate your school’s brand or image to any audience in any situation. Naturally, he must be able to communicate and establish rapport with children as well as adults and parents.
2. **Personality skills:** The membership director must be personable, well groomed, extroverted and spontaneous as well as a good listener.
3. **Leadership skills:** The membership director must be a professional who genuinely attracts others’ attention. He must be taken seriously and be considered a source of knowledge and service.
4. **Sales skills:** The membership director must be trained and experienced in managing the sales process, from presentation to objections to the close. He must persuade, without being “slick,” and motivate, even when being informative.
5. **Marketing skills:** The membership director must understand and have experience with most marketing and advertising concepts and methods. He should be able to identify easily target audiences and develop tactics and campaigns to attract them.
6. **Organizational/administrative skills:** The membership director must be able to organize a vast amount of information and projects of various sizes. He must also know some bookkeeping, accounting and retailing.

The Duties of a Membership Director

As a staff member at your school, your membership director has one primary duty, as do all other staff

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MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR THE OWNER AND INSTRUCTOR

members: student service. The needs (large or small) of your students and their families are more important than any staff member's other job responsibilities.

That being said, your membership director's "other" primary duty is to generate income for your school. Before he is able to do that, you must develop an income-generating plan for your school. Generally, that is one of the primary purposes of a business plan. If you don't have a business plan, then virtually nothing is more important as a first step toward generating an ever-growing stream of revenue for your school. That is a separate Black Belt Management Report too.

The point is that you can't expect your membership director to be successful, if you have no plan for him to follow with specific revenue goals. For him to be efficient and effective, he needs more than random and ill-defined directions from you. The remainder of this report will help you to start to develop an income-producing plan for your membership director.

Income-Producing Activities

Most of a martial arts school's revenues will be generated from four market sectors.

1. New student enrollments.
2. Active student re-enrollments or upgrades to new programs.
3. Retail sales of pro shop or catalogue equipment.
4. Special events promotions (testing, tournaments, seminars, clinics, private lessons, etc.).

New Student Enrollments

Your membership director is an integral part of the introductory/enrollment process. If he doesn't actually conduct the introductory lesson, then he is actively involved in marketing to and attracting the prospective student to the school for the introduction.

Whatever his specific responsibilities for the introduction, the membership director must address three other elements of the enrollment process to be successful: generating leads, maximizing enrollment revenues and maximizing new-student retention.

1) Generating Leads

Before he is able to generate a stream of healthy revenue, the membership director must create a healthy stream of leads. The enrollment/introductory process is much like an assembly line. Leads become prospects, which become introductory students who become regular students who become upgrades, etc.

Because the entire process starts with leads, that is where the membership director must start, with a proactive lead generation plan.

Lead-Generating Methods

- Obtain referrals from new and current students. Membership director requires:
 - Guest passes.
 - VIP passes.
 - Referral request letters.
 - A phone presentation for use with current students to promote referrals.
 - Full support of leadership team and instructors in the classroom.
- Maintain complete calendar and contact information for all community activities, such as fairs, shows, fundraisers, meetings, parades, exhibits, Chamber of Commerce events, etc. Develop ideas and programs to involve school in these activities (booths, demonstrations, flyers, raffle prizes, etc.).
- Review all local publications and local radio and TV news daily/weekly for promotional opportunities. A new factory opening in town, a new housing development, awards for local business leaders and honor students and other such local news should be sources of opportunities for the proactive membership director.
- Distribute regular press releases to all local media and invite media to major events.
- Make regular contact with targeted, local businesses to propose programs for employees to improve health, confidence and concentration. Develop a contact database of human resources directors. Propose a specific program to the school system.

BLACK BELT MANAGEMENT

MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR THE OWNER AND INSTRUCTOR

- Manage regular distribution of flyers, guest passes and door hangers throughout the community.
- Develop, implement and manage an aggressive demo team schedule and public speaking opportunities for the school owner.
- Continue to follow-up leads with at least six attempts to schedule appointments.

2) Maximizing Enrollment Revenues

Attracting and enrolling new students, even at an accelerated pace, is not enough. The membership director and school owner must develop an enrollment and payment structure that maximizes the potential revenues from every enrollment. Of course, the school owner must make the final decisions about down payments, monthly tuitions, payment plans, cash outs, short-term programs, private lessons, money-back guarantees, etc. as well as limits to discounts, scholarships and trade agreements. After acquiring enough experience (and working closely with the school owner for a period of time), many membership directors may assume the responsibility for making payment policy decisions.

Your payment policies must also be flexible, so your membership director is able to provide students and their families with options that serve their needs as well as yours, for excellent cash flow.

Developing a thorough payment policy (and in the form of a document) is a critical part of any business. Students (customers) must be satisfied that they are receiving real value for what they pay. The school must generate sufficient revenues to cover the overhead as well as produce a profit.

Your membership director is able to contribute further to the development of a sound payment policy (and maximize enrollment revenues in the process) by networking with others throughout the industry. Part of his role and responsibilities is to contact other membership directors and/or school owners to research successful payment policies and enrollment procedures that have helped other schools maximize their enrollment revenues.

Ultimately, your membership director's efforts will be judged by the numbers; and once your payment policies are determined and considerable networking has helped you to obtain industry-wide information,

then you should expect your membership director to increase enrollment revenues by 20% to 40%. This is not unreasonable, especially if your membership director is a full-time position.

Reasonable Enrollment Targets

Before you turn your membership director loose on your market, you should probably review your enrollment process, especially the specific benchmarks or target numbers against which you will measure your membership director's results.

Tom Callos, veteran school owner and contributor to NAPMA's monthly G.O.L.D. Leadership Reports, provides some statistical recommendations you should consider for your enrollment process.

- Monthly phone calls and walk-ins:

"I targeted 40 to 60 inquiries per month for all sources in a town with a population of 150,000. Your goal will vary, depending on the size of your school and your municipality."

- Enrollments from inquiries:

"I recommend that your goal should be 40% to 50% of your inquiries become enrollments. If not, then I recommend that you review, in detail, every step of your enrollment process from first contact through the introductory lesson, and adjust, tweak or change whatever appears to be obstacles to your goal."

- Revenue from 30 enrollments:

"Thirty enrollments are 50% of the 60 inquiries per month that I recommended above. Obviously, it is difficult to provide you with an exact dollar amount because there are so many factors affecting what you charge and how much revenue you are able to collect."

"At my school, those 30 enrollments would actually constitute 20 one-year tuitions, after factoring family plans and tuitions at less than full price. Those 20 "enrollments" equal approximately \$1,200, during a year, or \$24,000."

"I expected my membership director to collect 10% to 20% down on 90% of those enrollments. He would try to obtain quarter-payments, half-payments or cash outs from the other 10%."

- 3) Maximizing New-Student Retention

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Your membership director's responsibilities don't end with a signature and a check. Although he doesn't train students (in many cases), he did promise them and their parents that they would receive excellent value for becoming a student at your school.

Your membership director's obligation to each student he enrolls is that he will follow the progress of the student from introduction to fully involved student to belt advancements to a happy and satisfied student to be sure that the training is providing the benefits promised.

The following methods will help any membership director maximize new-student retention.

Follow-up all new enrollments with letters, postcards, phone calls, emails and face-to-face chats.

- Assist during the first 15 to 30 minutes of all beginners' classes, when possible.
- Observe classes and students for signs of disinterest or dissatisfaction. Check with instructors to help determine which students may need encouragement or a reminder.
- Schedule at least one after-enrollment meeting with students and parents to review their level of interest and satisfaction. Provide motivation and encouragement to those who require it. (This meeting is also an excellent opportunity to pre-frame for upgrades and generate product sales.)