

As a Scout (Venturer), I could convince more young people from my community (and surrounding communities) to join Scouting (Venturing) by organizing a membership recruitment plan that included these important steps/elements.

By M. Robert Marks *(Revised March 22, 2008)*

I believe more young adults would join Venturing if they had the chance to “try before buying.” If they attend one or two functions and *experience* Venturing they would be hooked. The difficulty is getting them to attend an event where they can experience Venturing, and then convincing them to join.

I read somewhere that successful organizations think about why people join their organization – and why people don’t join. I decided to take an informal survey of friends who were potential members but wouldn’t join no matter how hard I tried. Their #1 reason for not coming? They didn’t know anyone in the Crew or they only knew me and one or two other people. I asked other members of my Crew why their friends who weren’t members didn’t join and the answer was similar. What we did, when we met and how much it cost were always less important than who they knew in the Crew.

I also feel that most Venturers are happy going to the meetings and activities of their Crew with their current circle of friends. Recruiting new and younger members is not something they think about and certainly not a priority. It also takes them outside their comfort zone to talk to the people in their school or church who are younger. As a result, a lot of Crews die when the active group goes off to college.

The plan that I suggest includes a number of steps to deal with these obstacles and a few new ideas that would increase the number of youth who join.

One important part all recruitment efforts is the extra attention to making the prospective member feel welcome. Another part is to progressively increase their circle of friends to include members of the Crew.

Step 1 – Train the Crew

Hold a training session for the current Crew members. This session would focus on changing their mindset about recruitment. It would also help them feel comfortable inviting younger prospective members to our functions.

It should be no more than 10-15 minutes and should be positive. We want them to realize they owe it to others to invite them to have the same experiences they are currently enjoying in Venturing.

The training would include a short video showing the “steps to recruiting new member” (to be created), a discussion on how to recruit and some role playing. The best way to get over the fear of asking people to join is to talk about it and practice. Emphasis would be on the need to make prospective members feel welcome before they attend their first function.

Step 2 – Develop a Prospect List

Develop a list of prospective members. Target the 8th Graders (14-15 year olds). The list should have a minimum of 10 good prospects with the goal of signing up 5 new members.

Potential prospects include:

- Younger friends / neighbors
- Siblings of current members / friends of siblings
- Nearby Scout Troops
- Eagle Scouts
- Former Scouts
- School leaders in sports and academics
- Class officers
- Members of church youth groups

Step 3 – Plan the Event

Schedule and plan events(s) that would allow the prospect to experience a typical Crew activity. Frequently an actual event will sell better than a staged open house. If possible, the event should be free to potential members.

- The event could be almost anything on the Crew schedule.
- Events don't need to be fancy, but should be quality. Even a movie night would work.
- A meeting with an interesting program would work.
- If an open house format is used it should be followed closely by an activity.
- Consider inviting other Crews to the event.

Step 4 – Invite & Follow-up

Invite the prospective member and their parents or guardians with a personal letter. The letter to the prospect should be signed by the Crew President AND someone who knows them; the letter to the parents should come from the Crew Advisor.

Follow-up with the prospect using multiple forms of communication. There should be at least four contacts with each prospect prior to event:

- ✓ Postcard reminder
- ✓ Telephone call (about one week before the event)
- ✓ E-mail, text message, IM (or all 3)
- ✓ Face to face

The full list of prospects should be shared with the entire Crew. Crew members are asked to make a point of saying “hello” to prospective members at school, church, the mall, etc. and let them know they are looking forward to seeing the prospect at the event. This will make them feel welcome and make it more likely for them to attend.

“Face to face” follow-up is the most important part of this step. About 1-2 weeks before the event, a team of two or three Crew members schedules a short visit with the prospect. This meeting can be at the local pizza or fast food restaurant, at the mall, or at the prospects’ home. Food should be involved as it is a good ice-breaker and will make everyone more comfortable. The meeting should be relatively short and would include talk about previous events and upcoming activities. Be sure to let the prospective member know their other friends would be welcome to attend the event (get their friends’ contact information and send them an official invitation).

The reason for this meeting is to gradually increase the prospects circle of friends within the Crew. By the time they attend the event they should know at least three or four people in the Crew. The more people they know, the more likely they are to join.

Step 5 – Sign Them Up!

During the event, everyone who was on the team that met the prospect and anyone who knows the prospect should make it their priority to make them feel comfortable. This should happen from the moment they walk into the event until the time they leave.

If step 4 was done effectively, by this time you know they will be joining. Make sure they don’t leave the event without leaving their signed application and a check. *When handing the application to a new member, give them two extra with the suggestion they are for two of their friends.*

“Tools”

Some “tools” could be developed that would make the recruitment process easier. Some of my ideas are:

1. Individualized packet for prospects. This would be given to them to take home and share with their parents after meeting with two or three crew members. The folder would include:
 - Brochure for the prospect
 - Brochure for the parents
 - Calendar or list of upcoming activities
 - Flyer about the current superactivity
 - Youth application
 - CD Rom with slide shows, videos, etc.
2. Develop a series of generic YouTube videos to show what we do in Venturing. These videos should be short (2-3 minutes) and fast paced. They could include service projects examples, caving, climbing, snowboarding, backpacking, soccer, search and rescue, SCUBA, sailing, skiing, biking, kayaking, etc. etc.
3. Encourage Crews to make their own videos. The more random and fun, the better. An alternative to videos would be short slide shows with good music in the background.

4. Create a template for a facebook page with guidelines on how to use facebook to promote the Crew. These facebook pages would attach YouTube videos from #2 that relate to their crew plus their own videos from #3. The url for the facebook page would be included in the invitations and all promotional material for the Crew.
5. Provide Crews with creative and exciting templates for invitations, letters, flyers, postcards, business cards and other promotional materials.
6. Develop a letter and brochure that would be sent to Eagle Scouts and Gold Award recipients congratulating them on their accomplishment and inviting them to join Venturing.

Summary

Whether the result of converting a church youth group, started from a Boy Scout troop or the start-up of something completely new, most Crews are chartered with a homogenous group of young adults. Each of these members might naturally invite their circle of friends. Convincing a group of youth who are currently friends to join Venturing is much easier than recruiting individual youth.

When followed completely, the recruitment plan I outlined works very well at recruiting new, younger members who will take over the Crew when the current group leaves. Even if it isn't followed completely, several steps and suggestions could be used alone or added to recruitment plans of Venturing Crews.

Recruiting takes planning, effort and attention to details. It also takes members outside their comfort zone to try new things. In the end it becomes an excellent growth experience for both the current members and the prospective members. All of it is well worth the time spent.