

Reaping the Benefits of Membership

Editor's note: This is the fourth in a series of articles on the importance of state chiropractic association membership, with particular focus on the responsibilities of association leadership. [Part 1](#) appeared in the Feb. 12 issue; [Part 2](#) appeared in the Feb. 26 issue; and [Part 3](#) appeared in the April 22 issue.

Unions came into power more than 100 years ago to defend the rights of the employee against big-business tycoons who were not as concerned about the worker as they were about their profits. [Even before their legalization in 1842](#), unions were organizing strikes to protect the welfare of their workers. Professional associations were built in the shadows of these unions, striving to help given professions and those within the professions succeed.

The professional associations of today are similar to the union model. Members pay dues to the state and national affiliates in return for benefits. Some even have local chapters representing them. In this tough economy, why do people still join these associations? It is not for the monthly newsletter, the annual convention or the periodic seminars to achieve their continuing education credits. Individuals may join associations for many reasons:

- Need to know information
- Support of their profession and institution
- Fear they are missing vital information
- Compliance
- Support materials
- Legal resources
- Legislative information
- Reimbursement issues
- Human resource needs
- Feel it's the right thing to do

I am sure you can add more items to this list, but what I have seen over my 25-plus years of managing and consulting for associations in the health care industry is a conglomeration of all of the reasons above. In addition, there is one more element I think is relevant and worth writing about: a need for the association to help members unravel the many complex financial and legal issues they are faced with on a regular basis within their own business or practice.

As an association administrator, I am asked to solve problems for our membership regularly. If your members could do it themselves, they would not need your professional association. As board members, we are the problem-solvers for many diverse issues.

I also often receive calls from nonmembers and have made it my practice to gently let them know that without membership status, I cannot offer them the information they need to address the immediate problem. Association members are all doing their part to make the profession we serve that much better, and it does not make sense that someone who is not a member would reap the benefits.

An association executive is the answer person. You and your staff are contacted by members and

nonmembers because they need what you have. They do not want to call you, but they do, most of the time, because it is a last resort before calling their lawyer or financial consultant. I always find it interesting that the nonmember knows how to find their association's number when they have a problem, but cannot be bothered to join the association for any of the other important reasons. This would be like Joe the Cyclist calling up Lance Armstrong and expecting him to divulge all his training secrets.

So, the next time you receive a call from a nonmember, be courteous and friendly - after all, you may be obtaining a new member - but also be firm and honest that what they want from you cannot be provided without membership, because what they need is not an answer to a single question, but the comprehensive support and benefits of their professional organization. Let them know that in return for their membership, your organization will provide them with a support group of people who can answer the questions they have now and in the future.

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