



Developing a Caring Culture

Rev. Peter R. Hook, State Chaplain

PeterHook@verizon.net

People join organizations for various reasons, but they stay and remain involved over a long period of time because of the mutually-satisfying relationships they form and the care they receive. This is true for churches, synagogues, civic, and service organizations such as the VFW.

When an organization embraces and cares about its members, it seems to thrive and retention remains high. Individuals involved in such organizations feel valued and respected. They build up one another, and each member becomes a better person as a result of being a member of such an organization. It is mutually beneficial and satisfying. Unfortunately, many organizations and work places are not like this. They just take from their members. They “use” people. And, when the person being used becomes exhausted and has nothing more to give, he/she becomes expendable. As a result, people who were once dedicated, vibrant members begin to fade into the background, and before long they drop out altogether. When this happens, and a pattern begins to develop, it is time for the leaders of such organizations to stop and analyze not only “what” is taking place, but to ask “why” this is happening. Why is it that our once-thriving organization is disintegrating and decaying? Why has it become so difficult to get people to participate and help? They should take an honest look at the organization and ask themselves, “Who in their right mind would want to join such an organization, and over time, be “used-up” and become physically and emotionally exhausted? Most people have enough problems to contend with, they do not need more.

It is time for each Post, if they have not done so, to create a community-wide caring culture. Posts should seek to develop a culture where every person is respected and valued because of who they are, not only because of what they can contribute. A culture needs to be established where its members are valued and where the leaders and the people reach out and care for one another spontaneously. In time, the members of such an organization feel appreciated. And, they feel they are receiving much more as a result of being a part of the organization than they give to it.

Here are some steps to begin to develop a caring culture:

1. It starts with the mindset of the leaders. If the leadership manifests a welcoming and caring attitude, and values every person in the organization, it is noticed. In time, such an attitude filters down and becomes contagious.

2. Do not tolerate gossip or speech that tears down others. When there is an issue – deal with it, and be quick to forgive.
3. Unleash people and encourage every member to take the initiative and respond when they hear of situations. When a member receives several phone calls congratulating them upon the birth of a child or grandchild, or if they receive a note in the mail expressing grief upon hearing of the loss of a loved one, it is always appreciated.
4. Meet needs. I remember giving a grocery store gift card to a member whom I sensed needed and would appreciate a boost. In another instance, I saw the Commander of my Post shake hands with a comrade and as he did, cupped in his hand, was a gift card. The smooth exchange took place as they shook hands and the commander simply said, “This is for you.”
5. Keep a calendar of significant joys and sorrows that members have encountered. Call them or send “Thinking of You” notes. Not long ago I said to one of our members, “Monday, it will be two years since you dad passed.” He looked at me a bit startled and then, with tears forming in his eyes said, “You remembered.” Yes, it is important to our members that we remember and acknowledge the things that are important to them. When a community remembers, it demonstrates it cares about its members.
6. Think about forming a small caring committee that the leadership can call on to respond in certain situations.

Remember, the things that are not seen (but felt), are the most important things to the members of any organization.

Resources for Chaplains: Hope you see you in June at the State Convention in Gettysburg, PA. In the meantime check out my Chaplain’s Page at the PA Department Web Site - vfwpahq.org Just look under District/Post Tools and you will see Chaplain’s Guide. I have posted a number of items you may find helpful as you continue to serve those who serve.

Blessings as you serve,

Rev. Peter R. Hook
PA State Chaplain
Veterans of Foreign Wars
534 Parkvale Ave.
Langhorne, PA 19047
267-229-7722
Fax: 215-750-1511
PeterHook@verizon.net

