

PRACTICAL IDEAS

4. Overcoming the Barriers to Belonging

A potential member's reason for not joining or his "barrier to belonging" is listed first. The researched, successful response follows. Use this information to prepare to meet with a potential member. Practice overcoming all the barriers. Think of other useful answers too.

Keep in mind that member recruitment and retention is our Association's lifeblood. Without members, we'd be nowhere!

BARRIER: There's no reason to join. I get all the benefits without belonging.

YOU: You may get the pay raise we negotiate, but that's where the benefits stop. If you are not a member, you have no voice in what we do. You don't have access to our services such as legal help or liability insurance, workshops and publications.

Most importantly, you should belong to help build our solidarity and unity. There's strength in numbers. We can get more done if you are a member and you're with us.

BARRIER: My spouse works for the same employer I do. Why do we both have to belong?

YOU: Because you're both guaranteed our benefits and services as individuals.

We also have "collective" benefits, like services for our local association from CEA-NEA.

But each of us is covered by benefits that are individual, like liability insurance, legal services, on-the-job assistance, seminars, and workshops. Think of it like health insurance; it covers only you.

BARRIER: I don't always agree with your association.

YOU: Few people agree with 100% of what any organization does – your church, club, political party, neighborhood association, your family, your country. That doesn't keep them from belonging.

As a member, you have the right to disagree with what we do and to help change what you don't like.

But if you're not a member, you cannot effect change.

BARRIER: I just don't believe in joining a group or a union.

YOU: We're able to do more as a group than we can as individuals – in salary negotiations, lobbying at the Capitol, providing personal benefits that save you money. It may sound trite, but together we can do what none of us can do alone.

We're a union because we're people working together to achieve common goals. We're a professional association because we advocate for public education beyond traditional "union" issues of job security and salaries.

BARRIER: I'll join the local, but I don't want to join CEA and NEA.

YOU: We can't accommodate that request. We have unified membership (local, state, national) because the three levels of our Association work in tandem to do what our members want. CEA and NEA provide services for our local and do things for us that we can't do alone. And CEA and NEA dues come back to our local to help us fund programs for members right here at home.

BARRIER: I'm in this for the kids. Your association doesn't do things for students.

YOU: That's not true, of course. We lobby for more money for schools and to improve CSAP and No Child Left Behind. We work to lower class size and improve student achievement. We help the public see education in a positive way through our advertising programs. We help you become better at your job through mentoring, workshops and seminars, research, grants, and much more. We're in it for the kids too. We're in it for the kids too.

BARRIER: I can't afford to join. It costs too much.

YOU: We understand we're asking you to make a financial commitment. Think of your dues investment as "job insurance." And consider participating in our Member Benefits programs so you can save money on your dues investment. I like to think of belonging to our Association as an opportunity to improve things for my students and me, rather than a service or product I'm buying. That makes it "worth it" to me.

BARRIER: I can get liability insurance a lot cheaper.
YOU: You might be able to find inexpensive liability insurance, but that's not what educators need. You need Legal Services: immediate, on-site help from experienced UniServ staff and CEA attorneys if you have a job-related problem. Unless the insurance you're talking about provides immediate access to a professional skilled in labor and school law, your policy does not compare to belonging to us.

BARRIER: You protect bad employees.
YOU: Our job is to protect every member's right to due process in his/her job – to make sure the administration follows the rules and doesn't violate your professional rights. We make sure you're fairly treated, but we don't judge whether you're right or wrong – that's your employer's role. Our other role is to help each other succeed: to mentor, to provide guidance, to lend a hand, and to help each other.

BARRIER: I can't join because you give your money to political candidates I don't support.
YOU: We contribute to our recommended candidates from our political action funds. You can get a refund on that part of your dues (Every Member Option) through an easy process of notifying CEA in writing.
The money NEA contributes to NEA-recommended federal candidates come from members' voluntary contributions, separate from dues that members pay to NEA.

BARRIER: You are committed to electing only Democrats to office.
YOU: We invite all candidates to interview with our members. We use only public education issues and issues that directly affect our members in deciding whom to recommend. We want to be sure our recommended candidates measure up on the issues our members care about the most. We recommend candidates without regard to their political affiliation as long as we know they support our issues.

BARRIER: I'll never need your help. The administration will watch out for me.
YOU: First, that's not the administration's job. Second, there is no guarantee that your employer will help you if a parent sues you, a child is injured while under your supervision, someone accuses you of a crime like child abuse.
Though the administration may be supportive, you need someone who will ADVOCATE FOR YOU, provide legal

help, and make sure you are afforded due process, someone who'll be there for you and be on your side.

BARRIER: I don't agree with NEA because NEA believes in _____.
YOU: I think it's important to look at our Association's belief statements (resolutions) and see exactly what they say. Our policies and beliefs are created by our members. We elect these members to represent us at governance meetings like the CEA Delegate Assembly and NEA Representative Assembly. That's how our policies are made. *(Get the specific language of our resolution/policy and deal with this head on. Many times the potential member has heard/read something that's not true. YOU must know our positions.)*

BARRIER: I'm from a family of union members. Your organization isn't strong enough for me.
YOU: It's great to meet someone with such great union values. We can really use your help in our Association. We are working to improve (list the specific things your local is working on). The more of us who are members, the easier it will be to get what we want and what's right for educators.

BARRIER: I think I'll just wait and see what you do this year. I might join later.
YOU: We really need you as a member now. We can do a lot more if you belong now, not later. We're the group that looks out for your job, helps improve education, lobbies for school funding, represents educators.
If you wait to see if you need us, you should know that you must be a member at the time you need help. If you're not, we can't help you. Your membership can't be retroactive. It's just like insurance: you'd better have it when you need it.

You can get this information in the form of perforated cards from your Local Association President. The Barrier to Belonging is on one side of each card and Your Response is on the other.

AND... Get information from your Local President about PACE, a Colorado organization that may be in your area with the intention of competing with your local for members.