

Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc.
Affiliate Chapter Relations Committee

Affiliate Chapter Handbook
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Section 9.1

A Glimpse at Affiliate Chapter Board Service

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A Glimpse at Affiliate Chapter Board Service

By Janet L. Bailey

There is a reason we are all members of the same professional association. Too often we dwell on what makes us different, but it is critical that our leaders remember our similarities and the common goal that keeps us together.

***RID Goal Statement** - It is the goal of RID to promote the profession of interpreting and transliterating American Sign Language and English.*

Promoting the profession: How do we as individual interpreters promote our profession? How can we affect regulations regarding safe working conditions; assure that consumers are protected; and how do we encourage interpreters to strive for excellence?

It cannot be done alone, by a selected few or even by a national Board of Directors and a capable National Office staff. It can only be done through the combined work of hundreds of members who make up national committees, affiliate chapter boards and regional and local committees. It is done through the activities of groups of members throughout the nation. It is celebrated at local, regional and national meetings, workshops and conferences. Finally, it is demonstrated every day by the work of qualified interpreters serving the needs of Deaf and hard of hearing individuals throughout this nation.

These lofty goals are impossible for a single interpreter. But together we can make it known that interpreters are professionals; we can have a voice in shaping our working conditions; we can establish a nationally recognized certification system, a certification maintenance system and a self-regulating ethical practices system. Together we can, and have, shaped our profession.

Somehow we are able to find dedicated individuals willing to volunteer to serve the greater good. {Reinforcing the fact that there is a reason we become RID members. }

Affiliate chapters tend to experience cycles with periods of healthy participation and times of relative inactivity. Some local leaders take the responsibility, run with it – often successfully - but then become burned out when they realize they cannot do it all. When a new member steps up to take on a leadership role, everyone gives a long sigh of relief and disappears - leaving the new “leader” to do it all. This vicious cycle is played out again and again and the only solution is for a **group** to step up to share the responsibilities.

Experts on board service talk about the stages of growth in an organization. Some characterize the stages by comparing the organization to the development of a child. RID

has been around for many years and yet because of the volunteer status, the nomad existence of running an organization without walls, and the constant changing of personnel, our affiliate chapters rarely have the luxury of developing beyond adolescence.

Many joke about the lack of contested elections within RID. Consider the old joke where a volunteer is called for and everyone in line steps back leaving one bewildered person *elected*. There have been many, myself included, who took on the responsibilities of an office because no one else was willing. The new uninitiated leader is expected to figure out what to do next. Because most affiliate chapters have no physical office, the administrative reins are often turned over (unceremoniously) with the passing of assorted ring binders, file folders and boxes from the home office, basement or car trunk of the previous officer. [More recently the bulk of this transfer has minimized with the advent of computers, discs and CDs.]

With no official training, we roll up our sleeves, take a deep breath and **fake it**. Usually this means focusing on the uncompleted tasks left over from the previous administration: perhaps planning the upcoming conference, budget concerns, membership renewals, newsletter publication.

Rarely do we consider the task, analyze staffing needs and create a work plan. But that is exactly what we should do.

Planning: The first thing a new board should do is to look at RID's philosophy, mission and goal statements. Then figure out how they relate to your affiliate chapter challenges and goals. It may be that you'll find that you need to create local goals if there are specific local or regional needs not being met.

The board needs to identify, as a group, the short-term and long-term goals of the organization. From the identified goals a list of projects, tasks and events will become clear. Timelines must be created that will allow adequate planning and preparation. (See section 22 for more information on goal setting.)

Staffing: All boards have a diverse membership. The trick is to figure out who has what skills and how they play into the work ahead. If you are lacking specific skills, look to the larger organization and recruit committee members who can fill these gaps. If the skilled help is not interested in serving on a long-term basis, you can always have them sign on for a shorter period of time through a task force or special activity. Above all, avoid the temptation to do everything yourself. Recruitment and delegation are skills that you must develop, practice and maintain.

Great advice if only we had the time! Reality shows that the new leaders not only take on the responsibilities but the stress-creating deadlines, fear-inducing fiscal crises, and the awe-inspiring expectations of the membership.

Stress is everywhere and cannot be avoided. Adequate planning and sharing the load will help. A healthy dose of humility and a boatload of humor will get you through some very rough times. Keep in mind – and share with the membership – that you are human and not able to solve the problems of the world by yourself. Do your best and ask for help. And remember to breathe – or recite the syllable “OM”.

Leadership: The president of the board sets the tone for how business will be conducted. If you are willing to listen, folks will talk. If you are willing to show your appreciation and share the credit, folks will work with you. You can also set the tone of the meeting and the group by establishing ground rules. If you believe your work is important, model the behavior you want to see among group members. Arrive early, be prepared, stay on task, have a sense of humor, and respect the others in the group. (See section 24 for more information on meeting ground rules.)

Many groups fail because people believe that meetings are boring and worthless. Meetings of a volunteer professional association are where our business happens. It is up to the president to establish the ground rules and to communicate the importance of following them. We live in a world where the utterance, “...it’s deaf time...” gives group members a free pass to arrive late. However, you will find that if you conduct your meetings within a set time frame, with a minimum of sidetracking and distractions you will earn the respect and gratitude of those involved. Everyone’s time is precious and by starting and ending your meetings on time you are proving that you recognize this fact. You will also be surprised that if you start the meeting as planned, whether or not everyone is there, people will get the idea very quickly and will amend their tardy behavior knowing that you **will** be starting on time no matter what. Let me add, however, that this does not mean that the meeting must be strict and joyless. On the contrary, you should make time for a little light-hearted amusement so that people truly want to come to the meetings. Not only will meetings be more productive – they will be more fun.

As leader of the meeting you are charged with facilitation of the agenda. Set your agendas based on shared priorities. Give adequate time for discussion on each point. You might want to give the timekeeping task to another group member. Open each new topic by allowing the issue/item to be introduced fully. Then open the floor for discussion. (See appendix M for sample agenda.)

We all have opinions and preconceived ideas about how best to handle problems. Force yourself to hold yours and listen to those around you. You never know what you will hear. Be open to new information and new ideas.

Being heard, even if you do not ultimately support an idea, is important. Validation will go a long way to making that person a strong and willing member of the group. As leader, do not allow cliques to form that can put down a weaker member. We all want to

feel part of the group and valued for our contributions. Make it a standard practice to try and view issues from all sides before making your final determination.

There are many **communication styles** that can affect the progress and ultimately the success of a group. While most of us use different styles at different times and with various people, recognizing the styles of communication will be important when trying to run your meetings. Members of your group may tend to be passive, assertive or aggressive communicators. Those who interact with others in a **PASSIVE** manner believe that the feelings and thoughts of others are more important than their own; those who have **ASSERTIVE** interpersonal styles consider the thoughts and feelings of others without discounting their own; and those who communicate in a more **AGGRESSIVE** style will not hesitate to stand up for themselves but who may violate the rights of others and appear as coarse. The verbal styles used by these types can be characterized as follows:

- **PASSIVE:** apologetic using an overly soft or tentative voice
- **ASSERTIVE:** “I” statements and a firm and confident voice
- **AGGRESSIVE:** “You” statements using a loud voice

As chair of the meeting you can remind people to use “I” statements and if necessary you can take a member aside after the meeting (not in the view of others) and discuss their communication style and its implications to others. Remember that you are leading the group toward a goal and trying to get everyone there to feel a part of a team and feel good about themselves and their involvement.

Even the smallest task ripples its way to help create great achievements. Keeping people involved, informed, and appreciated will go a long way to assuring folks will answer your next call for help.

Remember to applaud the efforts of your workers. Everyone wants to be appreciated. It is very easy to do this and so often overlooked. Some who have served in committees or boards leave their positions never to be seen again in RID politics or even as active members. Others remain active for many years. The active members either have built-in self-appreciation mechanisms or the organization and their peers recognized them for a job well done. If you ask those who are inactive, you will find that often they felt that it was a lot of work for very little return. They feel they did not make a difference.

Working for RID is a great opportunity. Serving on the board of an affiliate chapter is an exciting adventure that will allow you to meet many wonderful people—working together to promote our profession. Enjoy your experience and remember—anything worth doing should be fun!