

THE FOUR SECRETS TIP SHEET

Twenty-Four tips, techniques, and methods to build membership and buzz!

ASTD Sacramento Chapter / mail@astdsac.org / 916.563.3232

Secret # 1 – Craft an Innovative Annual Plan

If you aren't planning on rolling out your chapter programs on an annual basis, you are missing out on an opportunity to make a big impact on member attraction and retention.

1) Plan your programs annually – before the end of the calendar year.

Why? There are many, many benefits including: a) You won't get caught without a program if you start early, b) program ideas beget other ideas – start early and watch the ideas fly, c) If you are ready with a new slate of programs by December, you will be ready to post them in Feb. (see # 2 below)

2) Post your programs by February for the entire year. Even if you have little or no information about the programs, get the information posted. Why?

- a. This can boost enrollments to every program early.
- b. Take advantage of every event in the year to promote coming events. (Use handouts and a looping slide show at events to show what is coming next). Use the same slide show or versions on the web site and make it very visible. (See Handout #2 - Annual Program Slide Show and Comments) for a great example)
- c. An annual program posted to the website attracts new members and sends a strong message to existing members. The message – This association is giving me serious value for my membership!

3) Survey your members and your entire mailing list for ideas annually. Collect, read, and learn from what they have to say to you. This simple act can yield a treasure trove of information.

4) Borrow and trade with other ASTD Chapters. Reach out to other chapters for ideas or even to trade great speakers. What could be better to offer your members than a program that was well evaluated and received by another chapter? Two of our most successful program this year came from our sister chapter in Northern California (Mt. Diablo Chapter).

5) Leverage the value of the word or the concept "ANNUAL" in your program titles

What? Yes, simply start using the word annual. Members LOVE annual events! They look forward to knowing there are annual events planned and promised by your chapter. Another surprise, your program director(s) will also love annual events. With four annual events per year, one third of program planning is done at the start of the program planning cycle. The challenge then is to keep these events fresh and vital by changing things up, but this is a small challenge compared to creating twelve or more new and untested events per year.

6) Form a small group or committee and look for ideas annually. Use the ideas above, but multiply them with the power of a dedicated and innovative committee.

BONUS Tips -Consider these annual events: (See handout # 2 for more info on these events)

- 1) Annual State of the Training Industry session in January. Sell it cheap, maybe a "pizza day", bring in lots of new folks and introduce them to the "Power of Two". Your chapter will benefit and ASTD National will celebrate you for promoting the report and joint national/chapter membership.
- 2) Annual Train-the-Trainer session (get new and younger members - See handout #2 and tip # 19)
- 3) An Annual Conference (if you do one now, make it bigger, better, more contemporary – see tip # 21)
- 4) Annual Networking Event (See tip # 10 or Bonus tip for WIIFM - find out how to pull 100+ attendees)
- 5) Annual Holiday Party and Trainer Throw-down (See tip # 22 or December slide in Handout #2)

Secret # 2 – Leverage the Power of WIIFM

Our members tell us consistently that they want three things from ASTD Chapter Membership.

- 1) **Professional Development**
- 2) **Networking Opportunities**
- 3) **And Fun**

Your primary job as program director(s) is to make sure you deliver these three things! If you do, you will bring in new members, satisfy existing members, and see amazing things happen at your chapter.

--- Professional Development ---

7) Are you looking for new and different speakers/facilitators to meet everyone's needs?

Two of our board members brought in the author of "Thanks: How Practicing Gratitude Can Make you Happier", written by a noted positive psychology professor and based on the power to change people via gratitude, and he was amazing. (See more on this in tip # 24) This year alone we had speakers on improving facilitation with graphics, a story-telling expert who made us all reconsider stories in our training, a former SNL humor writer, and experts on presentations and social media. Go forth and search for fantastic programs!

8) Spend some time with speakers letting them know what your members want. Tell your speakers who was evaluated well and why. If your chapter members want interaction and facilitated exercises, as most chapters members do, tell your speakers this. Help your speakers make you look good.

9) The "anti-survey" We told you about surveys in Secret #1, but what about anti-surveys? What is an anti-survey? Eric Reis, author of the "Lean Startup" says people rarely tell you what they want, so he suggests starting with a product and using constant tweaking or experimentation to sell your product (in this case your programs). His advice, start with an MVP (minimum viable product) and play with it... watch your numbers and as needed, change up programming, change the title (make it Super or more descriptive), add prizes, add a bonus (see tip # 14) get another association involved, let members see attendees numbers (see tip # 15). Now - watch the numbers GROW!

--- Networking Opportunities ---

10) Are you doing networking events? How many? Consider one big annual event and pull in lots of people. People go to networking events when they see there will be lots of company or when they know there will be lots of fun and an easy way to meet others. (See handout # 2 – August Super Big Networking Event)

--- Fun ---

11) Remember what your members want (Professional Development, Networking Opportunities, and Fun) Have you given them any real fun lately? Get out of your comfort zone and do something crazy. (See tips # 12, 22, 23, and 24 and Handout # 2 January, August, and December for examples)

12) Are you going beyond the expected? When you give people MORE than they expect or exceed the WIIFM, you have loyalty. Some ideas? Prizes at every event. Surprise folks with a short innovative game, icebreaker, or networking exercise at three monthly events in a row. If you usually spend \$20 on food per event, provide a super dessert and coffee at the next event and include this in your promotional material.

Bonus Tip for WIIFM – Folks want networking, so build some serious excitement with your next networking event by building your own version of "Speed Networking". Make it a bit crazy by bringing in some whistle blowing referees to keep things moving and really interesting. Members want networking but it has to be fun and attract big numbers for folks to say, "Wow, that sounds like a networking event I can't miss."

Secret # 3 – Build Buzz

All Program Directors know that they need to find and engage good speakers who have solid material and know how to present it well. Once these solid speakers are booked, it is time to build the “Buzz”. You can have the greatest speakers and programs in the world, but if your members and potential members don’t know about it or attend, you have lost an opportunity to attract or retain members. Let members know what is happening, or that an amazing person is speaking, and get this information out on multiple channels. In short, make sure you build enough buzz to maximize attendance at every event. If you aren’t building “buzz”, you are wasting one of the most valuable resources that chapters have for attracting new members and retaining existing members. The resource – regular meetings and special events.

13) Take full advantage of your website and email message branding abilities. If you don’t send out branded emails for events, start doing it. Your attendees will get in the habit of responding to “events” when they see your logo and text. **What else?** Allow access to events from multiple places on your website. Front page, events page, other?

14) Give your members bonuses! The Sacramento ASTD Chapter gives away bonuses at every event and tells attendees about them in advance.

- Speakers – We ask speakers to come with or offer an e-version of a white paper or product they are willing to give away. Then we tell potential attendees about it in every event email. (We call it a “bonus” or a “free gift for every attendee”).
- Raffle items - We give a ticket to every attendee of virtually every event and then draw tickets for prizes. Most often these are ASTD books purchased using our CHIPS Code (the ASTD national code that every chapter can use to get ASTD National bonus points and dollars).

15) Play the numbers! Do you post a running tabulation of attendees or sign-ups for events? If not, you should. If you use Wild Apricot or a similar web management system this is a built in device and people respond to it. Folks love to attend well attended events. They are assured by numbers. They naturally assume, “If 50 other people are coming to the event, and it is still a week away, I better get on board.” *Hint for maximizing the “numbers”– make sure you are posting EVERYONE to the numbers list. If guests, registrars, speaker or anyone else is not automatically entered in this list, hand enter them. You may show a legitimate bump of 6-8 people and it could be just what you needed to make a difference in the perceived value of the event.*

16) Do you know the “Association of Associations”? They aren’t really called that, but that is what we call the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE), and they KNOW the association business. (how to build buzz, attract members, retain members). They have state chapters in many large states and are a great source of information for your local ASTD Chapter. We have learned a lot by becoming members of CALSAE.

17) Use your Marketing Director, Social Networking Director, and everyone involved in both these arenas to build “buzz”. Give your marketing and media people the freedom, incentives, and budget to use the latest in technology and social networking to support the great programs you are producing.

18) Add program announcements to every message sent to members and contacts. Use your jobs’ announcements, special program announcements, SIG announcements to remind members and non-members of monthly programs.

Bonus tip: Use every special event to boost membership! How? We price our special high-interest events such that there is a REAL incentive to join. There is a \$40 per head price break for members who attend our annual conference. (i.e. Join for \$80 and save \$40 for one event) Our annual Train-the-Trainer event (aimed at young trainers) INCLUDES a one year membership. We want NEW members and especially new professionals to the field.

Secret # 4– Create Super Engagement

Volunteer associations are built on engagement. So just how do chapters achieve this elusive engagement? How do they convince training and development professionals who are busy in their careers and lives to invest their time in the local chapter? They foster this engagement through building collaboration or jointly creating a successful chapter. Brendan Buchard, a noted expert on building collaboration, says, “People support what they create.... Co-Create!” and repeats this many times in his programs. I love the simplicity and eloquence of the message. People support what they create, therefore we need to give our colleagues the opportunity to co-create our programs with us, and then they will support it. Why? Because they had a part in its creation. Now they are engaged! **Go forth and Co-Create!**

19) Build a Train-the-Trainer (TTT) Program targeted at engaging new members / younger members – they will be the life-blood of your chapter. How? Build an inexpensive train-the-trainer program, or another program that appeals to new or relatively inexperienced trainers. Build a win-win for trainers and participants by staffing the TTT Program with seasoned members who want to help the chapter and have a professional interest in being seen as experts. See also Handout # 2 – the slide between April and May.

20) Engage your Special Interest Groups (SIGs) or any group of motivated like-minded members or non-members. Our chapter revitalized the concept of an annual conference with an E-Learning DemoFest that came directly from our E-learning SIG. This single event was aimed at informing and engaging around the topic of e-learning and its many tools and techniques. We attracted 100+ our first year and created a whole new level of engagement with our members.

21) Grow events via engagement. Our one year old DemoFest grew to an Annual Conference in 2012 and attracted an unprecedented 175 attendees. How did we get engagement? We engaged our experienced members who wanted to share and show their expertise, engaged our new members who wanted to learn, and engaged sponsors who wanted to give us money (and we suspect they also were quite happy to get in front of 175 excited and engaged learning and development professionals).

22) Don't be afraid to try something CRAZY. We are confident that our Sacramento Chapter has built an event like no other in the country and it has definitely created some incredibly engaged members. In fact we think every chapter could use this to end the calendar year or take a stale month and turn it into a feel-good event. What is this event? The event is our Trainer Throw-Down and Holiday Event. We have 6 trainers who have 12 minutes to show their best stuff, compete for a big prize, and walk away with the title of the Annual Throw-Down Champ. See more about the event in Handout #2 - The December Event.

23) Take a risk and try something entirely new. We are currently testing a new idea. We are supporting an outside small start-up group of training and development professionals to become a SIG affiliated with Sacramento ASTD. The goal is that by supporting the group we will engage new members, get new ideas, and grow. The group is a California State Government group with an interest in E-learning. They have members, interest, but little support. Our goal is to offer support, encouragement, meeting space, etc with an ultimate goal of --- Yes, Co-Creation!

24) How about an “out of the box” way to build engagement? Have you considered tapping into the related world (related to training and development) of cognitive neuroscience, social science, or positive psychology. Here are some great topics and speakers to build buzz. The book “Using Brain Science to Make Training Stick”, or Google these any of the following terms, optimism, resiliency research, gratitude research, or the Penn Resilience Program. All have some great training related information to build engagement!