



## Planning for Recruitment & Retention

The need to recruit is a given for any club. There will always be members who do not renew for one reason or another and new members bring new skills and experience, but is your club losing members for reasons other than natural wastage? Do you have the resources to grow the club? How do you plan to keep your members interested?

### Recruitment

Here are some of the questions you must address before planning any recruitment drive. These are not in any particular order - you should make your own list and your own order - the following has been prepared simply to give you a start.

1. Are you recruiting for a brand new club, or for one that has been in existence for some time and just needs some extra members?
2. If you're a new club then the personal contact lists of the initial member enthusiasts could be very important - beg, bribe, cajole, whatever, but get everyone to bring a few a few friends along to each of your early get togethers, and hopefully they will bring their friends along too. The minimum number of people for BMC Club affiliation is ten.
3. Existing clubs needing more members could first look at the age pattern of club members. Do you want more of the same age, or do you want a different spread of ages? Is the club predominately male or female? Do you want this to continue or are you going to make an effort to attract members of the opposite sex? Is your club in an area where there are different ethnic groups, if so how can you set out about broadening the ethnicity of your membership?
4. What is most important for your club? If you are fighting for survival then perhaps what you need most is some extra income. Look not just for prospective climbers and walkers but include your search for 'social' members too - apart from contributing to the organisation and the general social atmosphere of the club they help to provide the income you desperately need for survival.
5. If you are not fighting for survival then how many members do you need? How many members can you accommodate on weekend meets? What is the sum of your club's overheads? How much do you need to raise from subscriptions? How much can you charge for membership? How much do other climbing clubs charge their members? Can you raise money in other ways, or reduce your costs?
6. What does your climbing club want to be? One where rock climbing predominates, or one where walking and general mountaineering predominates, or one where all three are equally significant? Your club has the choice but experience would suggest that a 'balanced' club is the ideal.
7. Is your club one where climbing is regarded as a major factor or one where those who enjoy an occasional climb or walk can feel welcomed, too? 25% of the BMC's membership is made up of walkers, and clubs should not ignore such a large population.

Preparing a list like this is not a job to be done by just one person. Ideally your club will have someone with responsibility for recruitment, or (perhaps) better still one that addresses marketing and publicity issues, to include recruitment. Choosing the membership of the sub - committee is important: approach club members with business or management experience, particularly in marketing or public relations. They are likely to be experienced in matters concerned with planning and be willing to contribute to these difficult discussions.

Websites like ukclimbing.com are excellent ways of reaching many people with ease. The BMC is obviously able to help with targeted emails and articles. The BMC also has a Clubs' Committee that exists to promote clubs and their interests. If any of your club members are adept writers or photographers, then contributions to Climber, Climb or Summit are ways of gaining additional exposure.

Standardise your paper advertising with A4 or A5 sized posters and get permission to put them anywhere there are notice boards in places like libraries, climbing walls and gear shops. Emphasising the healthy open air aspect of the sport, as well as opportunities for travel and new experiences isn't a bad thing to do either. Wherever possible establish a club website and refer to its address (URL) in every form of your advertising. A club journal or newsletter is almost essential.

## **Retention**

OK, so you have managed to recruit a number of new members into your club. Well Done! However, the effort should not stop there. The first year of membership will be the critical period when the new members will be deciding whether climbing and indeed the club is for them. Once past the first year, they will probably become more likely to remain, and hopefully become the new club stalwarts.

During their initial season, it is important to get them involved with the club, and that means giving them plenty of opportunity to mix in with other climbers both of similar ability and of more experience. Some form of coaching is important, especially for real novices, rather than climbers who have moved into the area from elsewhere, but who lead E5. This not only helps them to master the initial skills, but also to meet other climbers in a similar situation.

Club nights at the wall in winter and evening meets in summer, where everyone turns up, are an excellent way of giving everyone a chance of friendly contact. However, there can be a potential issue, particularly with new members, who may not have enough experience to belay safely, and experienced members may feel they came to climb, rather than coach. Make sure you consider the needs of both groups. Perhaps an answer may be to have sessions which are specifically aimed at the newer members, where they can be partnered by an experienced member, someone of more experience to teach them the ropes.

Is your club providing enough for its members, new and old? People want to feel valued - to use their skills, to be asked for their opinions on club matters, to be used as mentors for

newer members. All of these things are important, as are the social aspects of climbing clubs which cannot be over emphasised.

During the winter season, particularly, keep members involved with working parties and organise a variety of social activities. Even for clubs without their own hut, quizzes, lectures, tea and cake gatherings, BBQs and the like are not difficult to arrange. Everything must be done to keep members meeting each other, constantly nourishing friendships and generally maintaining a feeling of belonging. The first winter is a particularly vulnerable time for new recruits, and indeed any long closed period will potentially result in a loss of members new and old. It is therefore important to try to keep all members involved over the winter months. Ideally the club will keep up an active programme of meets through the winter, so that enthusiastic members can brave the elements.

### **Thoughts on the dreaded “C” word**

Committee positions should ideally be filled by motivated members who actually want to hold the position, instead of doing it because no one else wants to. This helps ensure that the Committee does not get 'entrenched' – in other words older members are less likely to become disillusioned by endless years of service on the committee and newer members less put off by a perceived clique around the committee. A regular turnover of committee members allows for sharing of knowledge and gradual transfer of responsibility from old committee to new.

It is also possible that members who would otherwise leave the club for specific reasons (i.e. not enough sport climbing trips etc) might be less likely to leave if they felt they were able to change things. People usually join clubs to facilitate their outdoor pursuits, so a club with a busy calendar is more likely to attract and retain members. Having many regular trips taking place each year can allow members can build up experience year on year, instead of allowing to stagnate. It's easier for members with commitments i.e. work and family to plan far enough ahead to be able to attend trips. Organisation consequently becomes easier as the knowledge from the previous year's organiser can be shared.

Finally, when you do lose members, which is inevitable for any club, make sure you know the reasons why. Ask them - they are very important people. Someone representing the club's committee should be responsible for finding out. The best approach is a telephone call to the person who has left, a few weeks after the event. You are more likely then to have an honest reply to your questions. If things are not quite right in your club you need to find out. You may not be able to find a remedy but at least you will have a chance. Getting new members for a climbing club is difficult enough without losing members through neglect.

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