

DISTRICT FALL CONFERENCE 2019

DEPARTMENT SERVICE OFFICE REPORT

As September is almost midstride, it's hard to imagine that in 30 to 60 days we'll all be facing another winter season in the Midwest. Many of us will wake up in the mornings to the sound of neighbors chipping ice from their windshields on the street or in their driveway, the wind will be blowing, and the snow might be piling up. The sun will stay wan and weak, and through the windows you'll look out at a tundra of gray and gunmetal sky above. In the Midwest winter is an exercise in waiting - for relief, for a bird to sing, for the first purple crocus to push up through the snow, and you have no choice in the meantime but to pep-talk yourself through it all.

But through this almost predictable time of the year the Department Service Office's work will go on despite Mother Nature's harsh promise of another winter. As the District meetings are beginning, I have a request of all you American Legion faithful. I'm asking that each one of you **REPRESENT** the Department of Iowa and the Department Service Office. The American Legion expects you to represent this organization all the time. Simply put, we are always expected to act as if the National Commander, the State Commander, the State Adjutant, your District Commander, or even the Department Service Officer were in the room.

With each new veteran we encounter in the Department Service Office, we ask have you considered joining the American Legion? Maybe some 20 years ago membership organizations were a crucial aspect of a professional's career. Membership opened opportunities for networking and professional development that simply weren't matched by other sources. However, as we fast forward into the 21st century, in the age of social media a world of peers is only a tweet away and the benefits of joining a membership organization is rightly being questioned. So, is membership in the American Legion still relevant? I say yes. Even in today's hyper-connected global society, there are benefits to be gained from a membership organization such as the Legion.

Professionalism - Let me get this one out of the way first since it might be viewed as the most cynical of reasons to join, but there's no doubt that membership of a respected organization is seen as a plus by prospective employers. The Legion's brand alone sends the message that you are serious about your profession, and you are willing to put your money where your mouth is.

Education – The American Legion runs professional development events such as the state conferences, state convention, district meetings, and the Post's monthly meetings. There are published newsletters and at least one periodical designed to raise awareness of important issues facing our target veteran audience. While I don't find everything, the organization offers informative –sometimes it's pitched at the wrong level, or I'm a few steps ahead already – but every now and then I'll find a gem that makes all the difference.

Networking - Social media has injected steroids into the sport of professional networking, but the real power of a membership organization lay in the opportunities it affords for *local* networking. You can have your loyal following of many people around the state or even the country via your choice on electronic connection, but by attending local events sponsored by your American Legion, you'll meet great people in your hometown whom you wouldn't have met otherwise.

Profile - A membership organization provides you with an avenue to "give something back" to your community, the State of Iowa, and this country. While this is an admirable thing to do, it's a win-win deal as it raises your and the Organization's profile in the community.

With that said, the challenge to represent the Legion is threefold. First you need to know the values the American Legion cares most about. Pay attention to the what is being said in your meetings; take note of the projects being championed; and listen to the critiques (positive and negative) of your District's and Post's work. Second you

need to credibly represent the Organization's values and positions —even if you don't share them fully. Finally, you need to help everyone embrace the Organization's values as well.

As an organization we build credibility with the choices we make every day. You massage your systems and processes, one new wrinkle at a time. You build your awareness of the Organization's hot buttons and values with each interaction. And you're always looking for ways to stretch your individual and collective skills. If we fail to accomplish this, public judgment sweeps in to fill any void. If you don't get out there and define yourself, you'll be quickly and inaccurately defined by others, I'm not interested in slotting the Legion into a passive role. It's easier to be ignorant and say I don't know about the problem. But once you know, once you've seen it firsthand, then you have a responsibility to do something. There is strength in numbers, and if we all work together as a team, we can be unstoppable.