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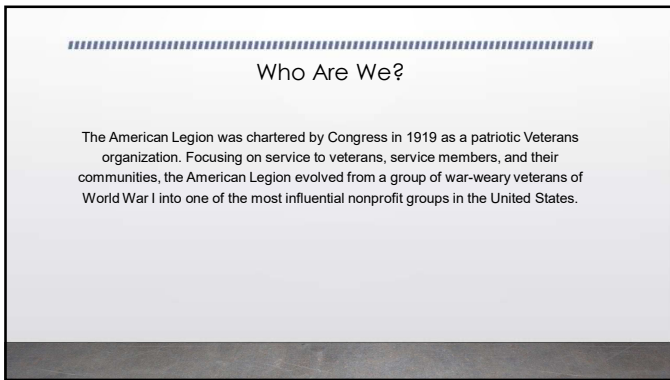
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Where Are We?

Membership in the American Legion in many areas of the country has been on a decline. This is true of most fraternal and Veteran organizations across the country. What was a long standing tradition has been replaced by family functions, and other family interests.

This can be witnessed in small towns and cities alike. Post simply cannot survive on dues alone. We must maximize our efforts to ensure the Legion mission will continue into the future.

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What are we doing right?

The number of programs in the American Legion far exceeds any one Post's abilities to maintain them all.

The American Legion actively addresses issues of national importance in Washington and across the country through their Legislative actions.

- Pact Act
- GI Bill
- PTSD Treatment
- US Flag Code

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What are we doing right?

We promote a civic responsibility, strive for national security, and encourage the preservation of American values through National Affairs.

Our Be the One initiative to reduce the rate of veteran suicide is working on lessening the stigma associated with mental health treatment. It provides guidance and empowerment to everyone to take appropriate action when a veteran or servicemember may be at risk – saving one life at a time.

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### What are we doing right?

The American Legion's youth programs provide a solid foundation for tomorrow to the next generations. Programs like and Junior Shooting Sports provide a team spirit.

Boys and Girls State (and Nation), Oratorical competitions and Flag Essays encourage America's children to take an active role in learning about our country and our form of Government.

Scholarship Funds for higher education are available at the Post, Department, and National levels to assist with furthering their knowledge.

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### The Legion has Evolved

Historically the American Legion has evolved, in some ways this happened very slowly.

Gone are Eisenhower Jackets, and suits and ties are rare for all but the most formal of events.

Titles and Positions have changed as the focus of the Legion has changed, and some traditions remain solely for the membership.

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Posts can be guilty of holding on to their past for too long, often in spite of the membership's wishes.

Oftentimes, the loss of members and declines in participation can be summed up by just a few words

**"We've always done it this way..."**

or

**"We've already tried that..."**

or

**"You're not in charge..."**

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The Legion Must Evolve

To survive, we must recruit new members as well as retain our current members.

Volunteers are as free to leave as they are to join. Most new members require time to establish their emotional connection to the Legion, and it could take a year, or even more.

By keeping new members active and involved, you help establish a sense of feeling like they belong here.

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The Legion Must Evolve

The American Legion is made up of Volunteers. From the newest member to the National Commander, we are here because we want to be. There are few paid positions.

What we do day to day, and how we present the American Legion to new members often makes the difference between renewals and losing members..

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The Legion Must Evolve

1. Why do social organizations like the Legion exist?
2. How can we leverage the information we know to maintain and grow membership?
3. Would an increase in members lead to more options that would be available to attract more members?
4. Stopping the slide requires understanding why the slide is happening.
5. Stopping the slide means admitting why the slide is happening in the first place.

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### Key Aspects Of The Psychology Of Social Membership

Some of the theory from the NIH behind making members feel welcome.

**Need to Belong:** Humans have a fundamental need to feel connected to others, and belonging to social groups fulfills this need, contributing to feelings of security and well-being.

**Social Comparison:** By comparing ourselves to others within our group, we gain information about our own abilities and opinions, shaping our own concept of self.

**Social Identity Theory:** This theory proposes that people derive part of their self-esteem from the groups they identify with, leading to in-group favoritism and potential out-group discrimination.

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### Key Aspects Of The Psychology Of Social Membership

Some of the theory from the NIH behind making members feel welcome.

**Group Norms:** The shared expectations and behaviors within a group can influence an individual members' actions and attitudes.

**Group Cohesion:** The degree to which group members feel connected to each other, and the need to stay in the group.

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### Factors Influencing Social Membership

**Shared characteristics:** People are more likely to join groups where they share similar interests, values, demographics (like age, race, gender), or experiences.

**Social influence:** The power of group norms and peer pressure can influence individuals to conform to group expectations.

**Leadership:** Strong leaders can significantly impact group dynamics and cohesion, shaping the group's identity and behavior.

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### The Possible Impacts Of Social Membership

Not all possible outcomes are positive. As a group the command staff must be aware of negative outcomes that might affect membership.

**Self-esteem:** Belonging to a valued group can enhance self-esteem, while exclusion from a group can negatively impact self-worth.

**Decision-making:** Group membership can influence how individuals make decisions and may potentially lead to groupthink where individuals prioritize group harmony over critical thinking.

**Intergroup relations:** Social identity theory highlights how group memberships can lead to prejudice and discrimination towards out-groups.

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### Personal Introspection

- To change one must be honest with themselves and ask the hard questions.

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### What Does YOUR Post Look Like?

Some key factors to enticing the new member to even walk through the door are obvious. If not they should be.

Every Post in America has a certain curb appeal, positive or negative. What does yours say?

- Is it welcoming?
  - Clean and kept up entryways and windows?
- Are the lights on?
  - Not every post has a physical location, those that do, are your hours posted?
  - If you don't, do you publish your meeting times somewhere?
- Is there a visible schedule of events?
  - What does your post do? There should be a list of the upcoming activities available.
- Is it current?
  - A list of the Fall events still up in January could lead someone to think you're not that active.

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What Does YOUR Post Look Like?

Question: Is having a Bar or Canteen part of the Legion Structure?  
Fact: There is no provision in the National Constitution for a Canteen or Bar.

Too often the initial opinion from the public of The American Legion is "it's a bar". Noting against bars or taps or clubrooms but being "a bar" often takes away from the core beliefs that the American Legion was founded on.  
There is no emotional or psychological investments in "a bar", and the programs mentioned today will and do get lost after a time.

Look for alternatives. Get out in the public. Do something unique and helpful in or for the community.

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Discussion

There is a large body of work shows that people with an active social group membership have a better psychological well-being, are healthier, and live longer than those who do not belong to social groups. The past may be behind us, but the mission of the American Legion remains,  
Service To Veterans, Servicemembers And Their Communities.

- What is your post doing that is working?
- What is it doing that needs to stop?
- How can we improve and modernize and yet keep the Legacy of the American Legion intact?

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