

ROCK YOUR CHAPTER

65+ ideas

to get, keep, and serve your members

Ben Eubanks

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my wonderful wife, Melanie, and to my new baby girls, Isabella and Maybree. You ladies make my world go 'round.

I'd also like to say a quick "thank you" to my friends who are pushing to lead their own organizations on a daily basis. From Alabama to Illinois, Massachusetts to California, and everywhere in between, you people *are* making a difference. Don't think it doesn't get noticed.



About Me

My name is Ben Eubanks and I am a volunteer with my local chapter. That's about all that qualifies me to talk about this stuff. I am passionate about what I do and write an [HR blog](#) to capture those thoughts and share them with the world. My days are spent like many of you—as a professional working in the trenches. In my spare time I write, read, volunteer, and play with my kids. Want to connect? I'm on [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), and you can always hit me [via email](#).

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Intro

Here are a few problems with the chapters out there:

- tough to find good volunteers
- lack of interesting content at chapter meetings
- lack of solid networking for members

This is all based on what I've seen in my own volunteer work, and I sure as heck don't know everything. But that doesn't mean we can't share ideas and help each other be and do better.

Some chapters are almost certainly doing all of these things (well, the useful ones, anyway!) and more. Have an idea of your own? [Feel free to share!](#) It might even make it into the next rendition of the guide.

Also, I have a request. If you find this valuable, please share it with others in your own chapter and with anyone you know who might get some value from this guide. I would appreciate it, and I know they would, too.

A helpful tip: I left the sidebar on the left a little larger than usual. Why? *Because you need to print this out and take notes.* Make a little scribble when you run across an idea that might work for you. Note the ones that might be possible if one or two minor factors were adjusted. If, by the time you reach the end of this guide, you have a page full of ideas to take back to your own chapter, then you definitely got a solid return on your time investment. And if something goes well for you, [please let me know](#). It thrills me to know that some of these ideas are revolutionizing chapters across the country.

30+ ideas to set your brain on fire

Here are a few ideas to make things more interesting and engaging for your members.

1. **Rock some video.** Want to convert more website visitors into members? Use a video on your sales page. You're taking a very business-centered transaction and making it more personal. Think about it. Wouldn't you like to feel like there's a person on the other side of the transaction instead of just a machine that sucks in your credit card number?
2. **Cheap advertising.** Don't have an amazing website? Get one. As cheap as it is now to build a website or even have someone do it for you, I don't see why some chapters still don't have one. Yes, it's not something that just any person can put together, but it doesn't cost a million dollars, either.
3. **Thanks for dropping in!** Make new members feel welcome. Create a simple one minute welcome video telling people that you appreciate them joining the team and share it immediately after they join. To give you a little preview, I created my own short video clip to show you what this could look like. [LINK](#) Go ahead and check it out. I'll wait. As you can plainly tell I'm completely unpolished and only slightly professional. But can you see and hear the sincerity? A slick video presentation looks contrived and fake. A quick video is more personal (and inexpensive).
4. **Welcome aboard!** Create an onboarding program. Your company probably has one, so why not your chapter? It's all about setting expectations from the very beginning, and establishing a set method for assimilating new members

into the chapter is a good way to do that. Here's a novel idea: create a new position on the board—VP of Member Onboarding. This person would be in charge of creating a uniform member onboarding process.

5. **Hey, hola, bonjour, guten tag...** Reach out in multiple ways. Facebook pages and/or LinkedIn groups take a few minutes to set up and can be updated as frequently or infrequently as you like. Offer people multiple ways to connect and don't force your own communication preferences on your members. Email blasts work, but they don't allow for bidirectional communication. You're missing out if email is your *only* communication medium.
6. **What's your specialty?** Offer multiple volunteer opportunities and offer them multiple times. Let people help in areas they are geared toward, and make sure you make it known how to get involved as a volunteer if/when someone changes their mind. I realized after I joined my own chapter that I would like to provide some assistance. But I wasn't sure how. I eventually figured it out, but most people probably wouldn't go further than the first attempt at finding a way to volunteer. Once I got into the volunteer ranks, I spoke with our webmaster and shared my idea for letting people submit their interest via the website. Within a day or two, we were in business, and the volunteer opportunities are prominently displayed.
7. **Everybody likes free.** Offer free events. Contrary to popular belief, HR pros don't make as much money as doctors, lawyers, and actors. ☺ Offering *high value* free events is a great way to pull people in before it's time for a paid event.

8. **Save this one for later.** Archive everything. Every event you can record is an opportunity to market the chapter, increase revenues, or just keep up that nostalgic buzz HR people seem to love so much. Recording a monthly speaker session and offering it through your website is a great way to keep providing value long after an event is through. *But wait, what if a person decides to skip the meeting in order to get it online?* Yeah, I've heard that one before. That's why you charge for it. It can be offered for a significantly reduced price (if you're like my local chapter, that saves you from having to provide a meal). Maybe you make it available at half price. Factoring in the fact that they lose some of the interactivity involved (networking, asking questions of the speaker, etc.) means that a lower price really doesn't cost you in the long run.
9. **Have you seen the news?** Send a newsletter. Yes, it can be via email, but it doesn't have to be a list of announcements. Make it worthwhile. It should read like a blog post, not a press release. MAILCHIMP This can be a free or paid service or it can even be built into your member/event management tools.
10. **Blogging=free advertising.** Start a blog. We did, and it's generated some great intra-chapter conversations. If you need help with this one, [just let me know](#) and I'll get you up and running. TUTS ON HOW TO SET UP A BLOG?
11. **Sharing is good for you.** Share blog posts with your people. I mentioned how to do this in another post in my [SHRM Chapter Leadership Guide](#) series.

12. **Let's teach you the secret handshake.** Create a welcome kit. It can contain links to: the video in #3, the blog in #11, or the content in #14. This is one of the easiest pieces to handle, because **you can start today**. All it takes is a few moments for you to think back to when you first joined the chapter. What would you have loved to know right away? It might be old news to you now, but think of how valuable it would have been to you back then!
13. **The good stuff is on the top shelf.** Create unique content that is only available to members. **Anyone** can attend a chapter seminar/meeting/function if they pay. Let's give our paying members something extra, huh? Record a pre-event interview with the speaker on what they'll be covering. Find one of your members who is a specialist in a certain sector or industry and do a 3-5 minute phone interview with them. There are dozens of ideas for this one!
14. **Shake hands, kiss babies, etc.** Offer extra networking time. I've been to two new member luncheons for my chapter, and both times we asked the group, "What is the number one reason you joined our chapter?" The top answer both times? **Networking**. That's a **big** reason people join these chapters, and the meetings are often crammed into busy schedules. Give people more time to just chat. If you want to encourage conversation, then share some discussion questions or even have some little icebreaker games. Yeah, they can get old, but if you use them sparingly, it can be a great way to get people chatting.
15. **Data is only good if you act on it.** Create multiple survey points for adjustments. Survey your new members on what they want. Survey your

current members on how you're doing. Survey people who are leaving on what made them go. Get some data and *use it*. We preach about the importance of metrics and data for our members, but do we pay attention to it for the chapter? If it was a real business, you'd be asking your customers and potential customers what they want from you. Go ahead and give it a shot.

16. **Little is the new big.** Offer smaller events. Yes, it seems counterintuitive, but the smaller the event, the more people participate. You never know how much that short dude in the back of the room really knows until you stick him in a round table discussion and let him join in. Not everyone is going to want to participate. That's fine. But for those who actually **want** something out of their experience as a member, it's a great way to take advantage of their willingness to participate. I'm a member of a small group at my local chapter. It is a wildly different experience compared to the normal chapter meetings.
17. **But big is good, too.** Pair with nearby chapters and offer large events. Find one of those big name people and bring him/her in. Share the cost with another chapter so it doesn't cut into finances so much. If you have a big name speaker coming in for one of your monthly meetings, why not reach out to other local chapters to try and share the revenue or at least the experience.
18. **Let's solve a problem, shall we?** Develop collaborative projects and case studies from (and for) members. Make that networking in #15 really work for people. Give them ideas for projects to work together on and let them create things that could benefit the whole chapter. For instance, a

group of 6-10 people get together with a common question/problem/issue and work for an hour to come up with two or three solid potential solutions to the problem at hand. When it's time to go, each person gets a copy of the solutions "manual" and has something they can take back to work with them. Even if all of the solutions don't work with everyone's culture, leadership, etc., there are still real options to test and try out.

19. **Volunteers—they're what's for dinner.** Bring in new blood (voluntarily). *Please* don't let your volunteer pool stagnate. If you have the same ten people volunteering day in and day out, you're going to kill your volunteers and destroy any chance for growth. There are two issues here. The first is running people ragged. They (we) are volunteers with jobs, families, and more. We don't have an unlimited amount of time and energy for volunteering, and the more we're pushed, the less we want to help in the long run. The other point is stagnation. If you're not growing, you're dying. Not sure where I heard that, but it's true. If you keep recycling volunteers through the chapter, then you'll never get that influx of new ideas and concepts that a fresh set of eyes can bring.
20. **Work to your strengths.** (Don't) kill your volunteers. Make it very simple and easy to connect if someone shows an interest in volunteering, and let them go [where their strengths lie](#) if there's any possible room. If someone is the most amazing planner you've ever known, then find them a place in the programs committee. If they have a geek streak (like me!), they can help with the website and other technical stuff. If there's a good writer in the bunch, then they can create original, unique content to enhance the reputation of the chapter. We try to fit people into our organizations where they are best suited, so let them do the same when volunteering if possible!

21. **Lighten up, live longer.** Have an informal voice, too. You can talk in the uber-formal voice that is expected of a professional organization without always being a stick in the mud. Have some fun with your members! This profession is too serious not to laugh often. Rejoice and be glad that your chapter meetings don't look like a stuffy dinner party from the year 1796. Have fun contests, tell jokes about HR people (why should lawyers have all the fun?), or take a chance to share those hair-raising "HR stories" that we all love to tell.

22. **Hey, dude, let's kick it.** Pair student chapter members with professional chapter members as an informal mentoring gig. It's a great way to lead the student members into a professional membership later on, and it gives value to both parties. When I think of the "average" HR pro, I'm envisioning someone more than twice my age and less than half my enthusiasm. That's a complete stereotype and I don't tell people that often, but I want to admit that I'm not perfect. I know that when others hear about a twenty-something HR professional, they aren't thinking about someone who is on fire to do great things. They're imagining a texting moron with zero work ethic. Isn't it interesting that we're in charge of that whole diversity and inclusion thing, but we also stereotype more than anyone else? Even if that young person does end up being less than spectacular, we could all use a little patience, right? I digress. Let's pair up any interested student members with a professional member. Give them that close contact with an informal mentor and help them to start developing those skills and talents of a seasoned HR pro.

23. **It's no longer 1995.** Get a website that doesn't make your eyes bleed. Yes, you may have one already, but if it has a bounce rate above 80% then you're doing something wrong. See #2 for more info.
24. **Free is the best price.** Do webinars (free!). Using something like Dim Dim's free service to create small webinars for your people. You can even use it to test drive a speaker or topic. If it rocks, then you may want a full chapter meeting on the topic! So many people don't ever want to test drive anything free, because it seems like you're giving away the bank. Solid, information-packed webinars can be a great value-add for members or even a selling point for nonmembers. Find someone in your chapter who is an expert on wellness programs, leadership development, training, etc. and give them a twenty minute platform to talk about their passion. If you're having a hard time getting people to volunteer, offer a free ticket to your next luncheon or couch it as a professional development/resume building opportunity. If you are trying to choose between two similarly-qualified speakers for an event, have them both do a fifteen minute pitch via the webinar format and let your members choose who they want to hear more from at a chapter meeting.
25. **Diversity, inclusion, and volunteers.** Make an effort to be more diverse. We hear about diversity often, but this time I'm pushing my own darn self interests (wink wink). How many of your volunteers are under 25? We are going to be the next generation of HR directors and VPs. Spending time working alongside the other more experienced superstars in the chapter is a great professional development opportunity for us. I mentioned this in another point, but the big thing that people seem to forget is that if we're pushed into the corner and made to do "busy work," then we aren't going to be the capable leaders that our organizations and people need us to be in the

future. I have two quotes I need to pull out here. Average of five closest friends AND Same in 5 years other than what you read and who you meet.

26. **Be that good.** Make people who aren't even local want to join. This sounds strange, but there's a chapter around where I live that gets people to events that are not local at all. Some of them drive 2+ hours for events there, because they're *that good*. Strive to be that kind of chapter! If you have more resources to offer members that aren't localized (remember those free webinars from #24?), then you could even attract memberships from people outside your area. If the value proposition is high enough, you **will** convert casual observers to customers/members.
27. **So, why did you decide to stop by?** Find out why people join. Do more of that. Are they trying to network with other members? Have a special networking luncheon! Are they looking for professional development opportunities? Make sure you're sharing about the numerous activities going on in your chapter!
28. **So, where are you headed?** Find out why they leave. Do less of that. Is your website or other membership material misconstruing what you have to offer? Make sure that what you **say** is aligned with what you **do**. Are people tired of hearing from consultants and other sales-y people at lunches? Keep the solicitations down and the hard sell from being the appetizer at lunch.
29. **So, what are we doing right?** Find out why they stay. Keep that up. If someone has been a member for six months, send them a quick survey asking how it's going and what they like. Try to address any concerns and take feedback seriously. Or maybe you can survey those who have been

members for five plus years. They may have some interesting insights as well as a history to measure the chapter's current performance against.

30. **Trick people into helping with marketing.** Get member generated content via contests. If you do go the blog route, keeping up a steady flow of content can be tough at times. Why not get others to do it for you? Get a sponsor to donate something (books are great) and offer it in a contest to a person who writes a comment on a post. Maybe you could ask how to handle a sticky issue or something similar that is sure to get a lot of responses. Or how about a contest where people get to tell about their worst day in HR ever? I bet that would be popular!
31. **We all have our thing.** Figure out what works for you. There's nothing wrong with ideas. They're free, and they are abundant. It's the actual *doing something* that is the hard part. Sift through the ideas, find a few that make sense for your chapter, and give 'em a shot!

12 ideas for volunteer recruiting/retention

1. **Emphasize benefits**

- Professional growth-people looking for a way to expand their skillset could greatly benefit from a position that challenges them to grow. Someone looking for some public speaking experience could step up as the person who gives updates at monthly meetings. It takes five minutes, but it's a fairly easy crowd to please and doesn't require much preparation.
- Resume booster-It's funny, but so many of us measure our accomplishments in the context of "can this go on my resume?" Well, volunteer service can definitely be put on a resume, and it helps to demonstrate your commitment to your profession if you are taking time out of your own life to dedicate to helping the profession grow.
- Local network building-One of the most valuable tools available to professionals on a daily basis is their network. Getting out there as a volunteer for your organization can drastically increase the number of contacts in your network.

2. **Spread the workload**

- Relies on several things: If a position can be broken in two cleanly and there are enough volunteers, then give it a shot. This cuts the overworking by one volunteer and can help to build the volunteer pool by offering less time-consuming positions

3. **Provide solid communication**

- Get out there and talk to them. There are already board meetings and committee meetings on a monthly basis (at least). Create a central location for important information to be shared. This especially helps

when the year turns over and can help a new crop of volunteers hit the ground running.

4. Feeder/recruiting process

- Offer volunteer opportunities early and often. Some people can't commit to a year-long position, but maybe you can have them stuff bags for a monthly meeting. Others might be able to commit to a year long position, but what if they come into the chapter midway through the year?
- Referrals work as a recruiting tool--use them to find volunteers. Word of mouth always has been (and will continue to be) one of the most powerful tools available.
- Have some information on volunteering available in a new member packet or email. Offer opportunities to volunteer early and often.
- Have a dedicated volunteer coordinator, even if the person only refers volunteers to committee chairs, that's still an invaluable service.
- [Volunteer button on website](#) (right sidebar). Use [Google Forms](#) (free) to capture responses. Then get it up on your website. If you don't know how to do that, then you can at least share the link with new people in their welcome materials.

5. Give them something in return

- Offer free/reduced cost meetings, recognition at chapter social functions, exclusive events/resources, or public praise for their efforts. Yes, they're volunteering, but a little recognition goes a long way.
- Seek feedback. Paying attention one-on-one is a great reward for some volunteers.

23 ideas from members and volunteers

Note, my experience thus far (and the advice that is based on it) is rooted solely in my own volunteer experience with the North Alabama SHRM chapter and may not reflect the same practices or norms of your own local chapter. That doesn't mean we can't learn from each other! Look for similarities, not differences. ☺

Below you'll find some quotes/complaints/questions from chapter leaders and members. The responses are numbered and my answers are below each.

1. My local SHRM chapter (St. Louis) costs an additional \$300 to join. I already spend that money for a national SHRM membership, so why do I have to pay for a local membership? I would not mind paying for events, but not to be a member.
 - In this instance, the chapter is not communicating the value of being a member. Those chapters that cost hundreds of dollars to join are beyond my comprehension, because my local chapter only charges \$50 for membership (or \$25 for national SHRM members). There are chapters that are free to join for national members, and there are those that are incredibly expensive (as in this example). If the chapter is using the higher cost to offset sponsorship/advertising messages, reduce monthly meeting costs, or bring in speakers with a higher perceived value, they need to communicate that. Otherwise people run into the issue like this commenter and choose not to join at all.

2. Finding interesting (not done over and over) content for meetings
 - How do you find out topics people are interested in? Use a blog to test drive an idea or offer it up to a small group and see what sort of discussions they have around the topic. If your blog post gets no comments or the small group isn't interested in talking about it, then it might be a candidate for the "no" pile. Use surveys to see what your members want. Remember, while we like planning events that we will enjoy, it's much more important to plan things that your members will find valuable.
3. Networking is great - but I almost always feel that someone is really looking for more business, instead of really exchanging good HR news or practices
 - Solicitation at meetings must die. Or it will kill off the people who have the opportunity to make your chapter great. [Great discussion of solicitation at the SHRM Volunteer Leaders LinkedIn group.](#)
4. Chapter meetings would be engaging, lively, and open to debate and discussion. People would be pushed out of their comfort zone to consider new things and - as a community - local HR professionals would work together to advance the profession within our organizations. --The topics and presentations are too repetitive, they are not addressing trends and evolving issues nor do they address personal leadership or inspire discussion.

- Let's look at creating some small groups or events where people don't just come to sit and listen—they come to participate in a project that helps them have a solid set of takeaways once the event is over. Having fifteen engaged members beats fifty disengaged members any day.
- 5. Monthly meetings where I can learn something new, hear from practitioners who share some case studies/success stories, or speakers who are more engaging. (Less on laws and legal compliance issues.) Networking activities that are fun and get people in the spirit of connecting. Assigning random seats to attendees so they likely end up at tables with people they don't know instead of hanging with co-workers. -- Little value for the membership. Speakers at meetings are rarely interesting or provide good takeaways that someone can take back to the office. Very little networking since people tend to show up right in time for lunch and scoot after the meeting is over (or before).
 - In multiple polls of new members to my chapter last year, the number one reason cited for becoming a member was networking. But the time in an average chapter meeting dedicated solely to networking is approximately the same amount of time it takes for someone to unwrap their silverware. We see a lot of this. Members want chapter business taken care of outside the meetings (email, website, and other communication tools) so there's more time for the two things they desire most: networking and learning.

6. Chapter membership and participation are suffering greatly from the changes in generations. The younger GenXers and GenYers don't see the value in face-to-face networking. Chapters haven't kept up with new media, internet or social networking - often because they are lead by Baby Boomers who don't see as great a value or simply know how. Chapter leaders need help in sorting the way through this divide.
 - o I'll give it to you, the younger people might not see the value in it. But they might also just be a little bit overwhelmed, too. I can still remember my first chapter meeting, and it was rough. Let's broaden that to anyone using social media. I've said it before, and I'll say it again. Social will not replace face-to-face interaction. It can enhance it and make it more meaningful/potent when the interaction does happen. On the other hand, chapters are NOT using the social tools to help facilitate those connections. If not understanding why or how is the issue, then they will have to come to the point where they desire to know for themselves. If they just don't want to do it, then the only answer is a change in leadership. I think the younger members DO know the value of the interactions, but they are just not ready to join in. It's tough trying to jump into a chapter when you either don't know anyone or feel like you're inadequate. I only say those things because of my own personal experience when I started almost two years ago.

7. The lack of support that many of our members get from their organizations' leadership to support meetings and activities.
 - This is up to the member to express the importance and vital role these events play in their professional development and their ability to support and lead in the organization. Chapters can help by creating tools for members to share with organizational leadership. For example, put together a one page document that demonstrates how some other members have used their chapter-facilitated networking or education to advance their own organizations. Help them make the case to their corporate leadership that it's too valuable NOT to attend.

8. Too much "chapter business" taking place at the meetings when guest speakers are invited. -- The chapter leadership would take care of business that does not require a vote, outside of meeting time. The communication could happen via the chapter website or a short & sweet summary newsletter.
 - I completely agree. If the chapter doesn't have an email service provider (or email blasts, as some like to call it), then services like [MailChimp](#) have a free account option for up to 1000 subscribers and 6000 emails per month. That's more than enough for a monthly (or bimonthly) email newsletter to members of most small to medium sized chapters. Another great option I've heard good things about is [AWeber](#).

9. We spend a lot of time and money on lunch and presentations without much interaction with members to discuss issues, share best practices, and leverage each other's ideas. I get so much HR information from the internet now (that still gives me PHR credit) that I would rather spend the limited time I have away from the office having more dialogue with my peers. -- More opportunity to interact with chapter members to discuss best practices, etc. I'd like to go back to the office with ideas and solutions or solving HR community issues.
 - o Again, see the pattern here? People want time to network with each other. Consider hosting an event where the meeting is just about people coming together and sharing problems and ideas with each other. No set schedule or rules. A great example of this is the HR Roundtable. People meet once a month to discuss problems and share ideas. Other than the questions/topic of the month, it's free form all the way. Here are some notes from previous [HR Roundtable](#) events to give you some topic ideas. Your members that receive a benefit from this type of event will have a hard time NOT telling their peers about the value of chapter membership.
10. While it is very important to have speakers at our monthly meetings and have the session approved for certification, sometimes we just need time to network with our fellow HR professionals. -- Possibly one meeting every six months that is just for networking in an informal setting.

- See previous comment. This could be outside normal chapter meeting times to keep from interrupting the “flow” or it could be purposefully inserted as a meeting to break up the flow if that’s what you really need.
11. I have only been a member for two months, but my greatest frustration is that we don't have time to network.
- Okay, now this is just getting ridiculous.
12. I do have some frustration in that I feel that most of the events are geared toward larger companies and while there are many similarities, I would love to get more info and exposure to "HR Departments of One", which is my situation. -- Programming for small HR departments. -- There are usually several events that I plan on attending, but cannot make. I do like when the material covered is made available.
- Two big parts in this response. 1) Programming for [small HR departments](#). I’m willing to bet that a good portion of your members are either solo or in a department with less than three HR people. Just food for thought. 2) Make the archived material available to members once the event is over. Then those who have last minute issues can still benefit (especially if they paid but couldn’t attend).
13. I find my local SHRM chapter to be too staid, too focused on stability and safety, and not nearly focused enough on educated risk-taking, business-

centered decision-making, and drinking. (Okay not really on the drinking, but the Houston SHRM chapter meetings are about as fun as a actuaries' funeral. It's tough to commit to dressing up, leaving work in the middle of the day, and sitting in a bad hotel conference room to be lectured to about everything Scary Out There. Even if you do get some decent key lime pie for dessert occasionally.) -- I hosted the local ERE meetup last week, here in Houston. The conversation was lively, honest, and interesting. We decided that ERE stands for "Extremely Restless Employers," and that SHRM stands for "Scared Human Resources Monitors." There's a place for both, I guess. But I know who I want to learn from. And who I want my employees to learn from.

- Ouch. Not much I can comment on other than this isn't the only person who feels that way! Maybe this is another good reminder of the importance to survey members in order to stay relevant?
14. Getting member involvement -- Time constraints and organizations doing more with less adds to the difficulty of members getting more involved.
- Definitely. See my advice above on creating a tool that will allow members to prove the value of chapter membership to their boss/employer/leadership. With companies doing more with fewer people, it might be harder to get away, but doing so reduces burnout, increases their knowledge, and improves the chances that they will be able to answer a question or solve a problem when it arises.

15. Unrelenting focus on sponsors vs. delivering valuable content to members. Also, "Doing things the way they have always been done." No innovation, no attempts to understand new technologies, etc. -- That the chapter would become known as the place in <city name> for HR professionals of all levels to become better at what they do. Our local chapter sucks!
 - o I've seen this one, too. Focusing on sponsors is nice in that it helps offset the cost for members to join and attend events. However, it's **not** the primary goal of your chapter (and it shouldn't be). Make sure you have someone pursuing sponsorship and another person planning content to keep the lines divided. An interesting way to snag sponsors is to hold a social event where sponsors from the previous years are invited to attend and have appetizers while board members of the chapter speak with them and explain the value of sponsoring an event. The social is free to attend for potential sponsors, and it's a great way to have a one-on-one without having to be too salesy.
16. I have been involved with several local SHRM chapters including one that recently merged with another because of its' complete inability to find leaders, bring more than 1/2 of its membership to a monthly meeting and to attract new members. The chapter we merged with has many members, good leaders, good programming, and gets a pretty good number of attendees each month. I think it is frustrating that some chapters want to make their monthly meetings into long luncheons or breakfast sessions where there is an additional cost to attend each session. The other chapter I

belong to has at least 100 members and easily gets 1/2 to attend every month and serves nothing more than coffee so there is no additional fee to cover the chapter's overhead and they too have good leaders and great programming which is preapproved for HRCI credit. I think some local chapters should lighten up, and not feel the need to offer sit down meals at impressive locations just to get attendees in the door. Serve them coffee or tell them to brown bag it, and if you offer good programs on current hot topic that are preapproved for recert credit they will come!

- My chapter is one of those that offers only lunch hours and a meal comes with your ticket purchase. I'd be interested to try out a different time slot, not offer food, and see what results we get. It would save us money, give members more time to network, and open up the possibilities for meeting spaces.
17. National is way behind with technology and communication strategies. Too many people in leadership positions that are just content rather than going out and striving for improvement. Things tend to get stale. Members feel disconnected. SHRM Connect for example, sucks. We need consistent communication of messages, answers or resolutions to major issues that members have brought up continuously over the years. More affordable conference experience. More personal feeling. Step into the 21st century – SHRM should be leading the social media HR movement, not just joining it.

- This isn't just in the volunteer capacities. It's the same in organizations. Stale people following stale practices of yesteryear. We've always had an expensive conference, so this one needs to be, too. We've always been robotic and cold, so we'll keep that up. We've always <insert dumb thing here>, so let's not stop now. Get the point?
18. I think that SHRM chapters are too focused on Monthly Meetings, certification study courses, and 'diversity fairs' rather than on getting engaged in the community. Community engagement is the missing piece in 'Serve the Professional, Advance the Profession.' (It really is captured in the 'Advance' portion, but is not something that we focus on.) SHRM chapters should be acting as advisors for local government, nonprofits and business associations, high school and university business programs, entrepreneurs, etc.
- Wow. This is one comment that really surprised me. I spoke recently with a friend who volunteers with her local chapter. She found out that there were over 1,000 members of the national organization in their area who were not members of the local chapter. Do you think going out and serving the local governments, businesses, schools, and nonprofits would have an impact on how many people are aware of your chapter and what it's doing? I do. This is a strong call to get up off our butts and *do something.*

19. I have several frustrations: Two "frustrations" (really more appropriately called "difficulties") that feed into each other and are reflective of any volunteer-led organization:

1. Succession planning - identifying top talent for now and in the future to lead the chapter. Oftentimes a chapter will need a leader to commit for a number of years (i.e. board role or two, leading to President Elect, leading to President), and it is a challenge to find people who have the spirit and intent of the profession and SHRM - and DON'T view chapter leadership as merely a "resume builder" - finding the "right" talent is key! SHRM does a very good job of promoting this concept/need to do this to its volunteer leaders, but it is not always put into action very effectively at the local level.

2. Maintaining a consistent, focused, long term strategy even if the chapter leaders change from year-to-year. For example, each president may want to put their personal "stamp" on their leadership year. This is all well and good, but when it is not part of a longer, sustained plan, it just leads to chaos and re-inventing the wheel each year. (see "Succession Planning"). Another dilemma is created because SHRM affiliate chapters are able to identify their own membership criteria; which often leads to exclusion rather than inclusion.

For example, individuals may be SHRM members, however, due to local chapter by-laws, they cannot join their local chapter (based on membership

criteria). I ran into this when moving across the country and found that even though I had 15 yrs HR experience, my SPHR, and was a long-term SHRM member (and previous chapter leader), I COULD NOT JOIN my "new" local chapter due to by-law requirements. So how did I fix this? From within.. by becoming a chapter leader and working to change by-laws.

There are still many facets of this (baby-steps) to be changed in the chapter - but it is frustrating as it takes time. And in the meantime, we are leaving the bodies of SHRM members who we tell "NO - you can't join the chapter, sorry!" - littered on the side of the road. There is also an unwillingness, in my chapter, to allow students to join.. can you believe that? Sure, they may have a SHRM student chapter, but often also want to join the local chapter, especially when they are in their final year at school (and based on OUR chapter by-laws, when they graduate, if not working in HR - and many can't immediately find an HR job - they cannot join at that stage!)

I have requested this be evaluated from a by-laws/membership standpoint - and have been shot down every time. this is the FUTURE of our profession!! Why would we want to exclude them? One day, Mrs. 45 year-old-biddy-HR Manager, that 23-yr-old new grad may VERY WELL BE YOUR BOSS! This sense of exclusion leads to the inevitable "clique"ishness - and becomes a mantle the chapter bears for many years and struggles to overthrow when there are NEW leaders who DO want to change things. AND - ties right back to the long-term sustainability of the chapter - and the

talent management aspect of identifying future leaders. We lose them before we can even talk to them about it; they are not allowed to join, and they never want to come back once being turned away (I have seen it time and time again).

How I'd handle these issues: 1. I would like to see SHRM require/strongly encourage/give extra SHAPE points to chapters who adopt SHRM membership categories and are more inclusive 2. SHRM should require a succession planning strategy session by each chapter, each year. And provide the tools to do so. Some chapters need to do this merely to survive! We recently lost a small chapter (disbanded) in our state as they had no sustainability and very very few members. They could have used some additional help and planning tools.

- Wow. Strong comments. They speak for themselves.
20. Well, I am an outgoing officer in our student chapter. My biggest frustration is trying to have members become more engaged as far as understanding the importance of networking, and internships. We have no problem recruiting members - they just choose not to be active until their Senior year. -- We have a large number of members each term, the ideal outcome would be having more students than internships instead of the other way around.

- This is my first hit on the student chapter side, but many of the same ideas apply. If you can't prove to a college student why they should join, then there's no way they will take the time from other activities to do so. If you can work with local companies to build a pool of internships, then that's a great piece of "bait" to get students into your chapter. If they don't want to be active, then don't let them stay in. How hard is it really for student members to be active?
21. Volunteer management--knowing when to kick the "dead weight" off of my committee. Have to keep in mind these people are volunteers--but it drives me nuts when people commit to something, then don't follow through--even when I have explained the time commitment in advance.
- That really is tough. I have a little piece in the guide below that's all about finding and keeping good volunteers. That should help some with this. The only other advice I have is that every once in a while you'll run into a superstar volunteer who does everything without breaking a sweat or expecting recognition. Do everything possible to keep that person. 😊
22. Well, I'm finding that good help is HARD to find -- and retain. I chair the Certification Committee and while they're studying -- and, especially after they pass, all the newly certified members desire to be a member of the Committee (perhaps it's because of the HRCI Credits they get), but then they soon fade out after a cannon shot out of the blocks...what gives? And

then I have to turn my attention to finding a replacement AND graciously providing them a reason to exit the committee. I want a more engaged and proactive committee and ahead of the game instead of one that is 'reacting' because of rapidly upcoming deadlines.

- Again, see the part below about volunteers. But if you are recruiting from newly certified people and they keep disappointing you, then... Would you recruit for your company from a source that continually brings bad hires? Probably not. Keep up the efforts!
23. It's not a great frustration, but I would love to see more best practice sharing among the chapters, especially from a regional standpoint. We meet quarterly, but there is usually a standard agenda, not allowing time to really learn from each other. At times, it feels more like a competition. There's nothing wrong with wanting credit for a creative idea, but we should share best practices to assist all leaders. Let's start sharing best practices across chapters, along with potential mentors for new volunteer leaders.
- This is brilliant, and I took it further in my own profession by creating the [SHRM Volunteer Leaders](#) LinkedIn group to facilitate connections and the sharing of ideas. The other part is providing mentorship for new volunteer leaders, and I love that as well. I haven't been around long enough to know how to make this work well, but if you have ideas, feel free to [share them](#) with me.

1 easy thing to start today

Build a welcome kit. That's it. Make people feel like you are happy to have them aboard. It can have all kinds of stuff in it, from some bonus resources to [free eBooks](#) to information about how to volunteer and more. The possibilities are only limited by your imagination.

By the end of today you could have a few paragraphs put together that will be sent to new members to tell them about what sorts of great things are now available to them since they joined.

The neat thing is that when someone gets that value immediately, they are more likely to 1) make use of the chapter's resources and 2) tell others about what they've received in return.

Here. I'll make it super simple and help you get started with a sample email.

Hey, Ellen!

Thanks again for joining TCCE (The Coolest Chapter Ever). I really appreciate you checking us out and can't wait to meet you at one of our upcoming events <include a link to your events page>. There are so many opportunities for you now that you've become a member, including access to some of the top speakers and professionals in our industry.

We also have some great networking events where you can get to know others in the local area and grow your network in a way that you never could before.

Then next time you're looking for a job or trying to solve a problem, you'll have someone local to reach out to and increase your chances of getting hired or figuring out a solution. <link to a chapter social networking group>

Want to know how to really rev up your networking? Volunteer. No, it's not the drudgery that you might imagine. We let you pick what area you want to volunteer in <link to your volunteer page> so you actually enjoy the experience. You get the opportunity to serve others, advance the profession as a whole, and build your leadership skills. All for a few hours a month. Not too shabby!

Plus there are great resources like recorded seminars/webinars, eBooks you can download and print, and our exclusive group on LinkedIn where members can help each other and share best practices. <link to these resources if you provide them>

These are just a few of the benefits you now have access to as a member, and I hope you continue to explore the possibilities in the coming weeks and months.

*Cordially,
Ben Eubanks*

See? Not that tough, but just imagine the difference in receiving that email versus receiving the same old template "Welcome. We might see you soon, but who cares as long as we have your money already. Toodles." Right?

So get started. Today. Now, even. Just make it happen. It's about doing the small things well time and time again. Let's get the ball rolling in the right direction.

So, what's next?

This guide is just the beginning. I'm working on a beefed up version with templates, videos, audio, bonus content, and more. I highly encourage you to watch for an email from me about how you can get your hands on the new and improved version of this guide. If you have any feedback, [I'd love to hear it!](#)

I'm firmly committed to my mission of helping chapters grow and retain members, and I hope that you have literally filled the margins of this thing with notes and ideas custom-fitted for your own organization. Bottom line: *I want you to be incredibly successful.*

If you're not subscribed to the blog (but you want to be) feel free to [subscribe](#). I'd love to share new content with you as it's released.

Thanks for reading, and I sincerely appreciate your support.

Rock it,

Ben Eubanks
[upstartHR](#)