

BRANCH MERGER GUIDE

1. INTRODUCTION-

A successful merger is not simple to implement, although it would seem so. After all, transferring members already are Sirs; therefore they already know what SIR is all about, and can easily meld into the surviving branch.

That perception is unrealistic, even with these possible benefits:

- it improves the surviving branch's finances.
- it increases the number of attendees at luncheon meetings, which is helpful for satisfying caterer's and/or facility's minimum meal guarantees.
- it can make the branch more attractive to a prospective speaker who appreciates higher attendance.
- it may provide the possibility for filling vacant leadership positions. For example, a transferring member who was Publicity Chairman could fill the open position in the surviving branch.
- it may increase participation in activities of the surviving branch, and may even add an activity(s) of the closing branch. (the possibility is slim since closing branches typically have few if any existing activities)

Those "possible" benefits all can be easily outweighed if the new, merged branch does not establish- or work toward establishing- a successful operating culture. Why? Because one and perhaps BOTH branches have not overcome some significant issues prior to the merger, including:

- a culture of volunteerism, taking leadership positions when asked and giving proper recognition of volunteers on a regular basis.
- having these 10 positions **minimum** filled and satisfactorily manned: Big Sir, Little Sir, Treasurer, Secretary; Committee Chairmen of Nominating and Membership; and RAMP Chairmen- Recruiting, Activities, Member Relations, and Publicity/Image. (The Branch requirement for 2+ Directors is met if two or more of these positions are also Directors)
- a "longterm survival" strategy that is understood and practiced by its members.
- luncheon programs that satisfy existing members and attract younger guests (having fun, being sociable, providing great speakers, conducting little business).
- providing a number of fun activities for members, and for members and their significant others.

Three Merger Scenarios-

Scenario One. Two branches merge when both face serious closure concerns involving membership, leadership, activities, and/or volunteerism. A Scenario One merger probably delays the inevitable.

Delay is good, though, in that the members finding sufficient value to remain can continue to enjoy that value for a longer period.

Scenario Two. A branch faced with closure merges with a lower risk branch in the locale. A Scenario Two merger can negatively impact the healthier branch over time- and often within a short time. Why? The branch facing closure typically has had ongoing insufficient support from its membership to resolve important issues. Members are unwilling to:

- accept leadership positions (some members could have served for years and will do no more);
- volunteer when asked;
- bring guests;
- participate in activities;
- start new activities.

Significantly, these are the bulk of the transferees. Branch median age for the surviving also typically increases, which can affect ability to attract the lifeblood of a branch longterm- younger guests becoming members.

Scenario Three. Two relatively healthy branches in the same locale decide that it would be best for both branches to merge. However, each branch has lost membership over the past several years and is concerned about its membership trend. Otherwise, they would not be considering a merger. Even with the merger, the underlying membership problem has not been resolved.

Transferring Members- Four Situations Facing Every Merger

1. Some potential transferees will be lost, because they have no interest in the change.
2. Some potential transferees will be undecided. Without some form of successful persuasion, they will be lost.
3. Some potential transferees will transfer, but within a few months will be lost for one reason or another.
4. Some potential transferees will transfer and find sufficient value to continue membership.

2. HOW TO PLAN AND EXECUTE A SUCCESSFUL MERGER- ESTABLISH A MERGER SUPPORT TEAM

A successful merger requires planning and execution in order to deal effectively with the four situations mentioned above. Policy 37-Disbanding/Merging Branches is a must-read to ensure the policy is followed. However, there is much more to do than is within that policy to be successful.

A dedicated Merger Support Team needs to be in place, hopefully well before the merger takes place. It should include key leaders from both branches- including the Membership Chairman and others with the best knowledge of its members. By having the Big Sirs on the team, for example, decisions can be made much more quickly as they arise.

The Merger Support Team is tasked with the following:

a. Develop Information on the Closing Branch (Scenario 1 & 2 Mergers particularly)-

This information is valuable for team members in the planning and execution process.

- its history/statistics- found on the website under Branch Statistics.
- reasons for closing,
- its activities and the names of the current or past activity leaders.
- participants in those activities (member and non-members).
- the branch's leaders and potential leaders- including HLM's and others who have received special recognition.
- its financial situation.
- its membership list.

b. Complete A Contact List- This list is comprised of the existing members of the closing branch and any former members who could return to SIR.

c. Ensure Consolidation of Activities-

Activities of the merging branches are extremely important. A Branch Activities Chairman for the merging branches needs to ensure there is a smooth transition for all activities. Example: if there are two Golf Groups, the Golf Chairmen and/or Golf Committees need to make transition decisions as early-on as possible, including communications to members of each Group.

d. Ensure Key Leadership Positions Are Filled-

A merger is an excellent time to fill vacant positions. As mentioned earlier, there are 10 key positions that need filling- Big Sir, Little Sir, Treasurer, Secretary; Committee

Chairmen of Nominating and Membership; and RAMP Chairmen- Recruiting, Activities, Member Relations, and Publicity/Image. However, there are a number of other positions that are needed, too: Directors, Webmaster, Bulletin Editor, Assistant Secretary, Assistant Treasurer, Audit Chairman, and Chairmen of specific activities. Members must understand that these positions need to be filled, to have a successful branch longterm.

e. Develop A Transferee Orientation Plan- This plan and its implementation ensures that each Transferee becomes knowledgeable about the surviving branch's leaders and its customs/culture, programs, activities, and other pertinent items.

f. Assign Advisors and Sponsors-

An Advisors (Aide/Contact/Mentor/Associate) are assigned names from the Contact List. The Advisor contacts his assignees personally, encouraging each to join the "new" branch. These positions of course need to know the names of the surviving branch's leaders and its activities, programs, meeting times, etc.

If the assignee agrees to be a Transferee, the Advisor becomes his Sponsor or ensures someone else becomes his Sponsor. A Sponsor for a Transferee acts in a similar role as he would with a new member- ensuring the Transferee is successfully merged into the branch.

g. Develop a Communications Plan- Members transferring in as well as members of the surviving branch need to be kept informed of the principal elects of the merger. In addition, surviving branch members have a critical responsibility to make the Transferees feel welcomed whenever they have an opportunity to do so.