

POST MANAGEMENT



You may have experience in managing a Post, County, District or Department but you should read and understand the materials published here so that you convey the American Legion policies and procedures and not the "traditions" you may bring from your own experience.



The American Legion is incorporated by an act of Congress and is organized into local posts, which, for purposes of coordination and administration, are grouped into departments. The post is the combat unit of The American Legion. Depending upon its ability to realize American Legion policies and properly interpret them to others, and to successfully carry out unselfish activities for the community, the state and the nation, our organization will stand or fall. **The post is The American Legion.** Its duties are beautifully spelled out in the Preamble to the Constitution of The American Legion. Membership is

by post only. Programs are effective to the degree the post adopts and puts them into operation. Mutual helpfulness becomes a reality through the post's comradeship, social activities and service programs.

The responsibility given to the individual post is the source of our strength and growth. The post is to a large degree autonomous, restricted only by broad general guidelines made clear in the national or department constitution and bylaws.

The individual Legionnaire's perception of The American Legion particularly the post officer's perception – largely defines the post. If the person perceives the Legion to be a bar, the post will be a bar, and that is all. If the person thinks the post is doing a good job but still isn't attracting new members, then the perception of what the Legion should be, or is, does not agree with what the majority of veterans in the area want in an organization.

POST MANAGEMENT

- Post Organization
- Post Goals
- Developing Leaders
- Elections
- Installation

All posts do not have to be alike, although there is a tendency to think so. Membership troubles arise in a community when a group with a narrow perception of The American Legion becomes dominant and suppresses any group with a different perception. Certain perceptions can prevent the development of new activities that would produce new leaders and new members, while others can result in the expansion of programs, leadership and, eventually, membership. They also help or hinder the establishment of new posts that might attract and serve entirely new groups of veterans.

The post must never forget, however, its responsibility to the veterans and children of its community – and to the community itself. What the community thinks of The American Legion is just as basic as what a Legion post thinks of itself. The American Legion exists only with the approval of our society, or at least a large segment of it. This is true whether it's the national organization or a post. Each post is judged by the community. Its success or failure reflects this judgment. A good post will encourage active participation by its members with other civic minded committees and organizations within the community. It will seek to participate whether or not the activity is initiated by The American Legion.

A good post will know the needs of the community. It will know them by the simple process of planned contacts by representative post members with city officials, educators, welfare workers, community leaders, and other civic and fraternal groups. A Legionnaire who does a good job for the community deserves recognition and thanks from the post, whether the project was post sponsored or not.

Veterans activities alone will not establish the Legion as an asset in the eyes of the community. These are, however, of particular importance to an organization composed exclusively of veterans.

KINDS OF POSTS, GOALS

Each Legionnaire sees The American Legion through his or her personal experiences or desires. The organization is big enough and broad enough to accommodate everyone, but the post will reflect the composite personality of its members. There are country club type posts and community posts. There are posts of ethnic groups and all women. There are business and professional posts, company posts, and posts formed by fraternal groups. Some posts have several thousand members, while others are successful with fewer than a hundred. All are doing the work of The American Legion.

What the post wants and needs to do, it can do, but only if the membership, and the post officers in particular, carefully spell out its goals or standards in terms of service to the community and then translate them into action. Service is getting members to do a job and having fun while doing it. It's doing what needs to be done, whether for the members or the community. Thus, post officers must be aware of the likes and dislikes of its members, and equally aware of the needs of the community.

DEVELOPING LEADERS

The American Legion requires a terrific amount of manpower. More than 13,000 new post commanders are needed each year. This number tops 100,000 when other post officers are elected. Some hold the same office year after year, but there is always a need for fresh volunteer leaders.

Where are they found? First, a veteran becomes a member. Then, experience, education and exposure through serving on committees and attending leadership schools, conventions and conferences prepare that person for other positions of responsibility. Leadership training, formal or informal, should be ongoing.

If the post's work has gone well and the present officers have been effective, there should be no lack of competition for elective post offices. But there may come a time when someone must be approached and urged to run for post commander or other elective office. This is particularly true in some small posts where many members have already served. This should be anticipated and a long-term plan in place. The present officers and active members must be on the lookout for future officer material, and Legionnaires showing ability and interest should be encouraged to seek higher office.

ELECTIONS

The post constitution and by-laws will spell out the dates for nomination and election of officers. If these do not agree with the department constitution and by-laws, the post's election dates should be changed. For best communications between the post and department, it is desirable for all posts to conduct elections on or near the same date, and the results promptly reported to the department.

INSTALLATION

The installation of a new group of officers is the first occasion of the new Legion year for an impressive ceremony and one of the top social events on the post's calendar. If new officers are casually installed, their attitude toward their obligation will be casual. If the installation is accompanied by a banquet, visits from department and district officers, and entertainment that draws a crowd, the new officers are going to be fully aware of the responsibilities they have assumed.

Impressive installation ceremonies can provide the framework around which other rituals can develop. The Manual of Ceremonies covers the initiation of new members, dedication of halls, funeral services and other rituals that are standard throughout The American Legion. Department headquarters and National Headquarters can provide additional tools to make these ceremonies more effective.

In many departments, regulations are in effect as to who the installing officers should be. Check with the district commander for these details.

DEPARTMENT



The American Legion is organized into departments and these, in turn, into posts. There is one department in each state and the District of Columbia, and there may be one in each territory and insular possession of the United States (Puerto Rico). Each department may prescribe the constitution of its posts, and the department has supervision of the posts within its boundaries and the posts assigned to it by the National Executive Committee. There are also foreign departments in the Philippines, France and Mexico. In all, there are 55 departments.

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

The top legislative body of The American Legion is the national convention. The National Executive Committee is vested with administrative authority between national conventions.

Through the offices of National Headquarters in Indianapolis and Washington, D.C., the policies of the Legion are clarified and its activities are centered and directed. Thus, the influence of nearly 14,000 posts is coordinated and directed along the lines of Legion policy.

POST OFFICERS

Commander: That you have ability is recognized by your election to the office of post commander. Now you must draw on your ability and past experience while developing new skills so that you will succeed in helping the post prosper.

The charge you have accepted, commander, is broad and difficult. How you respond will determine to a large degree the standing of The American Legion among your associates and within the community. Your own ability, the support of district and department officers, the information in this guide, and the help you will get from the post officers who form your team will together make the performance of your job possible. As you look to the overall operation of the post, you'll realize that you have stepped to another level. You may feel the step is too high, but as you proceed, following the suggestions and recommendations in this guide, you may find that your year as commander is the most rewarding of your life.

Planning post operations for the coming year: It's a rare group of new post officers who take office without enthusiasm and a desire for a successful year. In the charge you accepted at your installation, you were entrusted with the supervision of the duties of all other post officers. This does not mean that you will discourage them from using initiative and developing new ideas. What it does mean is that you will be judged by their effectiveness.

There are many ways to determine whether a post commander and their officers are enjoying a successful year. Judgments of the worth of a post are made by the members, the community, and by The American Legion itself. Like it or not, a gain or loss in membership is the measure most often used.

Actually, the membership record is a reliable barometer of what your post is doing. An active post where the members enjoy themselves often creates a "word of mouth" membership campaign. The members are proud to belong. It's natural for them to talk "Legion" to their friends, neighbors, relatives, coworkers and business associates. Since they enjoy belonging to the Legion, they want their friends to get in on a good thing, too.

However, whether it shows or not, a great deal of planning has probably gone into every successful membership campaign. But before salespeople can sell a product, they have to have a good product – something people want and will value. Programs, social activities, the opportunity to make new friends, even the post home itself – these are what a Legion salesperson has to sell.

Post executive committee: Early on, you will discover that running even a small post is more than a one person job. This is why the post constitution provides for a full group of post officers, as well as an executive committee. They are elected to do specific jobs. It's up to you to get them to work together for the good of the post.

Start by calling an early meeting of your officers and executive committee. This can happen even before you are installed. Invite the outgoing post commander and adjutant to attend. Before the meeting, you and your adjutant should know what post records are on hand, where they are kept, and how to use them.

Records, minutes and other materials: Does the post have all its membership records since it was chartered, or at least for recent years? Members are proud of their record of continuous membership. Keep these and all other membership records up to date.

Are the complete minutes of all meetings on file or bound? The keeping and reading of minutes may seem dull, but minutes can be extremely important. More than one legal case has turned on what some long forgotten secretary or adjutant wrote in the minutes of a meeting years ago.

Does the checkbook balance? Where are the funds, and is all the money accounted for? Is the post incorporated under the state's not-for-profit laws? Where is a copy of the articles of incorporation? Have the necessary annual reports been filed and all fees paid? Is every officer who will be handling funds bonded? This is required by the Legion's national constitution.

Do you have a copy of the post's constitution and bylaws? With the changes in post officers from year to year, it's easy to see how vital records can be lost or misplaced. Make sure that all essential records are accessible, that they are where they should be (and not hiding in the desk of an adjutant who served a decade ago), and that you know, at least generally, their purpose.

Budget and fundraising: Anyone who asks people to attend a meeting should do them the courtesy of preparing an agenda – and doing it in advance. One of the first things on the agenda for this first gathering of new post officers should be money – your post's budget. The officers need to know what income is expected for the year and how it should be spent.

You'll have a good chance of staying out of money troubles if you follow these three general principles:

- First, make your dues high enough to meet fixed, administrative costs: postage, stationery, department dues, and in some cases, rent. These are costs that every post must meet to stay in business.
- Second, if the community is to benefit from an American Legion project, don't hesitate to solicit the community for funds – for example, an American Legion Baseball team, a community playground or a swimming pool. The post will actually add to its reputation with such projects, but a full public accounting needs to be made of all funds received and of how they are spent.
- Third, don't ask the public to give in the name of charity for any project that will be of benefit primarily to Legionnaires. A businessman may donate to send a young man to Boys State, but he probably wouldn't care to give money to buy a new cooler for your bar. Sometimes it is necessary to raise funds from outside for something that is strictly for the benefit of the post and its members. When this happens, make sure that the public receives full value.

Committee assignments: Elected officers will be responsible for some of the activities and projects. Your appointed chairs will be in charge of others. Decide at the very beginning what is going to happen, when it is going to happen, and who is going to make it happen. Most of the assignments will be to carry on already established programs or activities.

Handbooks, manuals and brochures exist for all of the Legion's premier programs: Boys State, American

Legion Baseball, scholarships, and more (see pages 156-159). You and your adjutant have probably received copies from department headquarters already. These publications have information and ideas that your committee chairs need. Take them to the first planning meeting and turn them over to the proper people.

Programs new and old: No post can stand still. New programs are needed to maintain interest and, especially, to keep up with the times. Every new activity or program offers the opportunity to interest new people in joining the post. Inactive members can be turned into active members the same way.

Just about every post has service programs and social activities that were started long ago and have become tradition. But organizations, like individuals, fall into ruts. Any program run exactly the same way year after year is going to grow stale. So, at your first planning meeting, take a look at the post's programs and activities. Decide which need some changes or a new look. A program won't happen, though, without someone to make it happen. Every program or activity needs to have a person in charge – usually a post officer or committee chair. If the selection is good, the program will succeed. Ask and, in fact, demand that each chairperson and officer build a timetable of events that can be fitted into an overall post calendar for your year.

First post meeting: At the first post meeting, expect others to compare you to previous commanders. This is the time to set the tone for the entire year. If changes are going to be made, start now. The basic framework for any post meeting is found in the Manual of Ceremonies. By following the prescribed ritual and order of business, even a person who has never before presided over a meeting can do an adequate job.

As a new commander, you might feel self-conscious about running a formal meeting, particularly in a post that has gotten away from the Manual of Ceremonies. Don't. The American Legion is a respected organization, and its meetings should be suitably formal and impressive. No time is saved by omitting parts of the ritual. Meetings, of course, can and should vary. But by following the prescribed ritual and order of business, you should be able to complete your agenda in no more than one hour.

Agenda: While the Manual of Ceremonies provides the framework or the skeleton for a meeting, the commander's agenda is what puts meat on the bones. Your agenda for the first and each succeeding meeting should list the exact committees scheduled to report. But before putting a chairperson's name on the agenda, ask that person if he or she is ready to report. This is an easy way to see if the chairperson is doing the job. If not, a little encouragement, a few suggestions or perhaps some prodding might be in order.

Protocol: Although "protocol" is a term used primarily in setting the rules of etiquette that govern diplomatic functions, there is a certain amount of protocol that applies to American Legion meetings and social functions, especially those to which dignitaries have been invited. This is the responsibility of the post commander, beginning with the planning of the event.

If the department commander is to be invited, this matter should be cleared promptly with department headquarters. In preliminary planning, it is advisable to have an alternate date in the event the department commander is already committed for the original date.

The invitation should list the time, place, whether or not the event is a dinner, significance of the event and any other pertinent information. Will it be a joint Legion and Auxiliary function? Will there be non-Legionnaire dignitaries present? Remember, this is your "home," and those you've invited deserve all the courtesies and considerations accorded such distinguished guests.

If the event is a dinner, notify those who will be seated at the head table before they arrive. Escort them to their places to avoid confusion. The presiding or host officer is seated just to the right of the lectern.

The master of ceremonies is seated just to the left of the lectern. Use place cards to identify those at the head table.

Introductions begin after the meal. The presiding officer stands at the center of the head table and makes the introductions, beginning at the extreme left, continuing to the center of the table, and then starting at the extreme right and continuing to the center. The main speaker, the guest of honor, is the last person introduced.

Officers are introduced in the order by which they were installed: sergeant-at-arms, service officer, historian, judge advocate, chaplain, treasurer or finance officer, adjutant, vice commanders and commander.

As with all rules, there are some exceptions. If the event is a function of both the Legion and the Auxiliary, the Auxiliary officers and dignitaries are introduced first. A national executive committeeman or alternate national executive committeeman should be introduced immediately before the department commander.

Welcome committee: The first meeting is a great time to start a welcoming committee, if the post doesn't have one already. Ask two or three members – including the sergeant-at-arms to take on the job of welcoming new members, guests or even older members who are not well acquainted, helping them feel at home and introducing them. An active welcome committee is a part of the post's public relations job.

Pageantry and honors: Pageantry and patriotic observances are something that the community expects of its American Legion post. A well trained color guard and even a burial detail composed of members of the Legion family will help keep the local post visible.

Community projects: A good post commander will encourage members to actively participate in civic affairs. The entire post should be proud when a member is elected to the school board, heads up the United Way or gets a job promotion in a job and will go out of the way to congratulate members on their accomplishments, whether in the Legion or in another field.

Saying "thanks": Plan, assign responsibilities, check back to see that the job is being done, and then say, "Thank you very much!" A post can express its appreciation in many ways, including awards, citations and recognition at a post meeting. But even a simple "thank you" note can mean a great deal. This is a simple courtesy that should never be forgotten.

Resolutions: If you have an idea that will improve The American Legion at any level, put that idea into words in the form of a resolution. First, work to have it passed by your local post, then by your district at its annual convention. All resolutions passed at a district convention are delivered to the resolutions committee at the next department convention. At the department convention, appear before the resolutions committee and plead for their passage of your resolution, and be prepared to speak for its passage on the floor of the department convention. All resolutions pertaining to the national organization that are passed by the department are forwarded to the national convention. For guidance on writing resolutions, see page 140.

Sources of help: A commander relies on a team of post officers and taps the potential of post members. But valuable assistance comes from past post commanders, district officers, department officers and, where necessary, National Headquarters staff.

- Past commanders Many posts have an active Past Commanders' Club. Sometimes its primary purpose is social retention of good fellowship among those who have served as commanders. But

this group has a wealth of knowledge and ability. Don't let it go to waste. Whether such a club is formally organized in your post or not, it is helpful to build a Commander's Advisory Committee with your past commanders.

- **District officers** The post is a separate and distinct unit that functions independently. But the work of the post can be more effective when it is tightly linked to the department and national organization. District officers provide that link. The district commander is usually the elected representative of posts in the district, but an obligation to provide guidance and supervision is implied. Posts are charged with carrying out the Legion's objectives and programs and to comply fully with the obligations assumed under the post, department and national constitutions. But if your post becomes inactive or falters, expect your district commander to start giving advice. The district commander has a position of respect in our organization. A visit to your post calls for something special. Make it a social event significant enough to draw a crowd. The dignity shown the office helps increase the importance of the office of post commander.
- **Department officers** Department officers are "show" people. A visit from one usually offers an opportunity for media coverage, and the type of Legion function that will attract your members and community leaders. These officers are your elected leaders and deserving of every respect. Not every post will receive annual visits from a department commander, but if your invitation is accepted, or there is occasion to visit you, make the most of it.
- **Department headquarters** The department headquarters is the link between local posts and the national organization. The post will deal directly with the department adjutant. Routine business should be conducted through department headquarters. Questions of policy and organization should also be referred to department headquarters. The post commander should closely follow department affairs, know what statewide activities are going on, and see that the post is involved. He or she should also study all instructions from department headquarters and see that they are passed on to the proper officer or committee for action. Finally, the post's membership needs to be informed of any new activities initiated by the department.
- **National Headquarters** Nearly all your contacts with National Headquarters rightfully come through department headquarters. There is, however, one publication that should be faithfully read and kept, issue by issue: The American Legion Dispatch, which provides you the latest Legion news and information on which to base your programs. Post officers should also subscribe to The American Legion Online Update, an weekly email newsletter.

Auxiliary unit: The Auxiliary unit is an important part of the post's organization. Official contact with the unit is through the unit president. But the unit can help only in proportion to its opportunity. A good commander will find work for the Auxiliary unit to do. The commander, or a designated representative, will keep in close touch with the unit and give its members plenty of inspiration and encouragement.

Conventions: While your post could continue to operate without the district, department or national organization, it is more effective as a part of a team. You may have an idea that should be developed and expanded beyond your post. Certainly you want your post to have a voice in deciding the future programs and direction of the Legion. District, department and national conventions are where Legion policy is determined. Be certain that your post is represented by properly elected delegates, particularly on the district and department level.

Program reminders: Post programs require intelligent planning. Each year the district and the department conduct seminars on both general operations and specific Legion programs. You can help reduce the risk of future leadership problems in your post by making certain that the post is represented at training sessions. Attendance at district and department functions also helps build the esprit de corps that makes for a good Legion post.

- ✓ **JANUARY** - Initiation ceremonies are good membership stabilizers. Keep working on membership, especially by contacting those who became delinquent Jan. 1. A community service survey can

reveal areas where additional effort is needed. This month is also a good time to present flags and copies of the flag code to local schools. Check dates for post, district or county, and state Oratorical contests. March is Community Service Month, so now is the time to plan initiatives and projects.

- ✓ **FEBRUARY** - Americanism Month Plan school awards with local educators. Sponsor religious emphasis activities. Start planning the upcoming American Legion Baseball season. Invite a local veterans employment representative to speak at a post meeting. Consider hosting observances of Abraham Lincoln's and George Washington's birthdays. Plan a big American Legion birthday program for March.
- ✓ **MARCH** - Community Service Month Give priority to Boys State selection this month, or earlier. Close out the membership campaign, and mail dues and cards to the department. Recognize the anniversary of The American Legion's founding March 15-17. This is an occasion for post officers to focus on projecting the proper image of The American Legion in the community, in the programs sponsored and services provided, and also on the appearance of the post home and surrounding grounds. This can be perceived as a reflection of the attitude, initiative and civic awareness of the post membership. The post should be a pillar of the community, conscious that it represents the national organization to citizens in its community. Renewed attention to appearance doesn't require a capital improvement project, merely one of attention to detail and routine fix ups, from signage to inside and outside improvements. This should be included on your annual Post Responsibility Audit (see page 19). Between January and March, post leaders should consider forming a committee to host a post open house.
- ✓ **APRIL** - Children & Youth Month. Coordinate Children & Youth activities and recognition with the post's Auxiliary unit. Obtain Children & Youth Guide from department headquarters. Plan election of new officers, summer Scouting activities and Boys State. How about an old timers' night? Community service will elevate your post's standing in the community. Put American Legion Child Welfare Foundation Week on the post calendar.
- ✓ **MAY** - This month marks the anniversary of the St. Louis Caucus, where organization of The American Legion was completed in 1919. Armed Forces Day, Mother's Day and Memorial Day form the basis for good post programs and outreach to U.S. military personnel in communities nationwide. Consider honoring them with a Blue Star Salute. Does the post have a uniformed group? Do you decorate veterans' graves? Present school awards at the end of the semester. Kick off American Legion Baseball and summer athletic programs. Contact school officials to get Legion activities approved and on the calendar for next year: Oratorical Contest, Boys State, school awards, American Education Week.
- ✓ **JUNE** - Start planning a membership drive for next year, calling on past officers for assistance and guidance. Decide how to go about contacting new veterans. June 14 is Flag Day, so consider surveying people and businesses in the community, asking who flies flags on patriotic holidays. The history of Old Glory would make an excellent program for a post meeting. Summer youth programs need members' support and attendance. Community service is a great activity this month and every month.
- ✓ **JULY** - Host an old---fashioned community Fourth of July celebration. Certify new officers with department headquarters. Installation of officers makes an impressive ceremony at a post meeting. Continue efforts on behalf of summer youth programs.
- ✓ **AUGUST** - By now the post should have received next year's membership cards from department headquarters. In many communities, school starts at the beginning or middle of the month. Begin planning a community Veterans Day observance.
- ✓ **SEPTEMBER** - National Disaster Preparedness Month Sept. 2 is VJ Day, so consider asking churches to ring their bells. Encourage the community to recognize Patriot Day, Sept. 11. Celebrate the anniversary of Congress' charter of The American Legion on Sept. 16, perhaps with an event including civic leaders. Sept. 17 is Constitution Day, an ideal time for a citizenship program. Provide schools with copies of "Let's Be Right on Flag Etiquette." The third Friday of the month is National

POW/MIA Recognition Day. Obtain ad materials for Veterans Day.

- ✓ **OCTOBER** - Launch an all-out membership campaign. Remember that dues for next year are payable by Oct. 20. Organize and participate in Halloween safety programs.
- ✓ **NOVEMBER** - Continue full speed ahead on the membership campaign by conducting membership roundups. Get them in before Dec. 31. Lead your community in observing Veterans Day and American Education Week. Remind members they need next year's card number when paying American Legion life insurance premiums. The deadline for payment is Dec. 31.
- ✓ **DECEMBER** - Don't let Dec. 7 go by without an acknowledgment of Pearl Harbor, "a day that will live in infamy." As the holiday season begins, encourage and support activities that bring Christmas cheer to needy families. How about a Christmas party? Work toward an all-time high in post membership. Keep plugging for renewals and new members. Visit veterans who are ill or in the hospital.

In addition to managing Post operations you must also manage Post officers and committee chairman. You should become familiar with those positions and their responsibilities. Let's start with Adjutant:

Adjutant: The adjutant has the same position in the post as the secretary of any other organized body, and a bit more. Like the first sergeant of a company, post activities revolve around the adjutant. Most posts find it wise to retain a good adjutant in office over a period of years. The adjutant may well provide continuity in the post. The adjutant is the personnel officer and personal point of contact for individual members of the post.

First vice commander: In the majority of posts, a first and second vice commander are elected, with membership the primary concern of the first vice commander. Frequently, the success or failure of the membership record during his or her year determines the chances of advancing to the office of commander the next year.

In a successful post, a new commander is going to contact the post officers and committee chairs immediately after election to schedule a meeting where they can lay out a general plan of operation for the entire year. This is when the membership plan should also be decided.

The four W's of planning

- **WHERE** – Where do you want to go? What's the objective? (Or, how many members do you want?)
- **WHAT** – What steps have to be taken to reach the objective?
- **WHO** – Who's going to do what has to be done in each step necessary to reach the goal?
- **WHEN** – When is the work going to be done?

Only you and the members of your post know where you want to go, or how many members you want. But the steps to get there are much the same in every post. If you can answer the following questions for your post and for your membership campaign, you have your job analyzed and know what steps to take to reach your goal:

- Mailed dues notices will bring in about 85 percent of your current members' renewals. Who is going to contact those who do not respond?
- How are dropouts to be reinstated?
- How are you going to contact prospective members? Who's going to contact them? How will new recruits be brought into the post?
- What publicity will be needed?
- Who can be counted on to work at membership?
- What awards or special recognition will be given?
- What special events can be tied in with membership, such as Veterans Day, team competition,

contests with other posts, the Legion birthday, etc.?

Other duties: Membership may be the primary assignment of a first vice, but during a normal Legion year, the first vice will have many other duties. He or she should become familiar with the ceremonial protocol for regular meetings. He or she will most likely have to conduct one or more meetings during the year. Knowing how to prepare a meaningful and fruitful agenda is very important, as well as good experience. The vice commander must be ready to fill in for the commander at a moment's notice.

Second vice commander: The second vice commander is responsible for building an "I like my post because ..." atmosphere in which Legionnaires have fun while doing the work of the Legion.

The commander depends on the second vice commander to help run the programs that spice up meetings and attract attendance. The social calendar should be filled months in advance with activities that will bring out the active members, as well as those who are just card carrying Legionnaires.

One of the second vice commander's first duties should be to contact other veterans and civic groups to see that each patriotic holiday and observance receives the attention it deserves. He or she will be concerned with the pageantry so closely associated with the Legion.

The second vice commander may not be in charge of the color guard or firing squad, but must promote it. He or she might not be part of the initiation team, but should make sure one is functioning. In the pursuit of "justice," the second vice commander is concerned with the welfare of all fellow veterans, and thus is interested in the work of the Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Committee. Likewise, the second vice will know how the Economic Committee is functioning.

Finance officer/treasurer: The finance officer/treasurer must be a person of proven integrity and experience in handling financial affairs. The post depends on finance, just as any other organization, and will do well to accept expert advice in formulating and administering its financial policy.

The finance officer/treasurer usually serves as the chair of the finance committee and is in charge of all receiving and disbursing of post funds. The post adjutant, in all matters relating to finance, should carry on the work in close correlation with the finance officer. Both officers must be covered by adequate bond. Department headquarters should be consulted for blanket bond arrangement. Post accounting forms are designed to meet the requirements of Legion posts in maintaining a correct and permanent membership and finance record. Because of their simplicity, they require no special knowledge of bookkeeping or accounting. Every post adjutant and finance officer/treasurer should insist upon being provided with a set of forms to save time and money for the post. Consult the Emblem Sales catalog for prices and detailed descriptions, or go online to emblem.legion.org.

Be prompt in remitting national and department dues, along with the department record card, to department headquarters. Note all payments and other transactions on the post membership register.

Service officer: A good service officer should be retained. The value of a post service officer increases with length of service. As the service officer's reputation grows, so will the prestige of the organization in your community. The job calls for a competent and dedicated person, preferably one who lives and works nearby and is readily available to those needing assistance. He or she is responsible for bringing to the attention of all veterans and their dependents the rights and benefits granted them by law – law The American Legion helped craft.

The service officer must know how to access and utilize the expert services available through Legion channels and other community agencies. The job requires timely submission of information to fulltime professionals so that every veteran and his or her dependents are adequately represented. The service officer's report should be a standard part of every meeting.

Beyond the post, The American Legion maintains a full staff of appeals representatives in Washington. A small mobile staff of field representatives provides a constant flow of information concerning conditions in VA hospitals, domiciles and regional offices. Other Legion representatives assist veterans who petition Department of Defense boards for review of less than fully honorable discharges or dismissal from the military. They also help veterans obtain deserved decorations and medals.

Department service officers can provide necessary claims forms. Additional information comes through department publications, National Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation bulletins, memorandums and VA pamphlets. Many departments conduct training schools for post service officers to add to their knowledge and contacts, and all have trained service officers in VA regional offices and hospitals.

With most of today's veterans population composed of those who served during the Vietnam, Persian Gulf, Iraq and Afghanistan wars, the work of the post service officer continues to be vital. Even more than older veterans, these men and women are likely to not be fully versed in veterans benefits and programs. Meanwhile, older veterans need advice on how to integrate possible benefits into their retirement plans. Dependents should be visited as soon as feasible after a veteran's death.

Every Congress considers legislative matters of importance to veterans and to The American Legion. Working in cooperation with the post legislative committee, the post service officer can aid in the post's support of the national organization's efforts.

Chaplain: The chaplain need not necessarily be a clergyman, but must be a person capable of moral and intellectual leadership and one who gives dignity and respect to the office. The chaplain should be in close touch with the commander and other post officers of the post, and should attend all meetings of the post executive committee. The leadership in many post activities belongs by right to the chaplain, and when this office is filled by the right person, the post's usefulness to the community only increases.

The Manual of Ceremonies (see Section 2) gives an important place to the chaplain in the conduct of meetings, the observance of patriotic occasions, funeral services and dedication ceremonies. At all these events, the chaplain is the moral leader.

The chaplain should cooperate with the post historian on graves registration work and inspire the post to see that graves are decorated on Memorial Day. Besides officiating at post members' funerals when requested, the chaplain can also be of service to their bereaved families. The chaplain may also chair the post's Veterans Administration Voluntary Services (VAVS) Committee, which coordinates volunteer work at nearby VA facilities.

The American Legion's "Service to God and Country" handbook, available through department headquarters, offers guidance for the post chaplain and religious emphasis committee.

Sergeant-at-arms: The sergeant-at-arms knows how to arrange the meeting hall and assists the post commander and adjutant in preliminary arrangements for meetings, including leading the color detail during presentation and retirement ceremonies. He or she is the expert on flag etiquette and should know proper flag display and procedures in operating a meeting. The sergeant-at-arms should also play a leading role in the post color guard, burial detail and other pageantry.

The sergeant-at-arms is the logical person to chair a welcome committee, which can have a tremendous influence on the post's image, membership and relationship with members. Every Legionnaire wants to feel part of the group, particularly the new Legionnaire attending his or her first few meetings. The sergeant-at-arms must make certain new members are welcomed, introduced and made to feel they are important to the post. The welcome committee also encourages present members to attend meetings and advises the commander on who should be acknowledged.

Historian: The work of post historian is cumulative. It is wise to leave it in the hands of one person as long as it's being handled well. The office is a suitable position for a past post commander.

There should be close cooperation between the post adjutant and the historian. The former works with the records on matters of current interest, the latter on matters of historical interest. The post historian should also keep in touch with the department historian and be prompt in answering inquiries. An annual report should be made to the department historian just before the department convention.

Copies of whatever is printed concerning the post should be deposited in local and state libraries, as well as in the post and department archives. This will prevent complete loss of valuable records through fire or other calamity, as well as provide material for those looking for information about the Legion. An outline for a one year post narrative history & yearbook is provided in the appendix (see pages 145-154).

The post historian should attend department conventions and make a point of knowing what historians of neighboring posts are doing. The department historian can advise post historians on department and national post history contests, historians associations, and materials that will assist in doing a better job.

Judge advocate: The primary duty of the judge advocate is to supply professional advice in the conduct of post business or to procure proper counsel. He is the guardian of the constitutional form of post government. Your judge advocate can also supply valuable assistance to other post committees and officers to the service officer for legal advice, for example, and to the Americanism committee on matters relating to education and naturalization laws. Any post committee can benefit from the judge advocate's contacts with local government officials.

The judge advocate and legal committee are charged by the suggested post constitution with the duty of auditing post financial accounts. This should be done annually just before the election of officers or more frequently at their discretion.

Executive committee: In the suggested post constitution and bylaws (see pages 106---111), the government and management of the post is entrusted to the executive committee. It should meet regularly or as often as the commander deems necessary. The post executive committee is further charged with hiring such employees as may be necessary, authorizing and approving all expenditures, requiring adequate bonds from those with custody of post funds, hearing reports of post committee chairpersons, and generally managing post affairs. Delegation of these functions to the executive committee is in no way intended to usurp the powers of the membership through regular post meetings. Rather, this allows the routine operational affairs of the post to be handled outside of post meetings. Committee reports of general interest to members should still be given at post meetings, though.

The key to interesting post meetings is using the executive committee effectively. The post meeting that becomes bogged down in arguments on petty details is interesting only to those doing the talking.

Standing committees: Listed below are committees found in most American Legion posts, with brief descriptions of their duties. Your post constitution and/or department constitution may require additional committees or have other names for some committees, so do not consider the list to be mandatory or complete for every American Legion post.

New programs are often needed, while old programs should be changed, revitalized or, in some cases, dropped. Officers should take time to review the post's long standing programs and activities and consider changes or additions. Determine which committees are necessary. Next, take another look at the post's members and even eligible nonmembers, making a list of potential committee heads and members. Frequently, an eligible nonmember will consider joining a member of your post if it has an activity or is planning an activity in which he or she is interested. Whoever makes this must be able to point out the need

for the program and the reason why this particular person is desired to assist. Each committee chair needs to know how the work of the committee fits into the overall program of the post, what is expected and when.

STANDARD POST COMMITTEES

Americanism This committee seeks to inspire love of country and good citizenship through patriotic observances, flag etiquette, civic instruction in schools, the Americanization of immigrants, community service, and youth activities such as Boys State, Boy Scouts, Oratorical Contest, School Award Medals and American Legion Baseball.

Children and Youth This committee is charged with ensuring that any child of a veteran in need of care and protection shall receive proper and timely service and aid, strengthening the family unit, extending support to sound organizations and facilities that provide services for children and youth, and maintaining a well rounded program that meets the needs of the young people in the community.

Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation This committee assists veterans in pursuing claims, understanding their rights and obtaining their benefits. Committee members also visit comrades who are sick or disabled, and provide comfort to members' families in illness and bereavement. The head of the Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Committee may be the post service officer. In addition, the post chaplain may serve as chair of a visiting committee.

National Security This committee urges post members to assist in community emergency preparedness, and to support local and national civilian defense projects.

Membership & Post Activities This committee is responsible for obtaining, retaining and increasing post membership – specifically, renewals, enrollment of new members, transfers and reinstatements. The first vice commander often chairs the membership committee.

Other committees that you should be prepared to fill within your Post are:

- Public Relations
- Legislative
- Finance
- Economic
- House
- Service
- Other committees
- Sons of The American Legion
- American Legion Riders
- Graves Registration and Memorials
- Uniformed Groups
- Visiting or VAVS

Social activities: Someone once described The American Legion as an organization that came to play but stayed to work. That describes Legionnaires, too. The majority of members join because of real or expected comradeship, fun and social activities. A good post recognizes this, giving as much attention to planning a social event as it does to any other project. A post must determine the type of social activities that will appeal to the greatest number of members, but each activity should be evaluated as to its acceptance by the community and eligible veterans.

I hope we gave you a new perspective on the management of an American Legion post and its officers. While not complete this course should give you a great start in your preparation for a leadership role.

