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**New Member Orientation:
Inn-creasing Participation**

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Why conduct an orientation?

- Helps welcome incoming members
- Opportunity to discuss expectations
- Acquaints new members with Inn leaders
- Gives information about the history and operation of the Inn and the national organization

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Each year, Inns across the country welcome more than 3,000 new members, ranging from law students to senior judges. Many Inns go to great efforts to recruit each new member, only to be confounded by a new member's lack of participation. Why did that person never show up to the meetings?

One answer may lie within how the Inn brought that member into the fold. Was the member made to feel welcome? Did the new member understand what was involved and how much participation was required? Did that member know what to expect from the Inn, and what would be expected from him/her?

One of the simplest solutions for this problem is to conduct a formal orientation for new members, at which they are introduced to the Inn's leadership, given an overview and history of the Inns of Court, and are engaged in discussion regarding what they can expect and what will be expected of them.

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Helps welcome incoming members

- Meet other new members
- Ask fundamental questions
- Discuss motivations for joining the Inn
- Understand personal goals

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When welcoming new members to the Inn, it should be assumed that the new members don't know anyone else in the Inn. Imagine how uncomfortable it can be to join an organization, especially one with a strong social component, when you don't know a single person. The most important aspect of a new member orientation is to help these new members feel comfortable and welcome. How can you do this?

Since the new members may not know anyone else in the Inn, the orientation gives them a chance to meet other new members and the Inn's leadership before they are expected to engage in the real work of the Inn.

An orientation meeting gives new members a chance to ask fundamental questions. New members may not feel comfortable asking, or may not have the opportunity to ask, such questions during a regular Inn meeting.

It is beneficial to both the new members and the Inn's leadership to understand WHERE each member is in his or her career and WHY each person has joined the Inn. If the Inn has a structured mentoring program, this information allows the Inn to find the best mentor for the new member.

This information also helps the new member understand whether his or her goals for membership are realistic, and to adjust their goals to fit the framework of the Inn.

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Acquaints new members with Inn leaders

- Entire executive committee in attendance
- Introduce and explain roles
- Inn Handbook or reference list

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Another important function of an orientation meeting is to introduce the Inn's leadership to the new members. New members need to know to whom they should go for whatever need or problem they may have.

The entire executive committee should be present at the orientation. Not only does this make it possible for the new members to get to know the different leaders of the Inn, but it sends the message to the new members that this is important and that the Inn is committed to helping the new members feel welcome. If the Inn's leadership does not make an effort to welcome the new members and show up to the orientation, then the underlying message is that the new member doesn't need to bother, either.

Each member of the executive committee should introduce himself or herself, including how long they have been a member of the Inn. They should also describe their role on the executive committee and how the new members may expect to interact with them in the course of their membership.

Especially if an Inn has a large executive committee, most new members will not remember who is who and who does what. We strongly recommend giving new members a copy of the Inn Handbook at the orientation meeting, which should include a list of Inn leaders and job descriptions. If the Inn does not have a handbook, they should hand out a leadership reference list or contact list.

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Gives information about the history and operation of the Inn

- How pupillage teams are formed and their role
- Stress importance of attendance and participation
- Discuss how meetings are run and talk about the details

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The orientation meeting is the best opportunity to introduce the new members to the proper procedures and Inn policies. Regardless of how things may have been done in the past, or how some of the older members may do things, new members should be told how things SHOULD be done. This is one of the best opportunities for the Inn leadership to affect change within the Inn. Get your new members started out on the right foot.

Since much of a member's Inn experience occurs in their pupillage team, spend some time talking about the role of pupillage teams and how they are assigned. Stressing participation is especially important here. You should also talk about the monthly Inn meeting, how they are run, and what they should expect. Discuss the importance of the program and the discussions that every member is expected to participate in and that no one should sit quietly in the corner. Since many new members, especially younger attorneys and law students, may be intimidated by the senior attorneys and judges, discuss the protocol that is followed in your Inn and help the new members understand that, while the Inn stresses civility, it welcomes an open dialogue.

When talking about Inn operations, make sure you talk about the details. Where do the meetings take place? What time do they usually start? Where should the members park? If they are meeting in a secure building, such as a courthouse, what is the process for entering the building after hours? If a new member gets frustrated by the simple logistics, he or she may simply not come the next time.

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Gives information about the national organization

- Show video
- The Bencher
- International programs
- National and circuit awards
- Support services
 - Program Library
 - Online Leadership Learning Community
 - InnSight

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When your new members joined your Inn, they also joined a national movement promoting ethics and professionalism. Most new members are probably unaware of this national movement or of the national organization that supports this movement. Members who understand this feel a greater sense of importance and are more committed to their involvement with the Inn.

The national organization provides each Inn with a videotape to help explain the various benefits and services it provides. Take some time in your orientation meeting to play this videotape and then to discuss some of the benefits the members should expect, such as:

The Bencher, the bi-monthly magazine of the American Inns of Court. This publication includes substantive articles on the issues and ideals addressed by the Inns.

International programs, such as the Pegasus Trust scholarships and the reciprocal visitation agreement with the English and Irish Inns. If they are aware of the opportunities, many members may wish to take advantage of the chance to visit the Inns in London or Dublin, and the Inn's associate members may wish to participate in the Pegasus Trust program.

The national organization welcomes nominations from the Inns for its national and circuit awards programs. New members may be proud to be involved in an organization that honors such outstanding exemplars of professionalism and ethics.

It is also worthwhile to explain to the new members that the national organization provides a number of support services to the Inn, although they may not see those services directly. New members may be the Inn's leaders in a few years, and it will be important for them to understand that there are resources available to assist them.

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Provides an opportunity to discuss expectations of the Inn

- Attendance and active participation
 - Inn meetings
 - Pupillage teams
 - Mentoring program
- Pay dues in a timely manner
- Provide constructive feedback

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The Inn leaders should not be shy about discussing the expectations the Inn has of its new members. Too often, Inns do not discuss these expectations, or may even downplay them, and then don't understand why their new members aren't participating.

First and foremost, you must discuss the Inn's expectations for attendance and participation. If the Inn has an attendance policy, provide and discuss it. One of the aspects of membership in an Inn that sets it apart from other organizations is that it is an ACTIVE membership, not a passive or "checkbox" membership. The only way to achieve the mission of the Inn is to have full and active participation at regular meetings, in pupillage teams and in the Inn's structured mentoring program, if one exists. Some Inns have their new members sign an agreement stating that they understand the attendance policy and will abide by it.

The Inn has various financial commitments throughout the year, and it needs its members to pay their dues fully and in a timely manner. The Inn should clearly discuss the dues structure and the payment requirements.

The Inn should always welcome constructive feedback from its members, and it should make that point to its new members at the orientation. If the Inn uses formal evaluation tools, such as for programs or surveys, let them know that they are expected to submit them and that the Inn welcomes honest, constructive criticism. And mean it.

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Provides an opportunity to discuss expectations of the member

- Education
- Networking opportunities
- Clear communication
- Strong leadership

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Each new member comes to the Inn with his or her own expectations. It is important to know what those expectations are, whether they are realistic and to address them early on. The orientation meeting is the perfect place to do this. Some of the common expectations that members have are:

Quality educational content. Many members have come to rely on their Inn membership to satisfy their CLE requirements. But CLE aside, Inns of Court have a growing reputation for providing some of the best legal programs in the country and members may come in with high expectations.

Many members, especially younger members, look to the Inns for networking opportunities. They may be new to the practice, new to the community or looking for a career change. While it should not be anyone's primary reason for joining, it nonetheless is a legitimate expectation and one that can easily be met IF the Inn has a high level of attendance and participation by the membership. This expectation will not be met if the Inn suffers from spotty attendance and poor participation.

Members may and should expect clear communication from the leadership and among the other members. No one wants to have to guess what they're supposed to do or where they're supposed to be. Poor communication detracts from the membership experience.

And finally, the member should expect strong leadership. Knowing that the Inn is well-run and that the leaders will do what they say they will do underpins the member's feelings about the Inn as a whole. Strong leadership also helps create a sense of accountability among the members, which in turn will help foster higher participation.

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How to conduct an orientation

- Hold prior to first full Inn meeting
- Approximately an hour
- Have an agenda
 - Provide for social time
 - Welcoming remarks by President
 - Leadership introductions
 - Inn policies and procedures
 - National organization and video
 - Expectations and goals
 - Q & A

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Since we've covered why your Inn should conduct a new member orientation, let's now discuss how to conduct one.

The orientation should be a totally separate meeting. Resist the urge to conduct the orientation as part of the first regular meeting of the Inn. The new members need the opportunity to get the basic information and ask fundamental questions, and you don't want to bore your returning members with information they already know. The orientation should be conducted prior to the first regular meeting of the Inn, and preferably prior to any pupillage team meetings.

Expect the meeting to last about an hour. It may be possible to schedule the orientation on the same evening as the first regular meeting, an hour or so earlier. For example, the orientation may start at 5:30, with the other members arriving at 6:30 for the regular meeting. This makes for a long evening for the new members, though, so if possible, the orientation should be held on a different evening prior to the first regular meeting.

A sample agenda should include:

- Time at the beginning or end of the meeting for some socializing. Have name tags for each person.
- The president of the Inn should make some brief welcoming remarks, perhaps quickly reviewing the Inn's history and mission.
- The leadership should introduce themselves and explain their individual roles.
- The Inn Secretary or other leader should review the important Inn policies and procedures. Don't forget the details.
- Play the national organization video and briefly discuss some of the important benefits and services.
- Ask the new members to discuss their expectations and goals, and allow for some general Q & A.