

Reenacting How-tos: Methods

LEADERSHIP IN REENACTING

Part 2 – Leadership Off the Field

by Kevin O’Beirne

Author’s Note: This is the second of a two-part article on leadership in reenacting. Part 1 is titled, “Basic Pointers on the Roles of Commissioned and Non-commissioned Officers of Infantry in the Field”.

This article attempts to tackle the thorny issue of off-field leadership of reenactors, and presents pointers for effective management of matters other than military portrayals during events.

Effective *off-field* leadership keeps living history organizations healthy, sees the conceptualization and communication of new ideas, disseminates the results of research, sets a group’s calendar of events, handles the group’s day-to-day business, and sets and corrects the overall course of the group and hobby.

Because off-field leadership encompasses so many critical and diverse aspects, and covers probably 90 to 95 percent of the calendar year, it is probably *more* important than reenactor leadership in the field during events. The hobby can survive some bad officer impressionists, but it cannot thrive and survive poor off-field leadership and management.

There are all kinds of reenactment groups, from the informal mess to “traditional” company-type organizations, to battalions and brigade- and division-sized groups. The leadership requirements for each are different, but the basics of leadership are the same. Perhaps not all of the specifics presented below apply to each type of group, but each type of group requires good leadership.

Rather than spout axioms from textbooks on management and leadership, this article presents its author’s views on issues specific to leadership of reenactors, hopefully with minimal use of “buzzwords”, and with sufficient generality to be applicable to the reader.

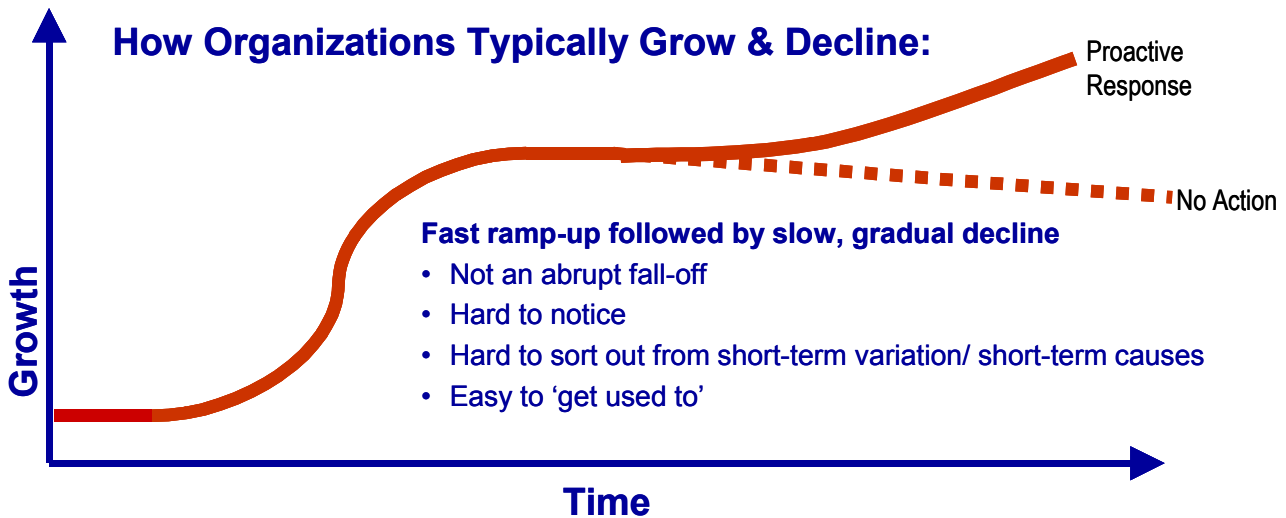
“The Circle of Life”

of work is done in the initial burst of creative energy: new bylaws and standards are written, recruiting is a passion for many, there are new opportunities for members to acquire field-rank, and other issues. The “bad” of the old has been cast off and the future is bright. The new group attends events with an ever-growing number of members and acquires prestige as a force to be reckoned with.

The honeymoon usually ends after six to twenty-four months, as some of the new members become aware that the new group has a few of the old group’s warts and maybe some new ones all its own. A small seed of dissatisfaction grows: the group is “too hardcore” or “not authentic enough”, the new leaders are perceived as power hungry, personal animosities arise, cliques form, or something else. Members start to become somewhat apathetic toward the group’s operations, and the “work” of keeping the group functioning devolves on a few. Events become repetitive and predictable. Development of the group’s field-portrayal(s) stagnates. The group’s roster eventually has more names on it that do not come to events than those who do.

By this stage, the group has reached the plateau in the middle third of the above figure, beyond which it may never progress. Eventually, after more time has passed, like an amoeba or other single-cell organism, the “new” organization splits and the cycle will start anew.

Effective off-field leadership can help keep groups together and vibrant, and define new directions that keep the members interested and challenged. *The above figure does not have to happen to each reenactor group...if its leadership is aware, informed, active, energetic, creative, and continually looking out for the good of the entire group.*



This figure is certainly applicable to reenacting, and most veteran reenactors have seen it in action: Someone breaks off from an existing organization and forms a new, competing group that becomes “the new thing” and quickly attracts members, both from the old group and from the outside. Because, in its infancy, the new organization means all things to all its members, the new members are enthusiastic. Lots

This article covers the following:

- Basic concepts applicable to virtually all reenactor groups
- Leadership 101
- Relations with other groups

- Organization and paperwork
- Communications
- Fundraising and preservation causes
- When problems arise
- Fostering improvement
- Recruiting
- Events

The balance of this article is an overview of each of these topics in an “idealized” fashion. No living history group that this writer has yet seen—including the writer’s own—fully lives up to everything in this article.

Basic Concepts

A critical item that group leaders cannot forget is that reenacting and reenactment groups are *history clubs* with a strong social aspect. While there’s nothing wrong with the social aspect, reenactor groups should be strongly **history based**. Not everyone shares this view; for example, some of my friends maintain that the leader of their former reenactor group once actually said, “The history doesn’t matter.” *The core purpose of a reenacting group should be the study of history and its application in the field, and reenactor leaders’ actions should arise from this basic precept.*

All of a group’s members are leaders, or should be. Even if you’re not on your group’s board of directors or similar decision-making body, anyone can educate the members on some aspect of history, be the group contact for an event, lead an effort to update the group’s list of recommended vendors of reproduction goods, host a social event, and in general make the group a better, more exciting place—*all without ever winning an election or wearing field-rank.*

Members who do not regard themselves as leaders of some sort do so at the peril of the group. Reenacting is an all-volunteer endeavor that runs best when more folks are pitching in to “make things happen”. Remember the figure at the opening of this article: the plateau/trail off part of the group’s existence happens when fewer and fewer folks care and “work” for the group.

The leaders of a reenacting group should accurately and honestly define the group’s **purpose** and then take positive, proactive steps to realize it.¹ Many reenacting groups exist for no reason other than to attend events of “some sort”—and these groups are often the ones that decline after a few years.² Having a real purpose helps to characterize the group and set its course, and tells the members what type of recruits to look for. Periodically, the leaders should revisit the group’s purpose and, if necessary, redefine it so that the group can continue to evolve.



“The Buck Stops Here”: How the CR is supposedly run (photo of Kevin-Truman courtesy of Phil “Photoshop” Campbell)

Leadership 101

The following basic ideas should be understood by reenactor group leaders:

- The group’s *leadership serves the members*—not the other way around. Group leaders in it for “power” and stature should step aside, and contemplate what is lacking in their life outside of the hobby.
- Leaders need to be *good managers*. Some of the most successful reenacting clubs are run like a business.
- Group *members hate egotistical leaders*, and there’s too much ego in reenacting anyway.
- Leaders need to be *accessible, available, and visible* to the members. Those who do not like dealing with people should not aspire to leadership

positions.

- Leaders must *set a good example*. Group leaders must take their job seriously: show up and participate in unit events, should not leave early from events or meetings, and should not be a “weather-wimp” during events. Off the field, good leaders do not go AWOL and thereby leave the group rudderless.
- Leaders who discover that their job is not to their liking should pass it on when their term is up. In the mean time, *you accepted the role so do the work*. Someone has to do it, and too many group Presidents or other important leaders are leaders only on paper.
- While democracy is less efficient than a dictatorship, democracy better serves the members’ needs. Group leaders should *embrace the democratic process and involve members in important decisions*. However, there is a fine line between allowing members a voice, and inundating them with trivial issues—in essence abdicating the leadership position. Leaders must obtain approval of their actions before they happen, to the extent that satisfies the group’s members.
- Good leaders *delegate to responsible individuals*. This spreads the work around and presents opportunities to develop the next generation of leaders. Leaders should look for and cultivate new talent to eventually replace the old. Of course, delegation means that the work may not be done precisely how the leader would do it, which goes back to the above bullet about ego.
- Leaders must *publicly recognize those who work for the organization*. Publicly thanking “Joe”—at the monthly meeting or via an e-mail to the entire group—for, say, organizing last month’s living history event, will make Joe feel good and encourage him (and others) to do more positive things for the group; on the other hand, if Joe’s efforts are swept under the carpet, Joe (and others) will quickly come to the conclusion, “Why bother working when the leaders don’t even remember the effort?” Praise costs nothing and has huge benefits. All members, not just the leader’s friends, who work for the group must be recognized, and failing to do so could be construed as favoritism and clique-ishness.

¹ For example, a number of reenactor organizations maintain that they are committed to “the highest level of authenticity possible”, while their leaders’ actions clearly do not live up to this purpose. Goals should be realistic, achievable, and reflect the members’ desires.

² Several years ago I asked the leader of a reenactor group, “What is the group’s purpose? Define that and maybe you’ll see why you’ve got fewer and fewer men coming to events.” He paused and responded, “That’s a darn good question that I can’t answer after being a member for ten years. Let me get a pen and paper to write this down.”

- Leaders need a *thick skin and big ears*. A good leader always listens to his constituents, both to what is said and what is not said. Leaders will always be subject to the barbs of others—comments meant as overt criticism and those not intended as such but that may come off that way—and must be able to “roll with the punches”, not take the criticism personally, and rise above the rancor for the good of the group, and the leader’s own reputation.

Many items in the bullets listed above are ideals, and few ideals are fully achieved in any human endeavor. Nevertheless, they are something toward which reenactor groups should strive.

Relations With Other Groups

Reenacting is a “team sport” and it is difficult to reenact alone or with very small numbers. While there is the perpetual reenactor argument of quality versus quantity, to a certain extent *numbers do count* because most reenactor messes, companies, and even battalion groups are not nearly the size of comparable military units of the 1860s. While one can lead a really “exclusive” group, what good is a picket outpost event with four men? On the other hand, there is a *lot* to be said for quality and common purpose, and most folks recognize that the “numbers at all costs” approach has little merit.

Different groups have to work together to create positive experiences for their members. This is best accomplished through good relations and alliances with other groups, and may include joining a larger organization, such as a battalion.

Groups that affiliate together must share a common vision of reenacting for the affiliation to be successful. All relationships hit bumpy roads now and then, and it may become necessary for leaders of allied groups in dispute to subordinate their ego to the common good of the larger whole. Diplomacy, tact, open and frank communications, and **common good manners** are necessary instead of jumping to conclusions.

Dissolving an alliance or leaving a battalion is a serious matter to which a group should give very careful consideration. Even while making an exit, it is best to be graceful and courteous—you may need to work with those people again, and a reputation takes a long time to live down. A good leader does not leave a “relationship mess” for his successor to clean up.

In general, it is best for any club to cultivate the best relations possible with other groups, even if your organization does not directly interact with the So-and-So Light Infantry Co. Q, whether due to philosophical differences or geographical distance.

A barrier to improved relationships among groups is stereotypes, like: “They’re farbs!”, “Those hardcores are nasty stitch-counters”, and others. While it would be better if folks tossed aside their stereotype prejudices, fact is, they exist. An open hand and offer of friendship, along with examples of positive conduct, go a long way toward differentiating your group from “the rest of the stereotypes”.

There are some groups and individuals with whom others simply cannot get along. In such cases, it is better if little or nothing is said, in lieu of conducting long-running feuds that do little good for anyone. As Mom said: “If you can’t say something nice about someone, don’t say anything at all.”

Sometimes the conduct of an individual or a small group within an organization sours relations with an outside group, which is increasingly common on the Internet. In such instances, it is beneficial for both groups’ leaders to discuss the problem frankly *and in private* to clear the air and determine if it’s one man’s feud, or something more serious. There are rarely quick answers to such problems; certainly kicking out the offending party(ies) is one, but each situation is different and requires tact, communication, and—on both group leaders’ side—a willingness to resolve the problem so that the relationship is not permanently damaged.

On the Internet, everyone should behave as if someone they have feuded with is reading their forum posts and forwarded e-mails. The Internet is a two-edged sword: a group may benefit from increased

visibility, but there is also greatly enhanced potential to “put your foot in it”.

When relations with another group get rocky, the correct path can be unclear and, until a proper course is identified, and indeed through the resolution of the matter and beyond, plain old good manners and the Golden Rule are required.

Inter-group relations can be touch-and-go. It is the responsibility of leaders and the members to foster good relations with other organizations, for the sake of the group and the hobby as a whole. No leader or organization does this right all the time, but it is up to everyone to make the effort. After all, “Can’t we all just get along?”

Organization and Paperwork

Group leaders are, in part, *administrators* and should handle the group’s affairs professionally and promptly. Too often reenacting organizations maintain poor or insufficient records, have no receipts to back up expenditures, do not balance their checkbook (if they have one), and take a long time to pay their debts. None of these practices go over well in the business world, and are similarly unimpressive to those with whom a group has dealings.

Below are a few considerations relative to the “business” end of effective reenactor group leadership. While much of this list is geared toward more-“formal” groups rather than informal messes, a good deal of the following is applicable to all reenactors:

- One of the group leaders should be appointed as the *file clerk* and serve as the repository for the group’s official documents. A centralized, organized file will make things a lot easier for future leaders when documents such as bylaws, standards, insurance policies, official correspondence, and other items must be referenced. Logically organized hardcopy files and electronic files should be maintained and transferred from one leader to the next as “jobs” in the group change hands.
- While *bylaws* may not be necessary for all groups, when things get sticky they serve as a community roadmap. Optimally, bylaws define how an organization functions and the powers of its leaders, and are a framework for an organization’s day-to-day (off-field) operations. Bylaws should clearly state how the bylaws themselves are modified. Numerous examples of reenactor group bylaws are available on the Internet for organizations that need to update theirs or develop new ones.
- It helps for reenactor groups to have written *standards of “authenticity”* so that members know what is expected of them in the field. Standards should suit the needs of the group relative to their “exactness” and the group’s portrayal(s). Many groups post their standards on the Internet so that it is virtually unnecessary for a group to start new ones from scratch. Of course, the other side having standards of “authenticity” is the necessity of enforcing them, which is covered later in this article.
- Bylaws or standards, if provided, *should address not only materials*, but also provide requirements for participation; for example, age and gender restrictions; rules (if any) for memberships in other groups³; minimum number (if any) of events members must attend, etc. The standards should also provide other guidelines that the group believes are important (such as the drill manual used, guidelines on the group’s approach to camping at events, expected standard of military conduct, etc.).
- For important *meetings*—particularly for annual meetings (where elections are held) or when key decisions are to be made—*an agenda should be published in advance, and minutes of the meeting provided* to all members. E-mail is a good way to publish the agenda and minutes quickly and cheaply and,

³ When members see one of their own in the ranks of another group, it is not uncommon for trouble to occur due to “loyalty” concerns.

optimally, the agenda should be published at least a week before the meeting. These items, while perhaps not vital for every meeting, are important to document when key decisions are being considered and to keep the members informed.

- The need for *insurance* should be considered by all reenactor groups. While many firmly hold that group insurance is indispensable, the need for insurance is a group-by-group decision. If insurance is necessary, how much are the members willing to pay for it, and what types and amounts of coverage are desired? Group leaders should consult with a licensed insurance agent in their locality for the pros and cons. If the group elects to obtain insurance, the group leader must keep a copy of the policy in a readily accessible file.
- Many reenactor groups *incorporate*, which provides benefits such as allowing the group to keep a bank account that is not tied to an individual member's personal finances, and somewhat insulating the members (particularly the governing officers) from liability. However, there is a certain amount of paperwork and "official-ness" that accompanies incorporation that some groups may not desire. Before incorporating, a group should explore the associated advantages and drawbacks with an experienced attorney from the group's geographic area.
- Some reenacting groups become a *Federal 501(c)3 non-profit* educational entity for tax purposes. While this means the group does not pay income taxes and provides a few limited tax breaks for the individual members⁴, it also represents a lot of paperwork for the application and updating the group's bylaws, and filing annual Federal tax returns regardless of income. Before undertaking the effort, the group should evaluate its motivation for desiring tax-exempt non-profit status and establish a framework for submitting its annual tax returns. Failure to do so could result in a Federal audit that could have serious repercussions on the group and its corporate officers. Many groups pursue non-profit status without due consideration of the associated responsibility.

Communications

One of the more important roles filled by reenactor leaders is that of the group communicator, which is often neglected in the hobby. One reenactor summed it up well to this writer: "I love being made aware of what's going on within the group. My old group, however, kept us almost constantly in the dark and I really hated that."

⁴ There are a lot of opinions about reenactors being allowed to deduct certain hobby-related expenses if they are in a 501(c)3 group. For advice, *consult a tax professional*, not a reenactor Internet forum.

Reenactors typically crave info. In short, leaders who do not communicate with their members are keeping their own head in the sand, and risk the group falling apart around them. Informed and involved members are more apt to be happy members who will work to keep the organization running and healthy.

Regular, **informal communications**, such as e-mail and phone calls, are perhaps the most important mode of keeping in touch with the members. E-mails should be fun to read and should make their point quickly; in other words, convey the maximum amount of necessary information with the fewest words.

If e-mail is a common form of communication in your group, inform the members by some means other than e-mail that they should check their e-mail on a regular basis. Encourage members who do not have e-mail to set up a free, web-based account, such as yahoo.com or hotmail.com, that can be checked from either a friend's computer or public-access computers (libraries, Internet cafés, etc.). While it is not always feasible to call everyone in larger groups, phone calls between leaders should never be dismissed in sole favor of e-mail, and "phone trees" are a good way to quickly get important, late-breaking news to the members.

Almost everyone has Internet access these days. Reenactors "surf the web" proudly displaying the web address of their own group and, in turn, checking out the websites of other groups. Because a **group website** helps provide "name recognition" and, anymore, is one of the best recruiting tools available a group, it is

nearly essential for reenactor organizations to have a website. A group's place in cyberspace serves as its electronic outpost and can even take the place of printed recruiting brochures.

Group websites can run the gamut from large and ornate—with slick design, lots of photographs, online newsletters, bulletin boards, authenticity standards, member biographies, downloadable "how-to" articles, event reports, and a host of other info—to modest.

Bigger websites are not always necessarily better. Larger, more complex websites are "easy" to build but require more maintenance than smaller, basic sites. To have a "professional"-looking site a group often has to pay a web server to host the files, and more than one member should be proficient in maintaining a website.⁵ Smaller, less complex websites can be hosted for free on services such as geocities.com. Ultimately, a reenactor website should reflect the "personality" of the group.

Technology should be one of the devices in a reenacting group's communications arsenal, but not necessarily all of it. A good, old-fashioned, **printed newsletter** is a great idea for virtually all reenactor groups, from the five-man mess, to company-sized groups, to

⁵ Do not put all the group's eggs in one basket, so to speak, when it comes to maintaining the group website. The webmaster's access to the site should also be provided to the group President or equivalent position, and a back-up webmaster is always a good idea. Too many group's websites go stagnant and may become an embarrassment to the group because the webmaster disappears and no one else can access the site to modify it.



Reenactor communications at work

battalions. Newsletters are important, because they disseminate news and are a periodic “real” token in a member’s hands that the organization remembers him, which is particularly essential for members who have not been to an event for a while.

Like websites, newsletters run from three or four-page missives presenting little more than basic info on upcoming events, to sprawling, magazine style affairs complete with photographs and feature articles. The “look”, frequency of publication, and style of a group newsletter should reflect the needs and personality of the organization. Basic pointers on newsletters include:

- Newsletters should be published on a regular basis—whether it is only twice a year, or monthly. Regular publication requires a motivated, dedicated editor.
- The purpose of a newsletter is to spread *news*. It is vital that reenactor newsletters include “complete” information on the group’s upcoming events, and the latest edition of the group’s annual calendar.
- Editors should possess a basic, minimum level of typing, spelling, and grammar skills. While this may seem intuitive, over the years, this writer has viewed at least a score of reenactor newsletters where the editor apparently got only to third-grade English. While all newsletters contain typos, proofreading the final cut once or twice before printing is important.
- Printing and mailing the newsletter can be an issue, and could cost a lot of money. Some groups charge as much as \$20 a year per member for newsletter printing, envelopes, and postage, while others find more cost-effective means for printing and distribution. The members should agree on the approach to be used before the group incurs newsletter expenses.⁶

To summarize this section: reenactors need to be kept in the loop and it is the responsibility of their group leaders to see that effective communication takes place.



Fundraising and Preservation Causes

Money is often considered a “drag” that gets in the way of reenacting. Some groups exist very well without dues and bank accounts, and others cannot exist without them. Discussions over money and budgets have torn apart some reenactor groups, while money is not a big concern to many groups.

Leaders need to **chart the group’s financial course**, and, working with the members, determine the reasons for which the group needs money, and in what amount per year. Plan in advance and then set the means and goals for fundraising. Reenactor group expenses can

include insurance premiums, newsletters, website hosting, donations to preservation causes, acquisition and replacement of group property, providing rations for members at events, running an event⁷, and many other things.

Income can include member dues, honoraria (many groups commit to providing a certain number of reenactors to march in a parade or attending a certain living history event in return for financial compensation), solicitation of donations from outside the group, and other sources.

The group needs to identify how it will keep its funds, whether through the group’s corporate bank account (if any) or some other means. Groups that funnel their money through an individual member’s account risk the consequences of financial mismanagement, whether through neglected recordkeeping or other, more nefarious actions. Individuals who have custody of the group’s funds without a corporate bank account are liable for Federal and state income taxes on the group’s revenue, which can be a substantial personal risk when the group’s income is appreciable. If the group’s funds are in the custody of an individual, it is a good idea for the funds to be in an entirely separate account, instead of mixed with the individual’s “personal” finances.

Accountability for the group’s funds is vital. The group’s leaders and members must define what constitutes an acceptable expense and how expenses are approved.⁸ Leaders should make sure that expenses are acceptable to the group before agreeing to an expense on behalf of the organization. It is advisable for the organization’s treasurer to periodically (annually, at a minimum) provide the members with a written report on the group’s finances. A record of income and expenditures should be kept, and a file of receipts maintained for all expenses, particularly if a group has a corporate bank account.

Preservation is a hot issue in the hobby. Reenacting’s *primary* focus is **not** preservation, but preservation can have a role in a group’s operations and “spirit”. Contributing to preservation causes, whether by direct financial donation, fundraising, or by labor (such as helping a historic site to restore a building, cataloging artifacts at a historical society that is short on helping hands, cleaning up an old cemetery, or adopting a monument on a battlefield) does long-term good and can make a reenactor organization feel that it has a higher purpose and “real impact”. The extent to which an organization embraces preservation as a goal, of course, varies from one organization to the next.

Preservation fundraising can be active or “nearly passive”, and the latter kind is probably more palatable to the majority of reenactors. An example of passive fundraising is when a group that sponsors a reenactment tacks extra dollars onto the participant registration fee or spectator ticket price, with the proceeds earmarked for a preservation charity. In such cases, the group may raise a good deal of money for preservation without overtly doing much—producing a very positive result without a lot of effort. Some groups produce something, whether a compact disc of period campfire songs, t-shirts, or something else, and donate the proceeds to a charitable cause.

⁶ Some groups use electronic newsletters, which saves on cost but often results in fewer members reading it, because of the “effort” to visit a website or open an e-mail, download it, and print it. Cost savings relative to printing and postage are wonderful, but there is a lot to be said about getting a hardcopy in your U.S. mailbox.

⁷ While issues associated with running a reenactment or similar event are beyond the scope of this article, it bears saying that, when a group sponsors a reenactment, seed money may be required until event revenue is received. The group may entail a significant financial risk if it underwrites the expense of running a reenactment and revenue fails to equal expenses.

⁸ Accountability is not as intuitive as it may seem. A well-intentioned group known to this writer once spent \$75 on “get well” gifts to for a popular member who was ill for a few weeks, including a \$40 bottle of whiskey, while at the same time another, less-popular member’s parent died and the group opted not to spring for a sympathy card. While reenacting is rife with these types of contradictions, such outrageous examples of group expenses should not be part of a well-led organization’s activities.

There are a lot of preservation charities and the group should determine the *exact* beneficiary **before** commencing a fundraising campaign. It is highly desirable that the charity be a non-profit, Federal 501(c)3 educational corporation, so that contributors can deduct their donation from their taxable income; the beneficiary's Federal employer identification number should be made available to donors.

Many reenactors tend to focus their preservation efforts on battlefield land acquisition and erecting monuments. As worthwhile as these goals are, consideration should also be given to preserving crumbling material relics, such as battle flags, vital documents, and historic properties. When relics disappear they are gone forever, while land—as difficult and expensive as it is to reclaim from development—is rarely “destroyed”.

Finances and preservation causes are not for every reenactment group. However, some groups jump into these affairs without due consideration, to their later chagrin.

When Problems Arise

Being a leader can be a “lonely” position: he is the person who must chart the group's course in good times and bad, keep the peace and, most of all, doing what is right *for the group*—not necessarily what is easiest or best for himself and his friends.

What happens when problems arise? How should they be dealt with? Advance thought will help with solving problems later on.

Relations with other groups are discussed elsewhere in this article. Leaders of groups that work together should communicate often and be honest with each other, but should also exhibit restraint. Inter-group rivalries often get in the way of good relations, and it is up to the leaders to find the right path through the bumpy terrain—hopefully while maintaining and even improving the relationship.

Something that always comes up in reenacting is **individual “disciplinary cases”** within the group, both for situations when a member's *conduct* is poor, and regarding compliance with the group's *authenticity standards*. All too often, failure of a member to meet the group's standards is whitewashed, and problems between individuals can fester until the situation affects the whole group. Failure to address such situations weakens the group and demonstrates that low standards are acceptable for both conduct and authenticity. Enforcing proper (non-outrageous) conduct and compliance with the group's standards is the responsibility of the leaders, and can often be a “dirty job”, but “someone's got to do it.” The group should have a standing consensus, if not bylaws, that specify grounds for expelling a member because, in reenacting, expulsions are sometimes announced at the whim of only one or a few people.

As mentioned elsewhere in this article, the group's **treasury**, if one is kept, should be watched and reported to the members periodically, receipts obtained, and expenses incurred only on items that are agreeable to the group and consistent with the group's purpose.

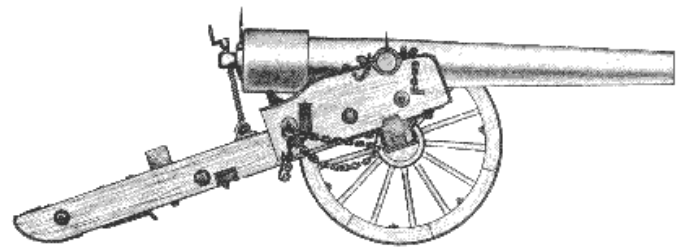
Group property can become a problem in some reenactor organizations. Many groups own things like flags, mess kettles, tents, “loaner gear”, and other items. The group should define who is responsible for community property, who bought and owns it⁹, who can hand it out for members to use, and clearly convey when it is to be returned. An inventory of group property should be maintained, together with the location of its “residence”.¹⁰ *Minimizing the amount of group property is a great, preventative way to avoid such hassles.*

⁹ Problems can arise when an *individual* purchases a flag or something else regarded as “group property” but never formally donates it to the group. Later, if the purchaser departs from the organization, rumors, accusations, and even lawsuits over the ownership of the property can arise.

¹⁰ A fellow in a long-running reenactor group once admitted to me, “Now that I think on it, we don't even know anymore who's got the group mess kettles, frying pans, commissary fly, and a bunch of

Dealing with the group's past leader(s) can sometimes be a challenge. A dissatisfied past leader who remains an active member can quickly become a rallying point for challenges to the group and its leaders. Some past leaders desire a sort of “elder statesman” status within the group and probably wish to be consulted now and then because of their experience. It is a good idea for group leaders to take advantage of this for various reasons, including: 1) the ex-leader's experience and insight may be valuable, and 2) because it is good to keep a former leader on your side rather than opposed to you. Occasional, measured public recognition of a past leader's efforts for the group is also a good idea to smooth the transition from one leader to the next.¹¹

Most serious for the survival of the group, leaders must **watch for signs of apathy and disinterest**. People usually vote with their feet rather than communicate openly, and if the leaders are not doing a good job, attendance will decline. Simply deciding to attend events that are closer to home and fewer in number is not the only solution, or even the right one. It takes work and creativity to retain members' interest and keep them coming out to events. If these signs arise, leaders should take immediate action to curb them, and if they arise, it is a sure sign that members are bored with the group, its events, *and its leaders*.



Fostering Improvement

Reenacting is the most fun when the group's members are learning new things and getting new, educational experiences through the group. To support this, leaders should foster improvement and learning within the group, as a way of keeping it healthy.

Members should be actively encouraged to perform research and disseminate it to the group, because continuous learning helps keep things fresh, interesting, and dynamic. Because reenacting is a history-based hobby, *group leaders should never be afraid of research and its dissemination to the members.*

Group leaders, in cooperation with “in the field” leaders, should schedule and hold drills for the members, together with “classroom” instruction to teach members drill concepts and topics beyond drill.

Learning and improvement can proceed at a pace that is appropriate for the group. While most groups do not desire to become “hardcore” (whatever that really means), it should be kept in mind that reenacting is sometimes described as “experimental archaeology/anthropology”, and experimentation may yield positive results that will require the group to change. This should be embraced by the group's leaders because, simply put, moving forward is good, while standing still usually presages a decline.

Recruiting

Recruiting can be another tricky issue, particularly when it comes to: 1) quality versus quantity, and 2) leaders who appear to be aggressively recruiting their own army corps. As with most things, the group can define an appropriate middle ground that suits it well.

other stuff. I guess they're gone.” This writer believes this is not uncommon in the hobby.

¹¹ All things in moderation. Too much praise of the ex-leader could come off like boot licking or incompetence by the current leaders.

Recruiting programs can be passive¹², active, or aggressive; which one is right for your group, and just how much of the group's energy should go into recruiting?

Being selective about who can join often helps to minimize problems down the road. Determine what type of person your group wants: Younger? One gender only? Hardcore? Easy-going? Or anything warm and bipedal?

Reenactor groups should have a program of some sort for teaching and supporting new members. Each group should determine the kind of support its new members require, and it can be a mistake to push off most of the training on the non-commissioned officers, who may teach their own knowledge base and views, and not necessarily those of the group. Most important, new members need to be made to feel at home if they are to stay. Assigning a mentor to each new member helps, but may not be the answer to all issues regarding new members.

Events

Attending reenactments and living histories together is probably the main reason that groups exist. Events must be carefully considered and event attendance properly administered for the members to have the best experience possible.

The group needs a responsive and responsible person to serve as its point of contact (POC) for each event. The POC should disseminate info to the members, encourage registrations (and process them if the event registers participants at the group level rather than as individuals), convey the sponsors' expectations to the members, and in general serve as a communicator relative to the event. Depending on the event and the group's role in it (attending only, sponsoring, or something else), the POC's duties can vary from being fairly easy to quite complex and demanding. To this writer, *one of the biggest roles to be recognized and improved upon in reenacting that of the unit POC*: proper communication of expectations for an event, with attendant preparations, will go a long way toward making events better, if all of the group's participants are "on the same page" before they arrive at the site.

Setting the group's annual schedule—with a lot of input from the members, of course—is one of the most important things a leader does. A variety of events should be considered and selected, because a "samo-samo" schedule each year can be eventual death to an organization. Consider picking at least one event per year (maybe more!) that pushes your organization's envelope, whether in terms of the type of event, location, or authenticity level.

Events should be carefully screened by the group's leaders before they are presented to the membership-at-large for voting. Groups should not attend an event just because one Internet forum post or e-mail or flyer or an ad in a reenactor magazine makes it sound good. The group's leaders, including the POC, should check it out in advance and determine, 1) Do the sponsors (not the event itself, rather, the individuals running it) have a track record or success or failure? 2) Do the sponsors appear to know what they're doing? 3) Is their event in line with the type of event your group attends, or should attend?

Leaders should learn these things in advance and choose wisely before submitting the event to the group as something worth considering for the annual schedule, because a weekend is a terrible thing to waste. When in doubt about a regularly held event, group leaders should consider sending a small contingent that can report back

to the group before considering a subsequent edition of the event by the full group.

A group's schedule should be "semi-flexible". There is certainly the need for mid-year adjustments to the calendar, but leaders should avoid putting on the schedule "anything that comes up" because it may diffuse the group's strength from "maximum effort" events.



If the group decides to attend an event where there will be significant "downtime", it is up to the group's leaders to identify things for the members to do during the weekend to keep the event fresh and interesting. Extra drill can be a good idea, and other alternatives include things that are firmly rooted in the specific history being portrayed at the event. To get ideas, open a book on that particular campaign, read it, and then urge your group to

re-create some of what it says—which is something of a novel approach to reenacting. Preparing for a special aspect of an event can often be as educational and fun as the event itself.

Event sponsorship is a topic that merits an entire article. Some groups seem addicted to running reenactments...and should not be. Running an event, particularly an annual one, saps the numerical strength, energy, and creativity of a group. More groups should band together to run events cooperatively, thus creating fewer but better and larger events. A few groups that run events should perhaps consider focusing their efforts on other things, because a poor event can tarnish the reputation of the group that sponsors it.

A drawback of event sponsorship is "payback": to get other groups to support "your" event, sometimes your group must commit to supporting "their" event(s), which has the potential to run the group into a "schedule rut" that can be difficult to climb out of as long as your group is sponsoring a reenactment.

Social events, whether in period attire or not, are a good addition to a group's calendar beyond reenactments and living histories. Reenacting is a social hobby and time should be provided for members to relax and enjoy each other's company. Possibilities include stuff like holiday parties, summer picnics, golf outings, and battlefield tours, among other things.

Conclusions

Leading reenactors may not always be easy, but the results of good leadership can be immensely rewarding to the members and the leaders themselves. While all the talents for great leadership rarely reside in one person, there is some "science" that can be learned as well as the "art" necessary for effective leadership of reenactors. Recognizing areas of improvement for the group and working to diplomatically address them, while keeping in focus history and the well-being of the group and supporting the work that allows the group to do other things well, are keys to group longevity, happy members, and a vibrant hobby.

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¹² Some groups do little more for recruiting than have a website and attend events.