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Making Memories, and Renewing the Connection

September 16, 2016

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By Marie Morganelli



Recently, I signed up for a membership with The Rails to Trails Conservancy. For \$10, I received a t-shirt, a membership card, and an acknowledgement that included another opportunity for me to part with my money in support of this organization. Receiving that membership card made me stop and really think about what a membership card means to a donor. That small piece of paper can't be used for a discount anywhere, but it does represent my personal commitment to maintaining outdoor spaces and converting them into usable parks and bike paths all around the country.

Despite not having a specific, usable purpose, that membership card does have a function: it serves as a reminder to me that I have resources available right at hand anytime I am looking for a new, safe, well-maintained place to ride my bike. That card represents my shared commitment with others for the need of safe, free outdoor spaces where I can enjoy some exercise and free time. That card represents the families I see on that trail, such as the

dad I recently saw, who was out biking with his two children, one of whom was learning about the “move to the right” rule when another rider passes on the left, thanks to his dad’s gentle instruction. Further ahead, his toddler was pedaling away on a tricycle. I was so surprised and impressed when the little boy automatically stopped to wait while I passed on my bike. “This dad is teaching his children well,” I thought, as I said hello to the boys and rode on by. As I continued on my way, I remembered that my Rails to Trails Conservancy membership signifies opportunities like this for a father to spend quality time with his children, while teaching them about citizenship, respect for the environment, and good, clean family fun.

All of this, for just ten dollars. I got a bargain!



This recent experience reminds me of the importance of remembering that by working to convert donors into members, we are doing more than simply raising money; we are effectively creating and maintaining an inner circle of goodwill and strengthening our communities.

As a writer, I always try to put myself in the donors’ shoes. Why might they sign up for a membership instead of making a one time or occasional gift? Why do individuals renew their connection with the charity year after year? What do the donors want out of a membership? What benefits them by sending in a check? It’s certainly not the flimsy two-color membership card with their name printed on it. Rather, the key is in what that membership card represents.


Like my recent experience on the bike trail, membership to a nonprofit organization frequently represents memories. Perhaps the membership renewal is to an organization with a brick-and-mortar space that a donor can visit, like a zoo or museum. Then that card becomes the representation of not only future experiences that a donor will have there, but the collective memory of all past visits as well. Perhaps those visits include trips from the donor’s parents or grandparents, or the family birthday parties held at the site, or all of the field trips, and the regular family outings. And by renewing that membership, the donor is effectively renewing that emotional connection and turning it into something tangible and long-lasting.



Marie Morganelli is a freelance direct mail copywriter. You can see samples of her work at her website (***precisewords.org*** (<http://www.precisewords.org/>)) or email her at ***marie@precisewords.org*** (<mailto:marie@precisewords.org>).



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