

MY CUP OF TEA



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Hugh Singleton at 6003 Melbourne Ave.,
Orlando, FL 32835
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Today's subject: What makes an organization?

HERE WE GO again—ask ten people and get ten different answers ... possibly. It is a more common situation to find that some of a group will agree, but not the entire group. Given that situation, how does any organization function in a manner satisfactory to everyone? There must be a common denominator; a basic set of rules that are subscribed to by everyone in the membership. With that basis, how is the organization able to function when differences of opinion arise among its members?

For purposes of discussion, let's assume that the organization is democratic in nature and that in governmental matters the majority rules. It would then follow that a vote be taken of the membership and, simply enough, the majority vote determines the outcome. In Utopia perhaps that would be the case. In our society and times it is seldom that simple. Why? *Because the full membership never votes!*

The result of most voting is that outcomes are the will of only those who vote—not of the entire membership. This means that a small percentage of the group decides all issues that are put to a vote. Is this democracy? If you feel that voting is a right and not a requirement, then you'd say yes and accept the results.

How is every member inspired to cast a vote? My feeling is that elected officers, the leaders of the group, play the most important role in this. Now let's move on to amateur journalism and to AAPA and NAPA in particular.

It is a sad but well known fact that most members of both groups are not active in either writing, publishing or printing. Equally well known is that many of these members have been active in the past, or may become active in the future. Rather than harass these people to become active now, why not create a level of membership for those who are inactive—with a provision to change that level when their status changes? I suggest that membership structure be similar to this:

1. Active Individual Membership
2. Active Family Membership
3. Active Membership – Electronic
4. Inactive Membership
5. Life Membership

Inactive members would receive the monthly bundle and official publication but would not have voting rights. Active membership would require that the member be represented in at least one bundle during each year, either as a writer, publisher, or printer. Active electronic membership would require that at least one publication be electronically posted per year. A life membership would carry voting rights, but would not require activity.

Perhaps the greatest benefit in structuring the membership in such levels is that any stigma now attached to inactivity would be eliminated. Also, there would be no expectation for those members to vote. The responsibility of making oneself heard in decision-making would fall on the shoulders of those who are participating in one way or another, and this group's tendency toward apathy would become the target of our elected officials whose duty would include an effort to encourage full participation in voting.

To those who are already raising their eyebrows, let me assure you that I understand we have not officially blessed electronic journals as a legitimate form of journal. I am, however confident that such a blessing will be given in the future. Discussion is underway, to say the least, and in time will lead to acceptance of a medium that is growing in usage, and one which will not, contrary to some, cause the destruction of hard-copy publishing, nor the death of amateur journalism. That discussion is healthy and full coverage of the pros and cons should be made.

Organizations such as AAPA and NAPA are sustained largely by the satisfaction derived by those who produce in seeing their work and in knowing how it is accepted by their peers. To this end, we should express our appreciation for good journalism and we should do it on a very consistent basis. The publisher who appears in the bundle every month is no less eager to get a compliment card than is the one who appears in the bundle once a year. A healthy organization is one in which all the parts function well, and a lively exchange of appreciation is a very important function that we tend to forget. Here is another area where our leadership can create a genuine sense of belonging.

Looking a bit closer at the leadership of our elected officials, I feel that most officers are well able to fulfill whatever office they hold. It may be that some duties need to be redefined to include such things as I have mentioned. For one thing, I feel that an officeholder who wants to excel in his job will look for ways to do that. For another thing, we all need to understand just what is involved in being an officer, and we need to support those who agree to serve. It can be time-consuming and frustrating, especially without cooperation from members. I think each officer should make public his own opinion on matters of concern and by the same token, each officer should hear dispassionately the opinions of others.