

GROWING UP: BUILDING A LASTING HOMEBREW CLUB

Josh Weikert

Past President, Stoney Creek Homebrewers

2016 National Homebrewers Conference



A NATION OF JOINERS

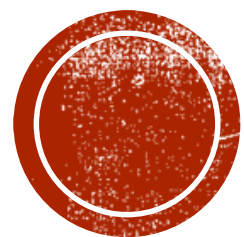
- “In no country of the world has the principle of association been more successfully used or applied to a greater multitude of objectives than in America.”
- More than 1,800 Homebrew Clubs in the US alone, as of 2015
- Easy to start – hard to maintain
 - Most start as charismatic groups



THE SHORT AND HAPPY-ISH LIFE OF A CHARISMATIC CLUB

- Foundation
 - Motivated actors, ad hoc structures
- Growth
 - The Friends, The Walk-ins, and The Transfers
- Fatigue
 - Central figures roll off, burn out
- **Decline**
 - Loss of impetus, energy, membership





PART I: CREATION



THE PERSISTENCE OF (INSTITUTIONAL) MEMORY

- **Institutionalism as an Answer to Charismatic Leadership**
- “Stable, valued, recurring patterns of behavior” that emphasize collective (rather than individual) identities – Huntington, “Political Development & Political Decay”
- Institutions in Brief
 - Deliberate and Purposive Identity
 - Informal Customs and Norms
 - Formal Structures & Features



BUILDING AN IDENTITY

- **“Organization is the mobilization of bias.”**
- For what purpose does your club exist?
 - Education, Evaluation, Competition, Interaction, Production?
- Choose an Identity *BEFORE* you start to grow!
 - Focuses early efforts on institutionally important projects
 - Lower membership turnover
 - Easier leadership recruitment
- Consider your market, goals, population, history
 - Other Clubs, homebrew shops, breweries, civic/fraternal organizations



BUILDING A CULTURE

- Culture, defined
 - Patterns of existing behavior that *inform future behavior & expectations*
- **Deliberate** culture-building
 - Member recruitment
 - Meetings
 - Activities
 - Model of Leadership (autocratic, gatekeeping, collegial?)
- **Organic** culture-building
 - Allow culture to evolve, adapt
 - Encourage input, feedback
- Culture is built by **Example and Enthusiasm**
 - *STAY IN CHARACTER*



BUILDING A LEGAL PERSONALITY

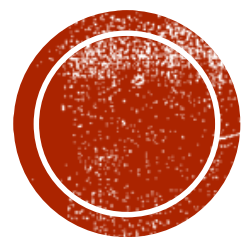
- Bylaws
 - Transparency, functionality, legality
 - Update annually
- Finances
 - Obtain an EIN, Open a club bank account
 - Accountability, Utility
- Incorporation
 - Form of protection for officers, directors, members
 - Ensure continued compliance
- Non-profit Recognition
 - Not required, but simplifies all dealings with the IRS
 - *Know your limits and requirements*
- To Insure or Not to Insure...



THE PERSISTENT CLUB

- Branded Identity
 - Knows what it is, and probably what it *will* be
- Cultivated Culture
 - Behavior reflects ideals, goals, history
- Juridical Personality
 - “The Club” exists, legally





PART II: ACTION



PUTTING THE CLUB TO WORK

- You have a Club – now what?
 - Data overview – 819 respondents to an online survey, geographically diverse
- Meet
- Educate
- Evaluate
- Compete
- Brew
- Socialize
- Give Back



HOME SWEET HOME

- Geography and Venue
- Relationship-building
 - Mutual benefits
- Public venues
 - Restaurants/Bars/Brewpubs
 - Breweries
 - Homebrew Shops
- Private venues
 - Club-owned real estate, Borrowed space



EDUCATION

- Start (and Return to) “Basic”
- Use your own talent
- Identify speakers
 - Brewers (Pro and Home), Maltsters, Farmers
 - Industry figures, Writers
 - Scholars (historians, scientists)
- Roundtable Discussions
- Exam Prep (BJCP, Cicerone)



EVALUATION (#1)

- Tasting Structure
 - Formality correlates to perceived benefit
- Personnel
 - Certified judges
 - The Wisdom of Crowds
- Frequency
 - Every meeting, or at a special meeting
- Focus
 - One beer at a time, Q&A with the brewer



COMPETITION

- Adding urgency, interest
 - Intra-club Competition (one-off or multi-stage)
 - Inter-club Competition
 - Open Competition
 - Duels
 - Circuit/Point Competitions (individual/club level)
- Be Careful of Alienation
 - Should be fun, motivating - not a reason for being



GROUP BREWING

- Big Brews
 - Single/multi-system
- Bulk Ingredient Buys
 - Consider working through a local brewery for grain, hops
- Formal/Informal brewing training
 - First brew(s)
 - Conversion to all-grain
 - New methods, equipment, techniques
- Club-owned Capital Equipment
 - Brew system, presses, dispensing equipment, mills, tanks



SOCIALIZING (#2)

- Open Club socials (at least annual, semi-annual preferred)
 - Open to family, significant others
 - Club-building activities
- Beer-related
 - Brewery visits, festivals, pub crawls, beer dinners, tastings
- Just for fun
 - Trips
 - Game nights
 - Outdoor Activities



GIVING BACK

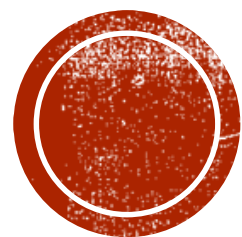
- Brewing Community Activities
 - Brew-offs, conferences, social events
- Charity support out of Club fundraising
- Beer and brewing education events
 - Community Days, Festivals
- Volunteering at community events
 - Group participation in car washes, food drives, etc.
- Donating beer to charity events
- **Get creative! Visibility is good for the club and the hobby.**



THE ACTIVE CLUB

- Make yourself at home
 - Probably your most important institutional relationship
- Give members what they want
 - Value is subjective
- Be creative – but repeat what works
 - Great ideas don't matter





PART THREE: DIRECTION



MANAGING THE CLUB

- What You Need
 - President
 - Big Picture v. Small Picture
 - Treasurer
 - Accounting and Goals
 - Board of Directors (usually required if incorporated)
- What Might Be Nice
 - Vice President
 - Past President
 - Secretary
 - Steward
 - Communications
 - Skill Positions
 - Competition Coordinator
 - Events Coordinator
 - Education Coordinator/BJCP Training Coordinator



HELP WANTED

- Start Simple
 - Minimalist (at first)
- Identifying New Leaders
- Recruit and Promote
 - The *cursus honorum*
- Brewers and Judges
- Ability v. Motivation
 - The Human Capital gap



(ENCOURAGING) PARTICIPATION AWARD

- Make Meetings Worthwhile (Back to Identity)
- Make “idea” people pull their weight
- Mix member-only and “open” activities
- Data-driven activity choices
- Experience-driven activity choices
- When Members Leave...



KEEP GOING.

- Growth spurts
- If things are stagnant – RESET
 - Focus on what worked initially
 - If nothing, then burn down the old house
- Be in touch with your brewing community
 - Encourage BJCP certification, befriend LHBS owners/operators, engage breweries
- **If –**





THANK YOU!

QUESTIONS, ANYONE?

