

THE QUEST FOR EXCELLENCE IN LEADERSHIP

November – December 2018 Issue

To my fellow Legionnaires in the Great State of Texas:

Greetings. Everyone agrees that The American Legion is a good organization. We do a lot of good things for our community, state and nation.

Not only does everyone agree that The American Legion is a good organization, but I'm convinced that everyone also agrees that our noble organization can do a whole lot better. Our communities, state and nation need The American Legion today more than ever! The harvest is plenty, but the laborers are few ... and unfortunately the laborers are getting fewer all the time.

I have no doubt WE CAN do better ... MUCH better. But, in order to do better, WE HAVE TO CHANGE THE WAY WE DO BUSINESS. It will take excellent leaders to make that change. That's where you come in.

All the Departments in the rest of the country are expecting Texas to step up and set the example for The American Legion. Our vision should be to make the Department of Texas the best Department in the nation ... to raise the bar and set a high standard as an example of how good The American Legion can be ... to show that The American Legion REALLY CAN be a positive influence in our American society ... an American society that is hungry for REAL heroes to look up to ... a society that needs The American Legion today more than ever. Your excellent leadership can make that vision a reality.

This journal is not an official American Legion publication. Rather, it is intended to be a medium for communicating ideas among leaders for the purpose of improving the performance of The American Legion in Texas, the same way we would communicate via e-mail.

Are you counted among the growing number of Legionnaires in Texas who have joined the quest for excellence in leadership? Are you one of the faithful and patriotic Legionnaires who understands what the words "For God and Country" truly mean? Please let me know if you are one of those excellent leaders who wants to share your ideas to help make the Department of Texas THE BEST!

I am faithfully and patriotically "For God and Country",
JEROME ILTIS



My name is JEROME ILTIS. I'm not currently a candidate for any high office in The American Legion, nor am I appointed to any National or Department Commission or Committee. I'm looking for excellent leaders to share their ideas to make the Department of Texas the best Department ... for the Good of the Legion ... and for the Good of the communities, State and Nation that we serve.

In this issue:

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- *Can You Hear Me Now?*
- *Calling All Leaders!*

The Oratorical Contest: *A Cause for Reflection ... A Call for Leadership*

For God and Country, Legionnaires associate ourselves together for ten specific purposes. The very first of those ten purposes is “To uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States of America.” Since the vast majority of us aren’t serving on active duty in the military anymore, how do we fulfill that purpose?

Many Legionnaires are perhaps unaware that we have a huge opportunity to uphold and defend the Constitution. We can do it by educating our youth about the Constitution through the awesome Legion program called the National High School Oratorical Contest. It is our duty to pass along to our youth – our future leaders – a deep understanding of why it is most important that the Constitution be upheld and defended. Unanimously, contestants will tell you they are much more knowledgeable about the Constitution because of their participation in the Contest. By virtue of this fact, we can appreciate knowing that we have fulfilled our first purpose to those students who participate.

Anyone who has had the pleasure of attending an Oratorical Contest can attest to being thoroughly impressed by the young orators. Simply amazing is their ability to articulate that the Constitution is the reason why our nation is great. Listening to their words of wisdom is inspiring and it gives us a chance to reflect upon our individual obligations to our community, state and nation. For example, at each contest, inevitably a contestant will bemoan the fact that only a fraction of the electorate exercises their responsibility to vote. Expressing dismay over the small voting populace makes us reflect on our own responsibility to vote during elections, a responsibility that our organization strongly emphasizes. The original resolution urging all Legionnaires to vote was approved at the 1920 National Convention. Since then, countless similar resolutions have been passed advocating Legionnaires to not only exercise their constitutional responsibility to vote, but to also encourage others to do the same. Therefore, the Oratorical Contest should cause us to also reflect upon how well we perform our public relations responsibility as an organization to encourage others to vote. Such reflection should result in a comprehensive “Get Out The Vote” campaign which may include posting messages on social media, broadcasting radio public service announcements and issuing news releases to media outlets.

From a broader perspective, the Oratorical Contest may illicit deep reflections on the philosophy that everything we do as Legionnaires should be to fulfill our overarching purpose “For God and Country”. Obviously, it doesn’t take much reflection to know that we are for our country when we uphold and defend the Constitution. But how

does the Oratorical Contest help us fulfill those first two words of our purpose: “For God”? Pondering this, we come to understand that God endowed each of us with the gift of a free will. We freely choose to either live by His moral statutes, or not. So, essentially, God gives us the freedom to choose our eternal destiny, either in heaven or in hell. The same is true for our country. The Founding Fathers crafted a constitution that endowed the citizens with a democracy allowing us to choose how we govern our nation ... knowing that if we choose to be a moral nation, our country will succeed ... and knowing that if we choose to be an immoral nation, our country will fail. Founding Father John Adams proclaimed, “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.” Mr. Adams’ proclamation was based upon his assertion that “we have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion.”

President Ronald Reagan said it best: “If we ever forget that we are one nation under God, then we will be a nation gone under.” The Oratorical Contest should help the students realize that being for God not only means having a personal relationship with Him, but it also means keeping our nation under God by keeping Him in the public square. These young future leaders will be making a lot of important decisions in their lifetimes that will influence many people. Developing their deep understanding of the Constitution by participating in this Contest will hopefully prompt them to consider the morality of their future leadership decisions because, by doing so, they will be affecting the future morality of our great nation. Hopefully they will understand that if our country is for God, then He will be for us ... and if God is for us, who can be against us!

Given the enormous educational benefit to the students who participate in the Contest, and given their eventual contribution to our American society, we should reflect on ways to foster and perpetuate participation by more of our youth. Over 1.5 million high school students attended Texas public schools in 2018, but it is estimated that less than 0.01% of those students participated in the Oratorical Contest. No students should be deprived of the opportunity to participate due to our lack of promotion. Again, we must reflect upon our public relations responsibility as an organization and strive to make students, parents and teachers more aware of the Contest.

Our reflections compel us to conclude that Legionnaires are called to lead the effort to maximize participation in this worthy program we call the Oratorical Contest.

Can You Hear Me Now?

A tagline is a catchy phrase that sticks in people's minds while making a powerful statement.

Verizon used a tagline very successfully to market their cellular communications services. In 2002, the company was spending an estimated \$1 billion every 90 days to improve service quality and to expand its coverage "footprint" (the term given to a mobile-phone reception area). Rebranding itself as a premium service provider, Verizon launched its "Can You Hear Me Now?" advertising campaign on January 14, 2002. The number of Verizon subscribers increased from 32.5 million at the campaign's launch to 37.5 million in 2003. By the start of 2004 the number of subscribers was 43.8 million, which indicated that quality was indeed a strong selling point for cellphone consumers.

Several years ago, The American Legion National Headquarters held a contest to solicit from its members a new tagline for the organization, offering \$500 for the winning entry. Upon further study, National cancelled the contest because some Posts and Departments had already drafted their own taglines.

If the Department of Texas had a tagline, it should be, "Can you hear me now?". Verizon used the tagline to achieve its strategic goal to improve the company's performance by expanding their footprint to better serve their customers. Likewise, the Department should use the tagline to strongly emphasize its strategic goals to Legionnaires in order to continuously improve our organization's performance, expanding our "footprint" in society to better serve citizens.

Metaphorically Speaking

Continuously improving our performance means continually increasing participation in our programs. A robust marketing, media and communications strategy is needed to do this. Like the character in the Verizon commercials, the Department needs to frequently ask our Texas society the metaphorical question, "Can you hear me now?"

If The American Legion asked today's Texans, "Can you hear me now?", their metaphorical answer would be, "No." Here are a few reasons why:

- According to National's analysis, American Legion Baseball creates an awareness of The American Legion more than any other Legion program, by far. Unfortunately, American Legion Baseball is one of the best kept secrets in Texas. The program is virtually unknown among today's high school baseball players across the state. Testimony to the secret is the fact that there were only two legitimate Legion Baseball teams playing in the State Championship tournament this past July.
- It's ironic that the Department has an Oratorical Contest. The irony is that the contestants are judged on their communications abilities, yet the Legion's ability to communicate information to students about the Contest is lacking. Most Texas high school students don't know that this Contest exists.
- Similar to the Baseball and Oratorical programs, too many young men and women in Texas are unaware of the Junior Shooting program.
- The opportunity to participate in the National Security Awards programs creates enormous potential for enhancing our public relations. Unfortunately, the opportunity has been squandered in recent years because only a few nominations have been submitted for the awards.
- The rare submission of Media Award nominations is a stark indication that today's Texans don't "hear us".

Effective Leadership is Essential for Success

Instead of a 100% Americanism being fostered and perpetuated, excuses are fostered and perpetuated by Legionnaires who actually believe the excuses are real. It's easy to conjure up mythical excuses for the inexcusable minimal participation in the programs. And it's easy to play the blame game. Making excuses and casting blame are not the traits of an effective leader. Seeking, finding and implementing



solutions to achieve success defines genuine leadership.

The Boys State program is one such success. Its marketing, media and communications strategy is key to its success. It stands to reason that the Boys State program strategy may be the model for the other programs to emulate.

National headquarters keenly understands that developing and executing sound marketing, media and communications strategies is essential to the success of The American Legion. This is the reason why National developed the Public Relations Toolkit. The Toolkit and resource annexes are a complete kit of easy to use media products that can be tailored to promote Post, District and Division activities during the course of the year.

By virtue of the numerous marketing, media and communications tools developed by the National Organization, there is an expectation by the National Executive Committee that the tools be used at every level to create a public awareness and a positive image of The American Legion in every state. However, the historically low number of media award nominations submitted annually to the Department of Texas is an indication that the tools, suggestions and advice offered by National are not used to a great extent.

While the Toolkit is billed as “easy to use”, it is nevertheless daunting, and perhaps intimidating, to many Legionnaires who are inexperienced in the field of communications. Even to those Legionnaires who are experienced communicators, the effort to

execute a detailed Public Relations Action Plan with the help of the Toolkit is very time consuming. This isn't an excuse, but rather it is a realization that we should work smarter and better, not harder.

Organizing for Success

Without a robust marketing, media and communications program at Department headquarters to proactively train and assist the Posts, it is unrealistic to expect each Post to possess or to acquire the expertise necessary to develop and execute sound marketing, media and communications strategies in their local communities. Many of the marketing, media and communications efforts suggested by National lend themselves to being accomplished at the Department level.

The investment in a trained and experienced Department staff person dedicated to the task of executing a robust marketing, media and communications program would be paid back in terms of increased participation in the programs. Increased participation would result in increased membership because it is the activity of the Post that entices veterans to join. This staff person could also assume the duties of transferring DMS members into local Posts. (Reference the article entitled "Making Perfect Business Sense" in the previous issue of *The Quest for Excellence in Leadership*.)

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National's expectations for the Department to execute an effective marketing, media and communications program are more wide ranging than the current responsibilities of the Department Public Relations and Publications Commission. In order to better align the Department organization with the function and intent of the National organization, the Department Bylaws should be amended to replace the existing Public Relations and

Publications Commission with a Marketing, Media and Communications Commission. In that regard, Article IV, Section 4(g) of the Department Bylaws should be replaced in its entirety with the following text to read:

"Marketing, Media and Communications Commission:

- To work in concert with all Department commissions and committees to build awareness of and support for the mission and programs of The American Legion in the State of Texas, and to promote same to active-duty military, Guard and reserve components, military veterans and retirees, individual citizens, the general public, the United States Congress, the Texas State Legislature, media, national and local government agencies and corporate America,*
- To educate and inform The American Legion Family of the mission and programs of The American Legion for the purpose of motivating them to promote and participate in the activities and aims of The American Legion,*
- To develop and execute effective membership and fundraising campaigns,*
- To provide direct oversight of all Department publications, Department Website, The Legion Times and any and all communications media of the Department, and*
- Such other purposes as may be assigned to it by the Department Executive Committee."*

All references to Public Relations and Publications Commission in the Department Bylaws would be edited to reflect the aforementioned organization change. All members and meetings currently authorized for the Public Relations and Publications Commission would remain the same for the Marketing, Media and Communications Commission.

It is envisioned that the newly formed Marketing, Media and Communications Commission would work with the Long Range Planning Committee to promulgate strategic goals and objectives. It would also consult with National HQ and with TEXALPA to establish performance measures for the marketing, media and communications program in the Department of Texas, and report the measured performance of the program annually at the appropriate statewide convention(s).

After promulgating the strategic goals and objectives, the Commission should determine if hiring a temporary, part-time, permanent or contracted staff person is the most effective means of executing a robust marketing, media and communications program at the Department level.

Conclusion

New and better ways need to be instituted in order to get the word out about our programs to the young baseball players, student orators, and marksmen, and to the law enforcement officers, firemen, EMT's, media and others. Then, in the spirit of the tagline "Can you hear me now?", the effectiveness of our promotional efforts should be measured and continually improved.

Verizon achieved the two main goals of its ad campaign:

- 1.) To establish itself as a premium service provider and
- 2.) To increase its subscriber base.

Similarly, The American Legion should strive to achieve two main goals of its marketing, media and communications Strategic Plan:

- 1.) To establish itself as the premier community service provider and
- 2.) To increase its membership.

For Verizon, the tagline targeted its potential customers. For The American Legion, the tagline should target the leaders in our organization. It should be the motivation that drives the Department's marketing, media and communications strategy. It should be used as a constant reminder for our leaders to continuously measure the Legion's "footprint" in our Texas society. The more Texans "hear us now", the more successful our noble organization will be.

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Oratorical Contest schedule:

- *Local Contests must be held after October 27 and must be completed by December 14.*
- *District Contests must be held after December 14 and must be completed by January 18.*
- *Division Contests must be held after January 18 and must be completed by February 10.*

Calling all leaders!

Your leadership is needed to confront the urgent situation we face in the Department of Texas. Not only is the declining trend in membership already diminishing our relevance, but it is threatening our mere existence.

If you agree that The American Legion needs to play a more active role in the betterment of our American society, then you are called to lead.

Legionnaires everywhere are counting on you to step up and lead the Department of Texas to be the BEST Department in the country.

- Please let me know if the constructive suggestions offered by this journal are beneficial.
- Please let me know if this journal should be continued.
- Please let me know if you have any excellent ideas that you wish to share in future issues of this journal.

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