

Building your Chapter

Tips for growing a strong and healthy chapter.

Introduction:

I get it. You have a passion for riding. You especially enjoy sharing the experience with fellow riders. Now you've made the decision to step up and become a leader of a chapter. You have read and understood the Code of Conduct and the Club Constitution and are familiar with the Riding Guidelines. You are ready to get the chapter rolling!

You will be responsible for finding roads with great views, the best burger joints, and the occasional roadside oddity. At times, it may become a drudgery and you may not feel up to it, but you will carry on. You are the First Officer. Make no mistake, being a First Officer is sometimes a difficult job, but it can be one of the most rewarding things you could do. Below are tips learned and wisdom shared from mentors, that I hope you use to get started on the ride to growing a strong and active chapter.

Reality Check: If you wanted the job for the title or you think you're a better leader than the last person or you think you know the "right" way to lead..., you need to step back and evaluate yourself. There's a good chance you're going to fail as a first officer. Being a first officer is not about you. It's about your members. It's a hard pill to swallow, but for many chapters that do not succeed, you can point to the first officer as a primary reason. Of course, that isn't the only reason, but it is the main one.

The keys to follow:

Communication is THE KEY! The best way to increase participation is communication. Preferably multiple ways but staying in touch with the members REGULARLY is important. How you do it, is up to you, but a weekly email blast with your dinner ride plans, followed by a forum or social media post about the event. Encourage members to join whichever medium works for the chapter. Most importantly, follow up with a post ride message, and better yet, include photos.

Be consistent: If you decide to plan a weekly dinner ride every Tuesday, do your best to keep that schedule, regardless. Make sure if you use the 50/50 rule, you explain it to members. If you need to get help from your SO or Ride Leaders and rotate ride responsibilities to keep the schedule, do it. The "50/50" rule is a reference to temperature and precipitation. If either the temperature is less than 50 degrees and/or the chance of rain is over 50 percent, the ride would be cancelled. Depending on your region, this can be modified.

Acknowledgment: As First Officer, you should greet every rider that shows up for a ride, shake their hand and thank them for being there. At the restaurant or destination, spend time with everyone. After the ride is over and before everyone departs, make the rounds again, shaking hands and expressing thanks for being a part of the ride.

Listening: With the different views from members, be open and willing to try something different. Maybe a different place for a dinner ride or a ride to see an event, or park, etc. Be willing to accept member's suggestions.

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Advertise: You advertise your chapter by wearing your patch and being seen. As an officer, you should be wearing a patch on club rides, but encourage regular members to do the same. As your chapter is out, other riders will take notice. Additionally, get out and get involved with the community. If there are local bike nights or other bike related social gatherings, make a point to go and mingle with independent riders. I would caution on going so far as "recruiting" members as you may not know what other clubs may be present. If asked about your club or chapter, be sure to have a business card available.

Involving members: The officially recognized positions in a chapter, are the First Officer and Second Officer. This should not stop you from asking a member to take on a task that would benefit the chapter as a whole, such as a membership manager, tail gunner, ride leader, meeting planner, etc. If you plan to host a rally, don't try to take it all on yourself. Give others the opportunity to get involved and let them take ownership of a project or position and importantly, feel a part of the chapter.

Give Respect: Always remember, "If you want respect, give respect". Treat all members with respect, even ones you may disagree with. NEVER talk down, demean, or criticize a member. If you need to have a discussion or offer correction to a member, do NOT do it in front of other members. If needed, have another officer present, but do not gang up on anyone.

Do not take yourself too seriously: Be willing to take the occasional jab, be the target of a joke or accept criticism. Be able to laugh at yourself. It shows that you are comfortable and confident with yourself.

Become a Mentor not a Subversive: When you step down, step away. Let the next officer have the chance to lead their way. Resist the temptation to correct or offer your opinion if it was not asked for. Make sure the incoming officer knows you support them and are available to assist if needed. Just because you did it different, does not necessarily mean it is wrong. Use your experience to help people grow in the club. If your advice is requested or there is an absolute need for input, do it privately or in a way that does not demean or undercut the current officers credibility.

To be a leader, you must be willing to be a servant.