

I Can Do That

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A 2011 poll of IEEE members demonstrated the many reasons why IEEE members retained their membership. These reasons including access to group insurance policies and, for society members, access to valued journals and other publications as well as discounts to IEEE conferences. It is interesting that about half of IEEE memberships do not include membership in a society. A majority of IEEE members take a rather passive approach to the group. They are essentially buying access to information, discounts or group insurance policies. In this article we will look at what members can do to enhance a passive IEEE membership with a more active and participatory membership. Volunteering in local and even regional IEEE activities can have significant financial and societal benefits for the volunteer.

An important reason to be part of a professional society is to gain benefits that include discounts at conferences, access to journals and other publications as well as access to group policies and other discounted products and services. However there are other facets of an IEEE membership that may offer even greater benefit to a member. These additional benefits are related to using the IEEE as a social network and as a springboard for action that can benefit other IEEE members, engineering in general, and the worldwide community.

Engineers and technical professionals who are IEEE members are often a bit introverted, interested more in things and systems than in social groups, and more likely to have a few good friends rather than a large loosely connected social network. As a consequence, they are often a bit shy or even reserved when in most social settings. The concentration in focus that these introverted habits provide may have served us well in both learning and practicing our professions, but when looking for new employment or new opportunities, some social skills can come in handy.

The IEEE offers a number of ways that members can expand their participation beyond just passively participating in meetings. The rewards from such participation include: learning leadership skills, developing social habits and creating social networks that may help in current or future job searches as well as benefiting the local technical community.

In many areas of Region 6, but not all, there are enough IEEE members in a section to support regular meetings on a number of technical topics. In some of the larger sections there are even more activities that may be of interest to technical professionals, including trade shows, conferences, etc. These gatherings offer an

opportunity to meet other people in the same or related technical fields as well as to learn about topics of current or potential interest. The organization and operation of these meetings is another advantage of IEEE membership. If you find these sort of meetings to be of value to you and you would like to develop your social connections and social skills you may want to consider helping to organize these meetings, running as a local officer of a society chapter or even the local IEEE section. If you need an invitation, consider yourself invited to become a leader in your local IEEE section!

Participation in local (or even regional) IEEE activities doesn't need to occupy a lot of time. Many useful things can be done in a small amount of time. A member of a local society chapter program committee may come up with a good speaker for a future event or be part of a committee with a limited time contribution. Of course, as time allows or interest develops more time can be put into IEEE volunteerism. Volunteerism can even help support IEEE and Region 6 initiatives such as helping local schools with technical help and even activities outside of the local area.

Here are some things I would like to see done to facilitate and attract IEEE volunteerism both at the local and regional level:

- Create a Region 6 committee on IEEE volunteerism that can help promote and facilitate IEEE members helping their professional group and community
- Get the IEEE involved in local education and humanitarian activities that could use some technical assistance
- Provide IEEE sections with resources to help them get IEEE members interested in local and regional activities that the IEEE is involved in
- Create a method for local volunteers to network with each other on best practices and also suggest Regional volunteer activities
- Make sure that our Regional officer training emphasizes methods to find and support IEEE volunteers
- Create leading edge and useful Regional IEEE volunteer initiatives that allow participation by local volunteers with whatever time that they can afford to provide

By creating an active IEEE volunteer network we can help our membership be more than passive members. These activities can be short and consume little time or effort or be more in depth and engage a greater leadership and participation by the volunteer. We need to provide a means for any Region 6 IEEE member to feel they can say, "I can do that..." when asked if he/she can help with IEEE volunteer activities.