



## Developing a Caring Culture

Rev. Peter R. Hook, VFW National Chaplain 2024-2025

People join organizations for various reasons, but they stay and remain involved over a long period of time because of the mutually satisfying relationships they form and the care they receive. This is true for churches, synagogues, civic, and service organizations such as the VFW.

When an organization embraces and cares about its members, it seems to thrive, and retention remains high. Individuals involved in such organizations feel valued and respected. They build up one another, and each member becomes a better person as a result of being a member of such an organization. It is mutually beneficial and satisfying. Unfortunately, many organizations and workplaces are not like this. They just take from their members. They "use" people. And, when the person being used becomes exhausted and has nothing more to give, he/she becomes expendable. As a result, people who were once dedicated, vibrant members begin to fade into the background, and before long they drop out altogether. When this happens, and a pattern begins to develop, it is time for the leaders of such organizations to stop and analyze not only "what" is taking place, but to ask "why" this is happening. Why is it that our once-thriving organization is disintegrating and decaying? Why has it become so difficult to get people to participate and help? They should take an honest look at the organization and ask themselves, *"Who in their right mind would want to join such an organization, and over time, be "used up" and become physically and emotionally exhausted?"* Most people have enough problems to contend with; they do not need more.

It is time for each Post, if they have not done so, to create a community-wide caring culture. Posts should seek to develop a culture where every person is respected and valued because of who they are, not only because of what they can contribute. A culture needs to be established where its members are valued and where the leaders and the people reach out and care for one another spontaneously. In time, the members of such an organization feel appreciated. And they feel they are receiving much more as a result of being a part of the organization than they give to it.

Here are some steps to begin to develop a caring culture:

1. **It starts with the mindset of the leaders.** A caring culture begins at the top. When leadership demonstrates a welcoming, respectful, and caring attitude, valuing every individual in the organization, it is noticed. Over time, this positive attitude becomes contagious and shapes the entire organization.
2. **Do not tolerate gossip or speech that tears down others.** Speak well of others. Address issues directly and with grace. Don't let toxic speech take root. When problems arise, deal with them promptly—and be quick to forgive.
3. **Encourage Spontaneous Kindness.** Unleash people and encourage every member to take the initiative and respond when they hear of situations. When a member receives several phone calls congratulating them upon the birth of a child or grandchild, or if they receive a note in the mail expressing grief upon hearing of the loss of a loved one, it is always appreciated.
4. **Meet Practical Needs.** Small gestures matter. A grocery gift card offered quietly to someone going through a rough patch. A handshake from a Post Commander with a card discreetly passed along. These actions speak volumes.
5. **Mark Milestones and Memories.** Keep track of significant joys and sorrows that members have encountered. Call them or send "Thinking of You" notes. Not long ago I said to one of our members, *"Monday, it will be two years since you dad passed."* He looked at me a bit startled and then, with tears forming in his eyes said, *"You remembered."* Remembering these moments demonstrates that the community truly cares about its members.
6. **Form a Caring Committee.** Consider forming a small caring committee that the leadership can call on to respond thoughtfully in times of need. A few dedicated individuals can ensure no one falls through the cracks.

Remember, the things that are not seen (but felt), are the most important things to the members of any organization.

Blessings as you serve,



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