

NEWCOMERS ARE NICE... Once You Get to Know Them

Advice to Established Members

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Having to talk with newcomers can be unnerving for some people, but we all share one thing in common – we were all, once upon a time, newcomers to the SCA. Somehow we survived the “newby” period to become the more “experienced” member. For many, orientation to the SCA was provided by a friend who was already a member, but nowadays more and more people are coming into the SCA by themselves. Therefore, many groups have an official host (chatelain/hospitaller) whose main function is to meet new people, answer questions, give out literature and steer the newcomer to the appropriate resources. However, an official chatelain should not exist so that no one else need bother with new people. The chatelain *supplements* each individual member’s efforts to greet new faces. How can you help welcome a new person?

First, *go up and say hello*. If you are not that “old” in the group, ask if the person is new. Sometimes it is a veteran member who is showing up after a long absence! Sound pleased, but not gushy, that the new person was interested enough to come. New people have a need to be noticed. Greeting someone is an easy way to provide simple recognition. Keep in mind that you are probably far more comfortable in the SCA than the new person is. The SCA is *your* bailiwick. You can afford to provide the recognition the newcomer needs to feel more secure in the strange environment and be glad he or she came. This is known as courtesy to strangers, and dukes as well as commoners practice it.

Introduce the new person to your friends and to those working on crafts. The new person may not remember who they are, but perhaps the members will speak with the newcomer later in the meeting or at future meetings. Being left alone and ignored is very hard on a new person!

Ask what the newcomer knows about the SCA. That gives a place to start a conversation and to fill in some gaps in knowledge. Ask why they came to the SCA and listen with courtesy. Inquire about modern-day hobbies and interests. It may help you identify what areas they might like to know more about. When you want to go back to your business, suggest that they might like to look around and then come back to talk with you before they leave. Check back with them before the end of the meeting if they haven’t come back to you.

Ask the person if you can explain what is going on. Too often, established members will say, “If you have any questions, just ask,” and then walk away. New people often do not know what they want to know, or they may not have a question that they think is worth asking.

Instead, try something like, “Come with me while I...” and then explain what is going on. Experiment with:

- “May I explain...?”
- “Are you interested in...?”
- “What do you like to do?”
- “What are your interests/hobbies?”
- “Would you like to talk to someone about... (leatherworking, cooking, embroidery, fighting, armor, calligraphy, archery, costuming, music, brewing, etc.) ?”
- “What can I explain?”
- “May I introduce you to someone who knows about...?”

Help the newcomer participate. If the group is participating in some activity such as dancing, do be sure that *you* invite the newcomer. Don’t wait for the dance leader to think of it. And don’t expect that most newcomers will ask a member to dance! Remember, too, ladies, that if there are not enough lords, you can ask a female newcomer to dance with you. Use the nice touches of courtesy such as “my lord”, “my lady” and polite gestures such as a slight bow or curtsy, especially if you are in garb. Being called “my lord” or “my lady” enhances the feeling of participation and offers a touch of confidence to the newcomer.

See that newcomer information is available. Arrange with the seneschal or chatelain/hospitaller to have newcomer material brought each week, such as a copy of the kingdom’s newcomer booklet, the SCA’s *Forward into the Past*, a copy of *Tournaments Illuminated* and/or your kingdom’s newsletter. You might also want to have a copy of *Compleat Anachronist*, instructions for making simple garb, a photo album, and so forth. Include a local group handout listing meeting place and times, especially for guilds or interest groups, a contact person and phone number or e-mail address. Give out a copy of the group’s newsletter. Bring an SCA membership form and an order form for items from the Stock Clerk.

Get the newcomer’s name and contact information. Ask them to sign a “guest book” so that you have a way to contact them if they come to several meetings and then don’t show up. Ask why they haven’t been attending. Their reasons may be illuminating!

With all this, keep in mind that a newcomer may suffer from overload. There is so much to see and learn! There are too many people doing too many quality pieces of handcrafts and the newcomer may feel as if he or she can never measure up to the experienced member’s level of skill. Having been told something once is no guarantee that the new person heard it or will remember it. That is why brief, informal newcomer meetings can be so important and

why continued, personal contact from you, the established member, is so vital to their continued participation.

May you never lack for something to say to a new person and may your group never lack a steady supply of new people!