

Strategic Planning Responds to “Why Change” Survey

“Rebranding” is the fourth installment from the Strategic Planning Committee in response to opinions received from the “Why Change” questions posed via E-News and in the magazine in December and January. The committee is again illuminates the efforts that are in process to address the issues, inform everyone about ideas raised by strategic planning efforts, and introduce new thinking stimulated by the membership’s responses to the “Why Change” initiative.

Rebranding

There has been a movement to change the name since the early days of the organization. In all of the “why change” responses, NO YOUTH MEMBER requested we keep the name. While the brand equity and international history of the organization was recognized, the vast majority of those who commented asked for a name that had utility to members when they talked about the organization with the larger community.

Members reported (and this was different than what adults thought) that online communication and facility is vital at all levels of the organization. It has to be targeted (by age), fresh and easy to navigate. They will visit it frequently if they feel it relates to them and they identify with the images. If PC does not provide a home for their horse-related needs (social, interest, information, education, access, maybe entertainment) they will search around till they find it elsewhere

Members stay or leave due to flexibility of program. PC program has to meet varied needs of today’s youth including: time, interests, costs and location. Communications methods have to serve the entire membership. This requires a place for: those seeking information about us, parents, volunteers, contributors, sponsors, local leaders and regional leaders, members (at developmentally appropriate levels) and the larger horse community

Horse Management learning and education is valued as one of the BEST parts of the PC program. However respondents complained about inequities, pickiness and unreasonable or uninformed judging experiences.

What is PC doing about it?

Short term

In May 2008 the Board of Governors committed to change the organization name to something meaningful to today’s youth. At that meeting it was recognized that while the organization never required members to ride in English tack, by tradition we had excluded those youth who did not follow the hunting, Eventing sports. The board resolved to intentionally seek participation of any youth who was passionate about horses.

The success of the specialty ratings concept, the age extension and the centers program are direct outcomes of leadership understanding the changed landscape of the lives of young people today. These programs were created over the past half dozen years to create program opportunities for more kids.

The electronic media is the currency of youth communication. Leadership recognizes this and is testing models for cell phone and computer use at rally, testings and activities. Thus far the tests

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have been successful, with members acting responsibly, and evaluations should lead to more realistic rules, practices and utility.

There has been a concerted effort to focus on D-level Horse Management instruction. If not adequately provided in the club, many regions have instituted regional HM instruction opportunities. In his first year as President, Art Kramer started a renewed focus on D program. For 3 years the strategic plan has recommended HM judging explore a POSITIVE scoring system, a more instructional judging model that recognized the skills required for the achievement of upper level ratings and did not require redundant oversight by judges. Seminars have been held to engage HM judges in these changes.

Long Term

Leadership is engaged in identifying what PC does better than any other youth organization. Historically we have claimed the ratings-based curriculum as the core of the organization. This missed the important skills, responsibility, teamwork, peer-to-peer education and leadership experience that are the hallmarks of those who attain the highest ratings. The PC culture is defined by these.

We know that most of our members do not progress beyond the D rating. Efforts are being made to understand what they take away from their PC experience—what values, knowledge, friendships, skills and memories are important to them—even if they don’t progress past the D level.

As numerous efforts to reduce paperwork, increase ease of use of the webpage, incorporate social networks, have administrative efficiencies, provide useful portal to the interested public, be a delivery mechanism for program content and education all converge on electronic media; the deficiencies in the current webpage are apparent. Leadership is committed to addressing this reality. A major part of PC’s future will have substantial online properties.

Both the Activities and Instruction councils are looking hard at HM, which is considered one of Pony Club’s greatest strengths and most problematic arenas in competition. Serious evaluation and tests are being conducted in 2009. The goal is to have a revision of the HM product and implementation that fits with best practices of the broader horse world and recognizes the realities of 21 century electronic communications. Further examination of reasons for and relevance of what has become known as the “Pony Club Way” is underway. The desired result is to provide adequate and relevant information about horse care that fits the members’ situation and level. Members should be able to travel and stay overnight with their horse and know how to care, manage and safeguard themselves and their horses at their level of achievement. Competitions should welcome and evaluate attendees relative to the standards of the sport and best practices. HM judging should form the fun, team cohesion and backdrop for the competition itself. It is the value-added component of horse care and responsibility.