A leader states, "***This is the way we've always done it.***" followed with no explanation as to 'why' this is the way it's always been done.

How many times have you heard this line when questioning a practice, policy, or the way your unit, district or department operates? Better yet, how many times have you said it? This statement alone, can make individuals that receive this response feel stifled, unimportant, and ultimately can contribute for their disengagement and membership non-renewal from the Auxiliary.

As we navigate reviewing our operating practices, policies, etc., it is important to pause to ensure we are not using this statement to avoid trying something new or discontinuing a practice that is no longer serving any purpose; only continuing because someone told you to do it because of '*unwritten rules*' or '*tradition*'. If a practice/policy/operation in question is "*the way we've always done things*" without current relevant reason and total membership counts keep declining at an increased rate, a reasonable person could ultimately conclude that '*the way we've always done it*' is no longer working, meaningful, or needed, and it is ultimately damaging to the Auxiliary and the recruitment efforts of potential volunteers needed to administer the programs to our military, veterans, children/youth, and the communities we all are a part of.

I have found that when this line is communicated, it comes from a place of fear of change or complacency in the status quo. We must not let fear or our personal comfort prevent us from tackling the issues and process modernization that will keep our organization going for years to come and attempting to correct the issues causing membership decline that we have seen over the past 20 years. Remember, 20 years ago we had a membership count of more than 18,000 members, and today, we struggle to get 8000. That is an average loss of 5000 members per decade or 500 per year.

I was asked, at Fall Conference, how many of the declining department membership totals were due to members passing away, so I ran the reports for the past decade. Here is what came back:

| Calendar Year | Deceased total | Calendar Year | Deceased Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2026 YTD | 108 | 2021 | 205 |
| 2025 | 174 | 2020 | 205 |
| 2024 | 149 | 2019 | 220 |
| 2023 | 176 | 2018 | 237 |
| 2021 | 176 | 2017 | 193 |
| **Total Deceased Members 2017-2026:** | **1843** | | |

As you can see, losing members due to them joining Unit Everlasting constitutes only 37% of the average 5000-member loss per decade given the data pulled from ALA MIS.

In the near future, there will be an Organization Modernization Toolkit included in either one of the Constant Contact Membership Updates, or in the next issue of the Sunflowerette, that will include instructions on how to use the toolkit. This toolkit has been created and talked through during Fall Conference. It does not jump to digitize everything, as that is the wrong approach. If you are not fixing the fundamental issues, and just pushing to digitize, you will still have the foundational problem and membership/engagement will continue to decline. This exercise is not glamorous, nor is it very fun, however it is necessary for our continued existence of being the source of programs and missions to support those we are honor-bound to serve.

**Remember, if we always do what we've always done,**

**we will always get what we've always got.**

Stewarding the Past. Shaping the Future

Kristen Hensley, Department President