

The value proposition of barbershop

What is the real value of barbershop? It is an old question and one we have frankly struggled to answer. At this crucial time in our history, defining the value of who we are and what we do is important, but maybe we should start with *why*.

One of my favorite *TED.com* talks is by Simon Sinek. He describes the golden circles of what, how and why and makes a compelling argument that the most successful people and organizations think, act and communicate from the inside out. Everyone knows *what* the organization does and most even know *how*. The secret is to fully understand and communicate the *why*. Why do we exist? Why do we do what we do? Why should anyone care?

The value of your 150+ hours

So, stay with me for a moment and help me work through a little math. In the equation below, Value is equal to the Experience of the member plus the Quality of the product divided by the Cost.

$$V = \frac{E + Q}{C}$$



Let's start at the bottom and work up. As you might imagine, the Society president gets mail (well mostly e-mail actually). It shouldn't be a surprise that some of the

concerns of our members are related to the expense of barbershop, frequently focused on dues. When I answer such concerns, I usually say something like this:

Cost. Compared to other social organizations, and in consideration of a conservative estimated available 150 contact hours per year, our dues structure is extremely price competitive. One member recently told me his dues were \$151 a year. (Society, District and Chapter combined) Well that's about \$3 a week and \$1.00 per available contact hour. I belong to numerous professional and civic organizations and none comes close to this kind of value.

We joke about bowling, but the league Becky and I used to belong to was 3 or 4 times more expensive (and I didn't enjoy it nearly as much).

So, all things considered, I think we have a really competitive and reasonable C.

Experience. I absolutely love barbershop and try to participate any way I can as often as I can, so

you already know what I think about the E in our equation. And it is not just me. Among the first 500 Barbershoppers interviewed in our 23K surveys, more than 90% of them say their overall experience has been either Very Positive or Extremely Positive. Of course, there are things we can do at all levels to improve the enjoyment of the experience, and I am proud to tell you our CEO and District Presidents are putting their full weight behind addressing the five most important concerns of our members to improve the overall experience even more. (See page 22 of this issue.) We can make it better, and we will.

It's about more than how well we sing

Quality. That leaves us with Q, and that brings me all the way back to *why*. In the past, we might have framed our quality in terms of our singing and performance abilities, but working with Marty Monson has helped us take a more serious look at our past and our future, and he has given me a whole new perspective. We didn't become the premier a cappella organization on the planet just because our current and past international champs were so talented (but they are amazing), and we did not survive for 75 years because we had an extraordinary business plan (but we are working on it). Why, then?

I believe we are here because our organization, from top to bottom, has also been about service to our communities. Who could even estimate the number lives we have touched with our music through the years in nursing homes, hospitals, parades, ballparks, founders' day picnics and the like? Could we even guess how much free music has been given to schools? How many of our members have served honorably and courageously in service to our countries? How many men, like me, are more successful and better contributors to their communities because of barbershop?

Indeed, we have made a difference in this world and, though we did it through our music, we also did it with our hearts through a universal and unified spirit of giving. That, my friends, is why we exist and that is what has made us great. So what is the V of barbershop? To borrow someone else's tag line, I'd say it is "priceless!"

'Shop 'til you drop!

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