YOU MATTER

District Presentation

Speaker's Manuscript

Target: 30–35 minutes

Delivery cues are intentionally selective. Timing checkpoints are approximate and should be calibrated after rehearsal.

SLIDE 1 — YOU MATTER

Every Legionnaire. Every Veteran. Every Family. Every Community. Every Day.

[LOOK UP — BEGIN CONVERSATIONALLY]

Good morning, Legionnaires.

Before we talk about membership goals, renewals, recruiting, or percentages, I want you to think about a question.

[SLOW DOWN — LOOK AT AUDIENCE]

Why are you still a Legionnaire?

[PAUSE — 3 SEC.]

Not why did you join.

Why did you **stay**?

[PAUSE — 2 SEC.]

Think about that for a moment.

For some of us, the answer may be the mission or the opportunity to continue serving. For others, it might be a particular program or the friendships we've made along the way.

But I suspect that for many of us, there's also a person somewhere in that story.

Maybe another Legionnaire invited you and made sure you felt welcome. Perhaps someone remembered your name, asked you to help with something, or called when you hadn't been around for a while.

Maybe someone saw something in you that you hadn't yet seen in yourself—and encouraged you to take on a responsibility you weren't sure you were ready for.

Somewhere along the way, another Legionnaire helped you understand something very simple:

[QUIETER]

You matter here.

[PAUSE — 3 SEC.]

And that is where I believe we need to begin any serious conversation about membership.

[ADVANCE SLIDE]

SLIDE 2 — MEMBERSHIP IS ABOUT PEOPLE.

I'm the Department Membership Director, so of course I care about numbers.

We have goals to reach. We need renewals and new Legionnaires. We need strong Posts. And we absolutely need to understand our membership reports and know where we stand.

Numbers matter.

But the very first words of our Strategic Membership Plan remind us of something even more important:

[LOOK UP]

> ***Membership is about people.***

[PAUSE — 2 SEC.]

Behind every number on a membership report is a veteran with a story—a lifetime of experiences and service. And whether that person is already a Legionnaire or someone we hope will become one, they need to know that they matter.

That's the idea behind **You Matter**.

But *You Matter* isn't simply a membership slogan. It's a way of thinking about The American Legion.

And before we can seriously talk about growing membership, I think we need to answer a more fundamental question:

[SLOW SLIGHTLY]

What exactly are we inviting veterans to become part of?

[ADVANCE SLIDE]

SLIDE 3 — WE ARE LEGIONNAIRES.

We use a lot of titles in The American Legion—Commander, Adjutant, Membership Director, committee chair, and officers at the Post, District, Department, and National levels.

Those titles are important.

But before any of them, there is another title we share.

[PAUSE — LOOK UP]

Legionnaire.

Our Guide says it simply:

> ***We are Legionnaires. Everything else begins there.***

And I believe it does.

Because before we can build membership, we need to understand what it means to belong.

[ADVANCE SLIDE]

SLIDE 4 — IDENTITY. BELONGING. PURPOSE.

So what are we really offering when we invite a veteran into The American Legion?

I think three things are at the heart of it:

Identity. Belonging. Purpose.

Identity says:

> ***"I am a Legionnaire."***

Belonging says:

> ***"There is a place for me here."***

And purpose says:

> ***"There is still something I can contribute."***

Military service may have ended, but the desire to serve doesn't have to end with it. Through The American Legion, veterans can continue serving—in a different way—by advocating for fellow veterans, mentoring young people, supporting military families, serving their communities, or simply being there when another veteran needs someone.

So we're not merely offering a membership card.

[LOOK UP]

We're offering an opportunity for continued service, belonging, and purpose.

And if that's what we're inviting veterans to become part of, membership can't simply be about asking someone to pay dues.

Retention can't simply be asking them to pay those dues again next year.

We need to give veterans a reason to join—and Legionnaires a reason to stay.

[PAUSE — 2 SEC.]

Which brings us to one of the most important principles behind *You Matter*.

[ADVANCE SLIDE]

SLIDE 5 — PEOPLE BEFORE NUMBERS.

[LOOK UP]

People before numbers.

Now, let me be very clear about what that means.

It does **not** mean numbers aren't important.

Again, I'm the Membership Director. Trust me—I look at the numbers!

[ALLOW REACTION — SMILE — DON'T RUSH]

We have goals, percentages, renewal reports and target dates, and all of them serve a purpose.

But there's an important distinction.

[ADVANCE SLIDE]

SLIDE 6 — NUMBERS ARE THE RESULT. PEOPLE ARE THE REASON.

[SLOW DOWN]

Numbers are the result.

[PAUSE — 2 SEC.]

People are the reason.

If we want to change our membership numbers, we have to start with the people behind them.

Our Strategic Membership Plan calls on us to invest first in relationships. When people feel welcomed, valued and included, recruiting and retention become natural outcomes.

That's what **People Before Numbers** means.

It doesn't ask us to ignore the numbers.

[LOOK UP]

It asks us to understand **where they come from**.

[ADVANCE SLIDE]

SLIDE 7 — WHY DID YOU JOIN? WHY DID YOU STAY?

≈ 8–10 MINUTES

That takes us back to the questions I asked at the beginning.

Why did you join?

Why did you stay?

Those are two different membership questions. One is about recruiting; the other is about retention.

But I believe the answers often have something in common:

Relationships.

Think about recruiting for a moment. How many veterans wake up in the morning thinking:

> ***"You know what I need today? Another membership card."***

[ALLOW REACTION]

Usually there's a person involved. Somebody starts a conversation, explains what The American Legion does, and takes enough interest in that veteran to learn something about them.

The Membership Director's Playbook says:

> ***People rarely join because of a brochure. They join because someone took the time to get to know them.***

And that leads us to another principle I think is worth remembering.

[ADVANCE SLIDE]

SLIDE 8 — WE DON'T SELL MEMBERSHIPS. WE EXTEND INVITATIONS.

[LOOK UP — DELIBERATE]

We don't sell memberships.

[BRIEF PAUSE]

We extend invitations.

We're not salespeople, and The American Legion isn't a product we're trying to sell.

We're veterans talking with other veterans.

So rather than beginning with an application, begin with a conversation. Learn something about that veteran's service and what interests them today. Tell them why **you** are a Legionnaire and what your Post is doing.

Then, when the time is right, open the door.

Invite them to discover an opportunity to continue serving.

Maybe they say yes. Maybe they say no. Maybe the answer is, “Not right now.”

That's okay.

Because sometimes the most important result of that first conversation isn't an application.

[SLOW DOWN]

It's the beginning of a relationship.

And when someone does accept our invitation, our responsibility doesn't end.

In many ways, it has just begun.

[ADVANCE SLIDE]

SLIDE 9 — RETENTION DOESN'T BEGIN WITH A RENEWAL NOTICE.

When do we normally start worrying about retention?

Often, it's when someone's dues haven't been paid.

But by then, we may already be too late.

The Playbook reminds us:

> ***Membership retention begins the day a veteran joins—not the day their membership expires.***

Think about how much that changes the conversation.

Instead of waiting until renewal time and asking why someone hasn't renewed, maybe we should look at the experience we've given them since they joined.

Were they genuinely welcomed? Did we take the time to learn their name and introduce them around? Did anyone find out what interested them and give them an opportunity to contribute?

[SLOW DOWN — LOOK UP]

And perhaps most importantly, if they stopped coming around...

[PAUSE — 2 SEC.]

did anybody notice?

[PAUSE — 3 SEC.]

Because our Strategic Plan says something very simple:

> ***People stay where they know they matter.***

And the Playbook makes it even shorter.

[ADVANCE SLIDE]

SLIDE 10 — RENEWALS BEGIN WITH BELONGING.

Renewals begin with belonging.

That's not a retention program we start during renewal season.

It's a membership philosophy we practice **every day**.

A veteran can join The American Legion in a few minutes. An application can make that veteran a Legionnaire.

But becoming part of a Post takes something more.

It takes relationships.

It happens when people learn your name, when someone asks what you think, when you're invited to help with something that matters, and when people notice that you showed up.

[BEGIN SLOWING DOWN]

And eventually...

[PAUSE — 2 SEC.]

something changes.

They stop thinking of it as *the Post I joined*.

Somewhere along the way, the people become friends. The work becomes meaningful. They realize they're not simply attending something anymore.

[QUIETER]

They belong to something.

And one day, without even thinking about it, they call it...

[PAUSE — 2 SEC. / ADVANCE SLIDE]

SLIDE 11 — THAT'S MY POST.

[SAY NOTHING — LOOK AT AUDIENCE — 3 SEC.]

“My Post.”

[PAUSE — 3 SEC.]

That's belonging.

These are my people.

This is where I serve.

This is where I belong.

[LOOK UP]

That's my Post.

[PAUSE — 2 SEC.]

And when Legionnaires truly feel that way, we don't have to wait until renewal season to start working on retention.

[RETURN TO CONVERSATIONAL PACE]

We've been working on retention all year long.

[ADVANCE SLIDE]

SLIDE 12 — ONE CONVERSATION.

Of course, belonging doesn't look exactly the same for everyone.

Not every Legionnaire is going to attend every meeting, serve on a committee, or want to become an officer. That's okay. There are many ways to be a Legionnaire.

But there should never be a Legionnaire whose level of involvement causes us to stop caring about them.

Sometimes the most important membership work we do is nothing more complicated than picking up the telephone and saying:

> ***“We haven't seen you in a while. How are you doing?”***

That's the spirit of a Buddy Check.

Think about what can grow out of something as simple as a conversation. It might lead to an invitation or a welcome. Maybe it gives us an opportunity to say

thank you, reconnect someone with the Post, or discover that another veteran needs a little help.

None of that may immediately change the percentage on a membership report.

But over time?

[LOOK UP]

It absolutely can.

Because when we build relationships, we build stronger membership.

[PAUSE — 2 SEC.]

So the practical question becomes:

How do we do it?

How do we move from philosophy to action?

I think we can begin with four words.

[ADVANCE SLIDE]

SLIDE 13 — MEMBERSHIP IS A JOURNEY

≈ 16–18 MINUTES

Welcome. Involve. Mentor. Lead.

These aren't four boxes every Legionnaire has to check. They're simply a way of thinking about the Legionnaire experience.

[CLICK--REVEAL WELCOME]

It starts with **welcome**.

When a new veteran walks into a Post, they may not understand our traditions, know our personalities, or recognize all of our acronyms. Those of us who have been around a long time can easily forget what that feels like.

So somebody says hello. We learn a name, make an introduction and help that person find their way.

Because the first question a new Legionnaire is trying to answer probably isn't, “What committee should I join?”

It's much more basic:

[LOOK UP]

> ***“Do I belong here?”***

[BRIEF PAUSE]

We want the answer to be yes.

[CLICK--REVEAL INVOLVE]

Then we **involve** them.

But involvement isn't simply getting someone to attend meetings. It begins by getting to know the person.

What do you enjoy doing? What are you good at? What matters to you?

Then comes the important question:

> ***"Would you help us with this?"***

There's a tremendous difference between attending and belonging.

A Legionnaire can sit through twelve meetings and still feel like an outsider. Another can spend one Saturday working alongside other Legionnaires on a service project and go home thinking:

> ***"They needed me."***

[PAUSE — 2 SEC.]

That's *You Matter*.

And that's membership.

[CLICK--REVEAL MENTOR]

Then comes **mentoring**.

Every one of us knows things about The American Legion that somebody once had to teach us. We didn't arrive knowing how everything works.

Someone showed us.

Mentoring doesn't have to be a formal program. Sometimes it's nothing more complicated than saying:

> ***"Come with me. I'll show you."***

Or perhaps:

> ***"Why don't you try it this time? I'll be right here if you need me."***

Think about what that communicates.

It says, **I see something in you. I trust you. You have something to contribute.**

And underneath all of that is the message:

You matter.

Over time, something wonderful begins to happen. The person who was welcomed starts welcoming others. Someone who was once invited to help begins inviting other Legionnaires to participate. Eventually, the person who was mentored begins sharing what they've learned with someone else.

[CLICK--REVEAL LEAD]

That's how we arrive at **lead**.

And I don't mean that everyone needs to become a Commander or hold an elected office.

Leadership in The American Legion is much bigger than a title. It might be making the Buddy Check nobody assigned you to make, welcoming the veteran who is standing alone, taking responsibility for a project, or encouraging another Legionnaire to take the next step.

Some will eventually accept formal leadership positions. And when they do, we should remember something:

[LOOK UP]

Where do our future leaders come from?

They don't magically appear when nominations open.

[ALLOW REACTION — PAUSE]

They're already in our Posts.

[SLOW SLIGHTLY]

The future Commander may have joined last month. The next great Membership Director may have been quietly attending meetings for three years.

Sometimes all that's missing is another Legionnaire saying:

> ***“I think you'd be good at this.”***

[PAUSE — 2 SEC. / ADVANCE SLIDE]

SLIDE 14 — IT DOESN’T END WITH LEAD

And here's the part I really like about this idea.

It doesn't end with **Lead**.

A Legionnaire who has been welcomed, involved, mentored and given an opportunity to lead eventually turns around and does the same for someone else.

Now it isn't a straight line.

[LOOK UP]

It's a cycle.

That's how membership becomes sustainable—not because one Membership Director had a great year or one Commander happened to reach goal, but because the culture of the Post continually develops Legionnaires who invest in other Legionnaires.

[ADVANCE SLIDE]

SLIDE 15 — EVERY LEGIONNAIRE IS PART OF THE MEMBERSHIP TEAM.

The third *You Matter* resource is called the *Membership Director's Playbook*.

But don't let the title fool you.

Membership doesn't belong to the Membership Director alone.

Certainly, someone has to coordinate the effort. Commanders provide leadership, Districts and the Department provide support, and National gives us programs and tools.

But none of those things can replace one Legionnaire taking the time to build a relationship with another person.

Membership belongs to all of us.

You don't need to be the Membership Director to welcome a new veteran, invite someone to participate, make a Buddy Check, say thank you, or encourage another Legionnaire. And you certainly don't need a title to invite an eligible veteran to continue serving through The American Legion.

[SLOW DOWN — LOOK UP]

You don't need a membership title to build membership.

[PAUSE — 2 SEC.]

You need a relationship.

And ultimately, what are we trying to create?

[ADVANCE SLIDE]

SLIDE 16 — THAT'S MY POST.

[PAUSE — 2 SEC.]

There it is again.

That's my Post.

[LOOK UP]

If you remember nothing else I've said about retention today, remember those three words.

Because when a Legionnaire can say them and really mean them, we've created something a renewal notice never could.

We've created belonging.

And if we can create that experience for more veterans...

[PAUSE — 2 SEC.]

the numbers will follow.

[ADVANCE SLIDE]

SLIDE 17 — SO WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

≈ 24–26 MINUTES

We've talked about plans, strategies and resources today.

But *You Matter* will never succeed because we wrote a plan or produced a Playbook.

[LOOK UP]

It will succeed only if Legionnaires **do something with it**.

I'm not asking you to go home and create another program, and I'm certainly not going to give you twenty more things to add to your to-do list.

I'm asking for something much simpler.

[ADVANCE SLIDE]

SLIDE 18 — ONE VETERAN. ONE LEGIONNAIRE. ONE CONVERSATION.

[DELIBERATE]

One veteran.

One Legionnaire.

One conversation.

First, think about **one veteran** who isn't yet a Legionnaire.

Have a conversation with that person. Learn their story and tell them yours. When the time is right, invite them to discover what continued service through The American Legion might mean for them.

Then think about **one Legionnaire**.

Maybe that person just joined. Maybe you haven't seen them lately. Perhaps they show up faithfully but haven't found their place yet. Or maybe they've been doing the work for years and nobody has said thank you recently enough.

Find some way to tell that Legionnaire:

[QUIETER]

You matter here.

[PAUSE — 2 SEC.]

And finally, have **one conversation**.

That's it.

Because one genuine conversation has a way of becoming something more. It can begin a relationship, open the door to an invitation, reconnect a Legionnaire with a Post, or give someone the confidence to become involved.

And sometimes, years later, we discover that a simple conversation was the beginning of something none of us could have predicted.

[ADVANCE SLIDE]

SLIDE 19 — ONE CONVERSATION CAN CHANGE EVERYTHING.

[LOOK UP]

One conversation can change everything.

One relationship at a time.

That's my charge to you.

[PAUSE — 2 SEC.]

But I don't believe it's fair for me to ask something of you that I'm not willing to do myself.

[ADVANCE SLIDE]

SLIDE 20 — MY COMMITMENT TO YOU.

As your Department Membership Director, I will continue working to give our Districts and Posts the tools, information, resources, and support they need.

I'll listen to what you're telling me. I'll learn from what works—and from what doesn't. When somebody finds a good idea, I'll do my best to share it so others can benefit from it.

And throughout this year, I'll keep reminding all of us that behind every membership number is a veteran or a Legionnaire.

[LOOK UP]

A person who matters.

I can't build membership across Minnesota by myself, and neither can any Commander, Membership Director, District, Department, or National organization.

[PAUSE — 2 SEC.]

But together...

[PAUSE — 2 SEC. / BUILD SLIGHTLY]

we can.

Because membership is everyone's responsibility.

[ADVANCE SLIDE]

SLIDE 21 — ONE PHILOSOPHY. THREE RESOURCES.

And that's really what these three *You Matter* resources are about.

The Guide reminds us **who we are**:

> ***We are Legionnaires.***

The Strategic Membership Plan reminds us how we build stronger membership:

> ***People before numbers.***

And the Membership Director's Playbook helps turn those principles into action:

> ***Welcome. Involve. Mentor. Lead.***

They're three different resources, but they share one philosophy.

[ADVANCE SLIDE]

SLIDE 22 — INVEST IN LEGIONNAIRES.

[LOOK UP]

Invest in Legionnaires.

When we invest in people, we create stronger relationships and a greater sense of belonging. That belonging improves retention, and Legionnaires who believe in their Post become some of the best people to invite other veterans into it.

When we mentor people and give them opportunities to grow, we also develop the Legionnaires who will carry our mission forward.

And when our Posts become places where veterans find identity, belonging, and purpose, we build an American Legion that veterans want to be part of.

[PAUSE — 3 SEC.]

Which brings me to one final thought.

[ADVANCE SLIDE]

SLIDE 23 — WHO WILL WRITE WHAT COMES NEXT?

≈ 30 MINUTES — BEGIN FINAL DESCENT

[SLOW DOWN — FROM THIS POINT FORWARD, DO NOT RUSH]

For more than a century, generations of veterans have carried The American Legion forward.

What we inherited didn't simply appear.

Legionnaires before us built the Posts, developed the programs, fought for veterans and served their communities. They shared what they knew with those who followed them and, eventually, entrusted The American Legion to another generation.

Eventually, it came to us.

[PAUSE — 3 SEC. / LOOK UP]

Now it's our turn.

[PAUSE — 3 SEC.]

Someday, another generation of Legionnaires will inherit the organization we leave behind.

Think about that.

[QUIETER]

The conversations we have today, the veterans we invite, the Legionnaires we welcome, the relationships we build and the people we take time to mentor will all help determine what that American Legion looks like.

What they inherit depends, in part, on what **we do now**.

[PAUSE — 3 SEC. / ADVANCE SLIDE]

SLIDE 24 — EVERY CONVERSATION. EVERY INVITATION. EVERY LEGIONNAIRE. EVERY DAY.

[SLOW — LOOK AT AUDIENCE BETWEEN PHRASES]

Every conversation.

[BRIEF PAUSE]

Every invitation.

[BRIEF PAUSE]

Every Legionnaire.

[BRIEF PAUSE]

Every day.

[PAUSE — 2 SEC.]

Each one writes another line in the story of The American Legion.

[QUIETER — SLOW DOWN]

And every one of us holds a pen.

[PAUSE — 2 SEC.]

[ADVANCE TO FINAL SLIDE — SAY NOTHING. LOOK AT SLIDE BRIEFLY, THEN AT AUDIENCE. ALLOW 3–4 SEC. FOR THEM TO READ.]

SLIDE 25 — PICK UP THE PEN.

THE NEXT CHAPTER IN THE AMERICAN LEGION'S HISTORY IS WAITING TO BE WRITTEN.

PICK UP THE PEN.

[LOOK UP — DO NOT READ FROM NOTES]

[QUIETLY AND SLOWLY]

The next chapter in The American Legion's history...

[PAUSE — 2 SEC.]

...is waiting to be written.

[PAUSE — 3 SEC.]

[QUIETER]

Pick up the pen.

[SILENCE — 3–4 SEC. DO NOT RUSH. KEEP YOUR EYES UP.]

[RETURN TO A WARM, CONVERSATIONAL TONE]

One veteran.

One Legionnaire.

One conversation.

[PAUSE — 2 SEC.]

That's my charge to you.

[PAUSE — 2 SEC.]

And together...

[PAUSE — 2 SEC.]

let's write the next chapter.

[PAUSE — 2 SEC. / LOOK AT AUDIENCE]

For God and Country.

[STOP — HOLD 4–5 SEC. ALLOW THE ENDING TO STAND.]

[IF APPLAUSE BEGINS, WAIT UNTIL IT ENDS. DO NOT SPEAK OVER IT.]

[PAUSE 2–3 SEC. — SHIFT TO CONVERSATIONAL TONE.]

“We do have some time remaining, and I'd really like to hear from you. What questions do you have—or what thoughts would you like to share?”