

FAMILY REUNION INSTITUTE'S

STICKY REUNION SITUATION

CHANGING OF THE GUARD *OR NOT*

August 2023

The Situation:

Our family has several young people (late 20s, early 30s) eager to make their mark on our family reunion. However there are several senior planning committee members who aren't ready to turn over the planning reigns and want to stay in charge, and others who think the young folk just aren't ready yet. I know it took years for our current committee to get to the point where the planning appears seamless. However, we're all getting up in age and need to consider helping the next generation get acclimated. What's the best way to integrate the two family groups so that everyone works together for the good of the planning, family and the reunion?

The Fix:



Doug Harris

When it comes to reunion planning, it's equally hard to get young people to step up as it is to get older people to step down. Young people often don't understand the degree of planning and hard work it takes to pull off a good reunion. Older people often don't understand why younger people are reluctant to step up, and think they're just lazy. Younger people often think the older people are stuck in their ways and don't respect them for what they can offer.

In my own family one of the younger generation (an experienced event planner) and an older cousin who had never participated in the planning before, agreed to plan the reunion. As soon as they began their plans, they got feedback such as, *"That's not how we do it,"* most often followed by *"Baaaby!"* or, *"Have you checked with the head of the South Committee,"* or *"The North Committee always ____."* This was ironic because one of the goals of the new planners was to eliminate the need for two committees. After all, in the age of Zoom and cell phones, (which did not exist in the '50s when the two committees were feasible and worked), why have two committees? In this case, the new planners who did an excellent job, decided they'd never do it again. And that's NOT what you want to happen.

That said, there are many ways to try to solve the problem at hand. You just have to know your family and be sensitive to timing and how to approach people. There is no one answer. I share a few suggestions and caveats instead:

1. Don't assume anything. Ask questions in a positive way to ensure that everyone's on the same page and/or have all the facts.
 2. Anticipate obstacles that will be raised on both sides.
 3. Know who you are asking to help. Complainers and the entitled are to be avoided at all cost.
 4. Be alert to sabotage from either side, which is often subtle, but always needs to be addressed.
 5. Be ready to deal with the ego factor. A position on the Committee may be meeting someone's need for recognition. Ask seniors with this mindset to serve as "Advisors" or "Consultants" to make them feel better.
 6. Sometimes it's better the take the slow, gradual approach, and give the young people one task, such as selecting a venue or handling communications.
 7. In some families it may work to have the younger generation handle the entire reunion, with a well-liked, experienced planner on the Committee.
 8. In other families it may work better to offer a one-on-one matching of older planners with interested younger members so that they can tap into the knowledge and experience from both generations.
 9. Don't give up! If an issue arises, work on a solution collectively and immediately.
 10. No matter how you look at it, planning a reunion is work—but worth it.
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