

## Post Level Positions

### Commander

Your ability to lead is recognized by your election to the office of post commander. Now you must draw on your ability and past experience while developing new skills to help the post prosper. The charge you have accepted, commander, is broad and difficult. How you respond will determine to a large degree the standing of The American Legion among your associates and within the community. Your own ability, the support of district and department officers, the information in this guide, and the help you will get from the post officers who form your team will together make the performance of your job possible. As you look to the overall operation of the post, you'll realize you have stepped to another level. You may see the step as too high, but as you proceed, following the suggestions and recommendations in this guide, you may find your year as commander the most rewarding of your life. Planning post operations for the coming year New post officers generally take office without enthusiasm and a desire for a successful year. In the charge you accepted at your installation, you are entrusted with the supervision of the duties of all other post officers. You should encourage them to use initiative and develop new ideas. You will be judged by their effectiveness. There are many ways to determine whether a post commander and his or her officers are having a successful year. Value judgments are made by the members, the community, and by The American Legion itself. Like it or not, a gain or loss in membership is the measure most commonly used. The membership record is a reliable barometer of what your post is doing. An active post where the members enjoy themselves often creates a word-of-mouth membership campaign. The members are proud to belong. It's natural for them to talk "Legion" to their friends, neighbors, relatives, coworkers and business associates. If they enjoy belonging to the Legion, they are more likely to want their friends to belong as well.

### Adjutant (appointed)

The adjutant is the primary administrative officer for the post and a like the first sergeant of a military unit. Post activities revolve around the adjutant. Most posts retain a good adjutant in the officer over a period of years. The role of adjutant provides continuity for a post. While the commander's duties are largely inspirational and executive, an adjutant's duties are administrative and functional. The commander navigates the ship, while the adjutant is the engineer who sees that the ship's machinery is working and maintained. The adjutant is the personnel officer and personal point of contact for individual members of the post. He or she maintains membership records and minutes of meetings, checks up and assists the work of the other officers and committees, and publishes official orders, announcements and communication with post members. All post records should be maintained and accessible by the adjutant, in a comprehensive filing system. The office involves a great deal of work and attention to detail. An effective adjutant is an essential component of a successful post. Some degree of compensation should be paid to the adjutant, particularly in large posts, due to the commitment required by the role.

### First Vice Commander

In the majority of posts, a first and second vice commander are elected, with membership the primary concern of the first vice commander. While each post is different, a membership campaign should cover certain fundamentals. Look at the methods used in the past. Develop new procedures to improve the methods being used. In a successful post, a new commander is going to contact the post officers and committee chairs immediately after election to schedule a meeting where they can lay out a general plan of operation for the entire year. This is when the membership plan should also be decided. The four W's of planning

- WHO – Who's going to execute each step necessary to reach the goal?
- WHERE – Where do you want to go? What's the objective?
- WHAT – What steps are required to reach the objective?

- **WHEN** – When is the work going to be done?

You and your post best know the membership potential in your community. The steps to get there are similar for every post. If you can answer the following questions for your post and community, you have your job outline and know how to reach your goal:

- Mailed dues notices will bring in about 80 percent of your current member renewals. Who is going to contact the remaining 20 percent who do not respond?
- How are you going to contact and recruit prospective members? Who's going to contact them? How will new recruits be assimilated into the post?
- Who can be counted on to work at membership and how will they be organized?
- What awards or special recognition will be given?
- What special events can be tied in with membership, such as Veterans Day, team competition, contests with other posts, The American Legion's birthday, etc.?

Other duties Membership may be the primary assignment of a first vice commander, but during a normal year, the first vice commander will have many other duties. He or she should become familiar with the ceremonial protocol for regular meetings. He or she will likely be called upon to conduct one or more meetings during the year due to an absence of the post commander. Knowing how to develop an agenda, run a meeting and follow protocol are useful skills to develop. The vice commander should be ready to fill in for the commander at a moment's notice.

### **Second Vice Commander**

The second vice commander is responsible for building an atmosphere in which Legionnaires have fun while accomplishing the mission of your American Legion post. The commander depends on the second vice commander to help run operations to spice up meetings and attract members to the post. The social calendar should be filled months in advance with activities designed to engage members. One of the second vice commander's first duties should be to contact other veterans and civic groups to verify each patriotic holiday and observance receives the respect it deserves. The second vice commander should be looking for ways to involve members in post activities, operations and programs to assist the first vice commander by providing improved member retention.

### **Finance Officer**

The finance officer should be honest and have experience in handling financial affairs. The post depends on fiduciary integrity and should acquire expert advice in formulating and administering its financial policy. The finance officer usually serves as the chair of the finance committee and is in charge of all receiving and disbursing of post funds. The post adjutant, in all matters relating to finance, should carry on the work in close correlation with the finance officer. Both officers must be covered by adequate bond. Department headquarters should be consulted for blanket bond arrangement. Post accounting forms are available to meet the requirements of American Legion posts in maintaining a correct and permanent membership and finance record. Because of their simplicity, they require no special knowledge of bookkeeping or accounting. Consult the Emblem Sales catalog for prices and detailed descriptions, or go online to [emblem.legion.org](http://emblem.legion.org). Be prompt in remitting national and department per capita fees and cards to department headquarters. It is essential the finance officer maintain accurate financial records for all post operations and activities.

### **Post Service Officer** (appointed)

A good service officer should be retained. The value of a post service officer increases with length of service. As the service officer's reputation grows, so will the value of the organization in the veteran community. The job requires a competent, dedicated and organized person, preferably one is readily available to provide assistance. He or she is responsible for bringing awareness to all veterans and their dependents the rights and benefits granted them by law. The service officer must know how to access and utilize the expert services available through The American Legion, state and federal government agencies, and local community agencies. The job requires timely submission of information to full-time

professionals so veterans and their dependents are adequately represented. The service officer's report should be a standard part of every meeting. The American Legion maintains a full staff of appeals representatives in the Washington, D.C., headquarters office. A small mobile staff of field representatives provides a constant flow of information concerning conditions in VA hospitals, domiciles and regional offices. Other American Legion representatives assist veterans who petition Department of Defense boards for review of less than fully honorable discharges or dismissal from the military. They also assist veterans in obtaining deserved decorations and medals. Department service officers can provide necessary claims forms. Additional information comes through department publications, National Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation bulletins, memorandums and VA pamphlets. Many departments conduct training for post service officers to gain knowledge and contacts, and all have trained service officers in VA regional offices and hospitals. With most of today's veteran population composed of those who served during the Vietnam, Persian Gulf, Iraq and Afghanistan wars, the work of the post service officer continues to be vital. These former servicemembers are likely to not be fully versed in Veterans benefits and programs. Meanwhile, older veterans need advice on how to integrate possible benefits into their retirement plans. Dependents should be contacted as soon as feasible after a veteran's death. Every Congress considers legislative matters of importance to veterans and to The American Legion. Working in cooperation with the post legislative committee, the post service officer can aid the national organization's legislative efforts.

### **Chaplain**

The chaplain need not necessarily be a clergyman, but must be a person capable of moral and intellectual leadership and one who gives dignity and respect to the office. The chaplain should be in close touch with the commander and other post officers, and should attend all meetings of the post executive committee. The leadership in many post activities belongs by right to the chaplain, and when this office is filled by the right person, the post's usefulness to the community greatly increases. The Manual of Ceremonies (see Section 2) gives an important place to the chaplain in the conduct of meetings, the observance of patriotic occasions, funeral services and dedication ceremonies. At all these events, the chaplain is the moral leader. The chaplain should work with the post historian on grave registration work and inspire the post to decorate veteran graves on Memorial Day. Besides officiating at post members' funerals when requested, the chaplain can be of service to their bereaved families. The chaplain may also chair the post's Veterans Administration Voluntary Services (VAVS) Committee, which coordinates volunteer work at nearby VA facilities. The American Legion Chaplain's Handbook, available online and through department headquarters, offers guidance for the post chaplain and religious emphasis committee.

### **Sergeant-at-Arms**

The sergeant-at-arms arranges the meeting hall and assists the post commander and adjutant in preliminary arrangements for meetings, including leading the color detail during presentation and retirement ceremonies. He or she is the expert on flag etiquette and should know proper flag etiquette. The sergeant-at-arms should also play a leading role in the post color guard, burial detail and other pageantry. The sergeant-at-arms is the logical person to chair a welcome committee, which can have a tremendous influence on the post's image, membership and relationship with members. Every Legionnaire wants to feel part of the group, particularly the new Legionnaire attending his or her first few meetings. The sergeant-at-arms must make certain new members are welcomed, introduced and made to feel they are important to the post. The sergeant-at-arms encourages members to attend meetings and advises the commander on who should be acknowledged.

### **Historian**

The work of post historian is cumulative. It is wise to leave the responsibility to one person if handled well. There should be close cooperation between the post adjutant and the historian. The former works with records on matters of current interest, the latter on matters of historical interest. The post

historian should also keep in touch with the department historian and be prompt in answering inquiries. An annual report should be made to the department historian prior to the department convention. Copies of printed material regarding the post should be deposited in local and state libraries, as well as in the post and department archives. This will prevent complete loss of records through fire or other catastrophe, as well as provide source material for those looking for information about The American Legion. An outline for a one-year post narrative history and yearbook is provided in the appendix (see pages 139-149). The post historian should attend department conventions and make a point of knowing what historians of nearby posts are doing. The department historian can advise post historians on department and national post history contests, historians associations, and materials to assist in maintaining best practices.

### **Judge Advocate**

The primary duty of the judge advocate is to supply professional advice in the conduct of post business or to procure proper counsel. He is the guardian of the constitutional form of post government. Your judge advocate can also supply valuable assistance to other post committees and officers. The judge advocate should maintain contact with local government officials. The judge advocate commonly has the duty, with others, of auditing post financial accounts. This is done annually, usually before the election of officers, or more frequently at their discretion.

*Excerpts from: The American Legion 2020 Officer's Guide and Manual of Ceremonies*