



Tiffany Kelley, Spouses Club Subject Matter Expert, discusses her thoughts on Merging your Enlisted and Officer Spouse Clubs.

Thoughts about merging your Spouse Club to include all ranks and community members:

I would say the strongest piece of advice is transparency and communications between all parties.

I've been part of an ugly merger that I walked away from and went back onto the board to help create a wonderful organization. I had my own failures and shortcomings and I'll own them all day long but the victories and legacy that was built during my time were amazing and I'm still proud of my time served.

I've seen great success and been part of repairing and rebuilding after negative mergers. The rebuilding after is tough and it's particularly detrimental for the entire community. People were, or are still, hurting so it lingers and the drama lives on because people's motives weren't always great...not malicious, but misdirected and it caused a lot of unnecessary difficulties.

Most of the mess can be attributed to three big nuggets:

1. Lack of transparency
2. Not having or discussing the true **WHY** it benefits the community of the spouses, the organization and the base
3. Open honest communication from all parties involved.

The PROS:

1. The volunteer force grows to accomplish so much more
2. Keeping organizations legitimate and with a true purpose to connect spouses and create a place for them to belong
3. Talent management is easier if you aren't having a non tech savvy person trying to manage your social media or website.
4. Broader reach into what today's military spouse needs from a club. (I don't need to have a club to play bunco or go to lunch) I do need it for the community and connectedness. (Social stuff is just a bonus)

Things to consider:

1. Honorary titles go away because spouses don't have rank.
2. Advisors become more important/appropriate for command leadership spaces – those that attend the community events and can keep the Club connected to the installation. They

still pay dues, vote in general meetings, but board discussions are made by the board with input/suggestions from Advisors.

3. Having a strong code of ethic that every board member signs and acknowledges helps diminish the drama and raises the ethical standard. This will help remove some stereotypes.
4. Stop clutching the white pearls of rank! For my fellow enlisted spouses, let go of the perception that officer wives don't want anything to do with us! I've actually caught more flak from the enlisted side on this topic.
5. Be open and don't be so obvious by pushing and Enlisted spouse to be the president so it looks "right" or "fair." Pushing the spouse of one person or another to be President does not help, just find the best candidate who will serve your board club and community!
6. Be flexible! Daytime events aren't easy for career spouses and evenings aren't great for those with littles. Have some things that can reach a wide demographic. Partner with agencies and other orgs to bring some networking and professional development events to your membership. This goes back to "I don't need a club to just play bunco or go to lunch with friends!" Develop a club that meets the needs to those you are trying to get to join.
7. Create value based events
8. Create a true sense of belonging... everyone has a seat at the table
9. Carry some solid traditions from both orgs into the new org that fills all the gaps that support the community. (Decorating the club or the dorms or the foyer or the common space, etc.)
10. Lastly, survey ALL spouses, not just the membership, and ask the hard questions and listen to what is reported back. Dig in and see how you can change or grow or improve from where your organization is currently.

CONS: there is going to be some who will absolutely retaliate, leave the organization, make a stink and try to defame everything and everyone. Keep doing good always!

Comments from a few others:

1. Remember that when you merge, bring the best from both organizations. One club doesn't get to keep every tradition and the other keeps nothing.
2. If enlisted spouses are made to feel like they're a charity case, it's probably not going to work out.
3. Think about creating an Advocacy Board (instead of Honoraries) with the spouses of your installation leadership group interested in supporting your organization rather than those based on who they are married to. They can share the vision of the organization without having to serve on the board. Have someone always share the upcoming news so they always have it at hand when they are attending other meetings and events.