

GUIDELINES FOR BUSINESS INTERESTS AND CHARITIES

Forward

Although we have tried to refrain from implementing 'rules/conditions' with regards to any Breakfast Club, certain values must be adhered to, to comply with the constitution of the now International 'Armed Forces & Veterans Breakfast Clubs' organisation, and what follows are the organisation's guidelines when it comes to dealing with Charities and Businesses as a club, in order to preserve our core values.

The very nature of the Breakfast Clubs, and the reason for the success they are currently enjoying, is the gathering of like-minded people, and their relationships that are formed between their members. A major reason for the strength of these bonds is that only a specific 'type' of individual makes it through the rigours of basic training, then service in the Armed Forces thereafter, and during their service, these characteristics are encouraged, cultivated and magnified, which ultimately 'conditions' an individual which can never be fully reversed. This is by design, as far as the Armed Forces are concerned, but it also means therefore, that after their return to civilian life, these individuals are changed forever to varying degrees, in comparison with those who have never served around them, which, even when surrounded by good friends and a loving family, can lead to feelings of isolation. Veterans seem to instinctively recognise the same characteristics in other veterans, which results in a strong common bond, which is the reason for the success of the AFVBC's.

It would be fair to say, that many of the people who attend breakfast clubs *need them*. They come to realise what they have been missing, without even comprehending it; the banter, the camaraderie, the sense of belonging that they lost when they left their respective service. Regaining this concomitance often helps them greatly when dealing with residual mental or emotional issues, indeed dealing with their everyday lives, and makes them feel that they have 'returned to the tribe'. This is the reason we disagree with 'charities' (military or otherwise), or members with business interests, bringing such to the Breakfast Clubs, because the focus has to be the club's members.

This was brought home some time ago, in the most harrowing manner when the AFVBC's were beginning to flourish back in May 2015, when a veteran who had completed tours of Ireland and fought in Desert Storm, took his own life. He had become homeless and estranged from his family, and was living at the Hull Veterans Support Centre. He had been invited to attend the original AFVBC, the BBC Barker's Breakfast Club in Hull, and had not attended; I feel I have to take at least some responsibility for that, as I firmly believe that had I tried harder, and he had attended, he would not now be dead.

Core Values

The core aim for any Breakfast Club, is to provide a safe and relaxed environment for veterans to meet and interact, free of any other distraction, and thereby support and promote the welfare of its members. Breakfast Clubs seem to have a 'magic' about them for many; I am contacted on a daily basis with accounts of individuals who have become emotional when they have attended the Breakfast Clubs for the first time, and often describe it as 'coming home'. THIS VERY THING ALONE should be hailed as the outstanding core principle; the 'soul' of the Breakfast Clubs; because it helps Veterans. 'Armed Forces & Veterans Breakfast Clubs; the tribe of heroes'. And why not? They help veterans in their daily lives, because they regain a network; a team that they can rely on; the very thing they lost when they 'walked out of the gate' for the last time! It is absolutely true for me, which is why the Breakfast Clubs exist in the first place!

This does not mean that the financial welfare of any veteran who is suffering hardship should be ignored, on the contrary, but other than the price of their breakfast, financial support for any veteran is the remit of the 3000+ military charities that are already in existence, who all say they are there to support us, and to fair, the major charities such as SSAFA and the RBL are becoming more involved with AFVBC's, so it WILL become easier to get such cases the help they deserve; the AFVBC's should not, and will not, become yet another military charity, but they WILL represent the 'customer base' for those that currently exist.

AFVBC's should NOT present an opportunity for financial gain for any charity, business or individual, although in cases of hardship, there have already been many instances when Breakfast Clubs have financially supported an individual member to some extent, but this is of course entirely up to the Breakfast Club concerned.

Charities & Businesses

What is disconcerting is how the word 'charities' is creeping into the dialogue of the Armed Forces & Veterans Breakfast Clubs more and more frequently. We are NOT anti-charity; far from it, but since learning of the vast amounts of money the founders 'Help for Heroes' and their immediate family have made, we are a little more sceptical, especially when you realise that giving 7p in the £ entitles an organisation to be called a 'charity', and has led to the proliferation of 'military charities', many of which are trying to emulate the personal wealth accrued by the founders of such organisations as the afore-mentioned.

Seeing them as an opportunity to make money, there are regular attempts by individuals, businesses and charities to 'exploit' the Armed Forces & Veterans Breakfast Clubs, due to their incredible proliferation and success. Making money, charity fund-raising, being an audience for business presentations for the promotion of goods or services cannot be a primary concern of a Breakfast Club. I have heard of a member of one of the clubs, working for a charity I'd never of, and know nothing about them (name withheld), trying to raise funds for this charity, and it sounds to me that this member intended that the main purpose of the Breakfast Club became this charity, which in my view would detract from its member's welfare.

In another instance, I have heard of a member, who works for a national organisation providing utilities, seeking to boost his sales figures by putting members of his Breakfast Club under pressure, during the breakfast club meet, to sign up to his organisation. It is my opinion that this too must be discouraged; I am not opposed to Club Members 'networking', for example here at the BBC, Pete Barker, who owns the premises in which we meet is a motor engineer, and it follows that most of us bring our vehicles to him for servicing, MOTs and repairs. We have a member who is a kitchen fitter, so he gets most of the joiner work, and we have a plumber... in fact we have a document on our page with trades in which we work, but this is how it works; if a member needs some work doing, he/she asks within the group or checks for a trade on the group page, it is not sold to them.

The Breakfast Club should be what the name suggest; in my opinion, if a member is offering a trade or service, or wishes to promote a charity, then they may leave some business cards or flyers on the table for members to pick up to contact them later, and get on with eating breakfast and banter.

Making Donations

It also appears to me, and others, that certain individuals and organisations are viewing the Breakfast Clubs and the Breakfast Club network as a legitimate means of making money for themselves or their 'charity', and the last thing I want is for people attending Breakfast Clubs to feel that they are under pressure to participate in fund-raising or to donate to this charity or that. I believe that each Breakfast Club may at some time come to the attention of either national or local charities, or individuals, which may make tempting offers of support or publicity, which will put it in danger of 'selling its soul', even if it is with the best intentions.

I would suggest, two ways of approaching this;

1. If an individual Breakfast Club discusses the subject of donating to a charity, they should consider and research the chosen charity very carefully indeed, before agreeing to make a charitable donation; I would suggest that it is obviously that autonomous Breakfast Club's own decision to do so, but it should never lose sight of the fact that the Breakfast Club exists for the well-being of its members.

2. Agree amongst your members to make your Breakfast Club a 'Charity Free Zone' and leave it up to individuals to support what charities they wish, as and when they wish outside of the Breakfast Club; the safest way by far to avoid conflict

If you choose the first option, I think one of the hardest things for the club's will be, knowing exactly the charities which benefit veterans, or the target group the charity is purporting to support, the most, as there are some very unscrupulous organisations out there, pretending to be charities, and there are people and organisations who get sucked in too easily, thinking that the fruits of their efforts are going to veterans, and instead is ending up in director's pockets. I would suggest that should your club decide to take this option, that any donation made, is made in the name of your club, as an autonomous body, and not in the name of 'The Breakfast Clubs'.

The Armed Forces & Veterans Breakfast Club Network

Rules, constitutions, minutes, accounts, committees etc. are the remit of our various Associations in my view, and it is my belief that one of the greatest attributes for the Breakfast Clubs, is their complete informality; after all, there were no formality in the NAAFI.

But I also believe that although Breakfast Clubs should remain autonomous in the way that they run their affairs, and should go with the consensus within the individual clubs, I also believe that as a network, we will command more respect as an organisation; strength in numbers as they say; and in order to achieve this, we should consider maintaining some global, overriding principals.

Exploitation of the Armed Forces & Veterans Breakfast Club Network

Administrators are volunteers. We manage our groups in our spare time for no financial gain or compensation. We also have families and lives outside of Facebook and the Breakfast Clubs, so we do what we can to further the interests of the groups we manage, and it is largely left to us to decide how to do that, so I am loathed to ask anyone to do more than they do already.

In the case of many of the Breakfast Clubs, there is more than one member who works as an admin, and more recently we have been allocating tasks to specific admins; we do this at the BBC, and I know the GBC do this too. I am responsible for new members in the BBC, and to that end, if I get a request to join, I check the profile of the applicant an indication of their service history, which is normally apparent, as most of us are proud to have served. If it is not apparent, I sent a personal message to the applicant asking them to give me some details of their service and provide a referee who can vouch for their service, if I am it all in doubt about the information they have given.

One thing I will be incorporating into this process from now on is checking in which area the person is resident. I know at the beginning of the formation of the network we now have, many of the current admins are members of groups in other areas, because they were assisting each other in the formation of their clubs, but this is less prevalent these days. I have heard more recently of persons applying to join multiple breakfast clubs, and it coming to light that they are working for this charity or that organisation. I will assume that most admins reading this already check for service history before admitting applicants to their Breakfast Clubs, but I would also ask you to please check where your applicants are resident. If they are NOT from your area, I would ask that you refer them to the website where they can use the search facility to find their nearest 5 clubs, by typing in a place name or post code, and clicking search....

www.afvbc.com

Information and advice for the guidance of Armed Forces & Veterans Breakfast Clubs, when dealing with charitable organisations or businesses.



... as they are unlikely to attend your breakfast club if they are from the other side of the country, and I would suggest they have another agenda; a different motive for wanting to join your club. We have had incidences of persons asking for lists of the breakfast clubs and how to contact them all. While the map, Facebook or the website may seem to be playing into their hands, they are necessary for genuine potential members to find their nearest club. We can minimise this vulnerability by being vigilant, and checking the area in which a potential member is resident, so I would ask admins if they would add this to their list of checks. If you have any suspicions, I would ask admins to publish these on the forum of the Breakfast Club Admin page.

In summary

Breakfast Clubs are there for their members, first and foremost, anything else comes a long way second in my view.

Charities and businesses are something that each individual Breakfast Club should consider for themselves, but we do not want members, or potential members being discouraged from attending their local Breakfast Club because they feel they may be pressured to donate or participate in fund raising, or are worried that they may be put under pressure to sign up for services and buy goods that other members are vending. The Breakfast Clubs for veterans are far too precious and important for us to allow that to happen