

We're All in This Together

It's no secret that when I launched TENG, I followed the FENG model of our financial colleagues. Nevertheless, at the time, I didn't want to copy every detail and when I created our two member levels, I chose to name them Active and Associate. FENG uses Active and Alumni. Simply stated, the Active members in both groups are those who are in transition, while their Associate or Alumni counterparts are employed.

A few of our members who also belong to FENG, have commented that the designation of Associate Member, raises some confusion, because in the financial group, this term connotes a level of membership for non-financial members that TENG does not offer. While this is not a major problem and certainly not worthy of a semantics debate in itself, as I plan and consider the future of TENG, I find myself becoming less enthusiastic and indeed more uncomfortable with the associate designator which is being assumed by a growing number of our members.

Ultimately, we are all TENG members and we will transition from being unemployed to employed, and most likely back again to the unemployed ranks, given the volatility of the job market. As TENG increases in size, I want our landed members to be an integral part of it, not a group who leave after landing once, or who feel they can't participate in group activities because they hold second class status, and I have had this feeling that perhaps the term Associate Member is somewhat exclusionary. I recently looked up the word associate in a dictionary (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Houghton, Mifflin, New York) to find this definition among several: "A member of an institution or society who is granted only partial status or privileges." I don't see our landed members in this light at all and hope that they don't see themselves that way. TENG membership should be integral over the life of a member's career, not something that is used once and forgotten.

My dictionary also states that alumni are the graduates of a coeducational institution. While we don't have commencement ceremonies, our landed members do in essence graduate from the ranks of the unemployed to those of the employed and are recognized in Success Stories, if they share the news of their landing. However, one member expressed the notion that the term Alumni Member could also be viewed as exclusionary. I don't think I agree with him, because alumni of any organization are usually regarded positively. While holding reunions may pose some logistic challenges, our alumni or landed members will increase in number and it will be very important for the future of TENG, and its transitional members to have a relationship with them. Given the transitory nature of executive careers these days which will cause many Alumni Members to become Active Members again, you may think this moot, but I think we need maintain some designation. It would be easy for me to drop both the Active and Associate or Alumni prefixes, but I think that as we go forward there may be value to having them.

My original concept was that people would join TENG when they found themselves in transition. Due to the corporate volatility that frequently spawns senior IT executive turnover, I assumed that people would recognize the value of TENG membership and stay connected after they land, to be ready for when they were hit by the next bullet. Indeed some of our members who landed last year are presently in this very

situation. Now that TENG is nearly two years old, I know that I must not only continue to grow it but also guide it into new areas. Any new directions the TENG takes will be for the benefit of its landed and transitional members alike and I intend for us to become more of a network of friends and colleagues, much like our FENG counterparts.

I plan to make this change from Associate to Alumni in the very near future. If you have any thoughts on this, I would welcome hearing from you.

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