

**How To Build Friendships**  
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Over the last several months I've had the good fortune to visit many members in their homes. Home visits and person-to-person dialogue have always been cornerstones of our organization. As our schedules become increasingly hectic, though, many of us may have difficulty finding time to visit with members.

It has been said that a vibrant organization emphasizes visiting, while a religious institution holds meetings. In the case of an institution, the expectation is that people will seek it out and show up to worship at prescribed times and in prescribed ways. A vibrant organization, on the other hand — such as the SGI-USA — is inclusive, reciprocal and takes the initiative to build friendships with all people in the community.

When the SGI-USA holds large meetings, we pray that participants will refresh their determination to fulfill their dreams and that guests will be inspired to practice Buddhism. Once the meeting ends, though, the real work of kosen-rufu begins. Kosen-rufu is person to person, heart to heart. It doesn't happen just in auditoriums; it happens in living rooms and coffee shops, on bus benches and subways — everywhere that people share the experience of simply being human.

It could be said that it's more significant to be in a person's life than in his or her living room. So I recommend flexibility regarding the term "home visit." It's important to be sensitive to members' circumstances — sometimes a home visit is not possible. So we must apply our creativity and sincere prayers to discover an opportunity for face-to-face dialogue — if only for a few minutes — at an appropriate time and place.

Also, talking with members one on one at the community center is no substitute for home visits. I find that I get a new perspective of — and develop deeper compassion for — a member when I'm in his or her home.

That being said, I'd like to offer a few points to keep in mind regarding home visits.

**Encouragement is our purpose.** Cherishing and caring for each person is the basic spirit of home visits. Such visits provide an opportunity to deepen our understanding of others and to talk in a relaxed, informal setting. There is no prescribed way to visit. Some people feel most comfortable chanting together first, then talking. Again, flexibility is important. I recommend an attitude of appreciation for the time that others spend with us, as well as an expectation that, with patience and prayer, our bonds with others will grow gradually deeper. As a result of our visit, the person should feel encouraged, which is our ultimate aim. Any other results, including subscriptions to our publications, should result naturally when appropriate.

**Home visits are more important than administrative meetings.** Some members may feel swamped by planning meetings and administrative duties within the organization, and may have difficulty prioritizing their schedules. I don't suggest that we set numerical goals for ourselves such as "three visits per week." I do, however, suggest that we all expand our visits-to-meetings ratio. When your schedule of SGI-USA activities is 50 percent visits and 50 percent other meetings, I think that's a very vibrant schedule.

**Be polite.** I hope it goes without saying that we should always be respectful of others' homes and lives. Please use good etiquette: Don't snoop; be considerate of the person's family situation and time constraints; don't eat all their food; don't overstay your welcome. And even if a discussion becomes intense or emotional, always remain courteous.

**Challenge your hesitation.** Sometimes, the prospect of visiting is intimidating — visits require us to be open and vulnerable in a way. If you're visiting a member whom you don't

know very well, you may also want to invite that member's district leader or other friend. Sometimes, dialogue flows more freely among three or four people during an initial visit. Often, people are waiting for someone else to take the initiative. So I suggest one motto for home visits: "Go." This isn't a command; it's a word of encouragement, invitation and reassurance.

Home visits are wonderful. I can't say that I remember many meetings from 10 years ago, but I vividly recall home visits from 20 years ago and more. Bonds are formed and many wonderful memories are made when we reach out to connect with others.

So...go!

**WT**

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