



MC Protocol 101

This document is a compilation and revision of several online articles meant to help VFW Ohio Riders Group members understand Motorcycle Club Culture and aid in navigating MC protocol and interactions with club members. This is by no means a complete list but is a primer for those who've had little or no contact with MC patch holders. Please consult with your District or State VFWRG leadership for further information, questions, or concerns.

The Club

The intent of this section is to give you an overview of the structure and philosophy of the traditional motorcycle club (MC). This does not necessarily express the feelings or priorities of any particular club, as all motorcycle clubs differ on some points. Regardless of the basic philosophy of this group, it is important that you understand the perspectives of other clubs that you may be associating with from time to time.

If motorcycles influence your lifestyle, then you are part of the motorcycle community. Of all the types of organizations found within that community, the traditional motorcycle club stands apart and ranks highest in stature.

Respect

A serious MC club commands respect for one reason. Those who are correctly informed recognize the deep level of personal commitment and self-discipline that a man must demonstrate and sustain in order to wear a patch. They realize that a club's "Colors" are closely guarded, and the membership process is long and difficult. Other factors notwithstanding, they respect Patch holders for what they have accomplished by being able to earn and keep the patch they wear. This is respect born out of recognition of dedication and accomplishment. The MC Club strives for respect for this reason. This is especially true as it pertains to those persons outside of the motorcycle community. This segment of society is by far the larger, and therefore represents a larger market for any fund-raising activities that the group might undertake. It stands to reason that cultivating a relationship with these people is important, and to be perceived by them as "Biker Scum" would not be advantageous to the group. They will therefore conduct themselves as upstanding citizens in every way... "Good neighbors" so to speak. The goal is to be admired and respected by the public rather than feared. The serious club, and all its members and guests, will always conduct themselves publicly in a highly professional manner.

Club Colors

The public does not draw a distinction between different club colors. In many cases, they simply can't tell the difference: we're all "Biker Scum" to them. If one club causes a problem that touches the public

sector, the offending club's identity is either confused or ignored and the heat comes down on all clubs. The general public does not make the distinction between a MC and an RC (Riding Club), Riders Group (RG), therefore EVERYONE needs to be aware that no matter whether they are in an MC and RC or an Independent rider, their actions reflect on all in the motorcycle community. The MC clubs tend to police themselves to avoid such incidents.

Participation

A Patch holder will not discuss any club business whether it's about membership numbers, club goings on, or any member's personal information with anyone outside of the club. They understand that they are a Patch holder 24 hours a day whether or not they are wearing their colors. Everything they say or do in public can affect the club. They also understand that if they get out of line, that they are subject to be counseled for their own good and for that of the club. Wearing a patch is more than getting together for good times. It also means getting together for the other times, too. It constitutes a lot of work. It's committing themselves to a lifestyle in which they do not look for how their brothers or sisters can help them, but for ways that they can be of help to their brothers and sisters. They always look to give rather than to receive. All of this may seem very idealistic, and in some cases it's just that. But it is an ideal that all clubs profess and are always striving for in principle and practice.

Always be aware of the "Golden Rule" of conduct while traveling in club circles: If you give respect, you'll get respect. If you act with disrespect, then you'll be treated with the same.

Levels of Commitment

When someone earns their patch, it does not mean that he or she has reached the ultimate goal and from that point they can kick back and coast. Moving from guest to probation to Patch holder is not climbing from the bottom to the top, but rather more like climbing a constantly ascending slope, and in time becoming a stronger and more committed brother or sister. A person's probationary rocker and later their patch are merely presented in recognition of what they have demonstrated along the way. In this fashion, the more senior the Patch holder is in the club and the more they experience, the more of a brother or sister they should be to all.

Purpose of Probation / Prospecting

Probation is not an initiation, as you would find in a fraternity. It is instead a period of time that is sustained until the person, in every sense, conducts themselves with the respect that is mandated to be a Patch holder. It's a time in which:

1. The attitude is conditioned so that he displays a sense of responsibility and respect toward the patch holders of the club, without which they will not develop a sense of respect for the group.
2. He is educated in basic MC protocol and etiquette.
3. He is given time to develop the habits that are basic to good security and good communications.
4. To get into the habit of participating.
5. To become accustomed to trusting the judgment, at times blindly, of those patch holders who will someday be his or her brothers and sisters.

The list could go on, but the point here is to demonstrate that probationary period has definite objectives and that a person will go nowhere in the club if he/she is not aware of this and does not apply themselves to those ends. It's not possible to make a checklist of what is expected from a person in all cases. There isn't any formula for success, but the key is ATTITUDE AND RESPECT. Everything else can be learned in time, but a person's attitude comes from the heart.

Points to keep in mind when interacting with MC's:

1. Protocol and Respect are primary rules when dealing with a motorcycle club patch holder. If you are FORMALLY introduced to an MC patch holder, make sure the person doing the introduction knows that you belong to the VFWRG Ohio, and if you are an officer, what position you hold. Under no circumstances do you interrupt to correct a mistake while that person is introducing you or while they are talking. Wait till the introduction is done & politely introduce yourself correctly (use your name – not your nickname, nicknames may come later.). i.e.

“Joe Rider, VFW Riders Group, District 11 Treasurer, Columbus, Ohio.”

(Use your name – not your nickname. Nicknames may come later.)

2. Greet them as you would meet anyone else and wait until the offer is made to shake hands. DO NOT interrupt; wait for them to recognize you. DO NOT be offended or make a big deal if they do not offer to shake your hand. Many times, they want to get to know about you and the VFWRG a little better before they offer to shake your hand.
3. NEVER, EVER, LIE. You can refuse to answer a question in a polite manner by saying something like, “That seems like association business, and I would like to refer that to one of our officers in order to get better information for you.” Be prepared to answer questions about what your association is about. Such as....
 - A.) “We are the Veterans of Foreign Wars Riders Group, and not a motorcycle club, and have no intention of ever trying to become a motorcycle club”.
 - B.) Our Patch is earned through service in a combat zone.
 - D.) All makes and models of motorcycles are welcomed in the VFWRG.
 - E.) We are a non-territorial riders group and wear nothing signifying territory.
 - F.) We are a neutral association and do not wear any MC support patches.
 - G.) Women riders are welcome and are welcomed as full members.
 - H.) Do not offer forum links or web sites, it's better to refer them to a VFWRG officer.
 - I.) Do NOT brag about how large the local or national membership is.
 - J.) Do not volunteer VFWRG info. If they ask a question about the VFWRG, answer it if you can. If they start asking questions about the number of members, or the National chain of organization refer them to one of the VFWRG Officers.

4. Most clubs realize that the VFWRG is a riders group. When approached, be aware that most patch holders will want to deal with local or state representatives.
5. If you, or anyone in our group knows a patch holder, don't let him/her throw the patch holder's name/nickname/club's name around like you are great friends of theirs, even if you are. Many clubs consider that a major sign of disrespect to the whole club.
6. Watch what you say in public. Patch holders, "Old Ladies", Support Club members, do not always wear their colors. Also, family members and their friends and associates could overhear comments made about the MC. By the time the story gets back to the club in your area, or the Dominant MC, it will have been changed many times over and could be blown up way out of proportion.
7. Anything said about MCs between our members is our business ONLY. If comments, even those said in a joking manner were to get out, problems could start. Discussion outside the privacy of the VFWRG can start rumors, which could cause a lot of problems for not only the district chapter but also for other chapters in and out of the state.
8. If for some reason you have to say something while in public about a motorcycle club, take the person you're talking to aside, alone, and say ONLY what you need to say to get your meaning across. Say as little as possible so no one else can hear it, and potentially misunderstand what you're talking about.
9. When riding with your patch it's just common sense to stay in numbers. Some motorcycle clubs can be very territorial, and some clubs don't see any difference between a riders group and an MC. If you are unsure of the areas or places normally frequented by motorcycle clubs, find out from your VFWRG Officers. If you are planning on traveling and are concerned about what the situation may be regarding the relationship with the local motorcycle clubs in the areas you'll be traveling through or staying in, talk to your District or State VFWRG officer and ask if they can get information to you by contacting the officers in the areas you will be in.
10. SHOW RESPECT! Do not walk up to a patch holder and interrupt when they are with other members. Wait until they acknowledge you. NEVER touch them or put your arm around them or try to "Bro Hug" them. NEVER touch their patch! Do not put your hand out to shake theirs; wait for them to extend their hand first. If for some reason you're not acknowledged at all, just keep walking. If you need to talk to an officer of a Motorcycle Club the proper way is to go through the Sergeant at Arms or one of the patch holders.
11. The VFWRG must remain neutral with respects to MC's! Regarding MC Club House events, you have to decide whether or not you want to show respect by going to any MC functions or avoid them all together. If you do choose to show respect and go, you can do this in a way that may make you feel more at ease by going to one of their support club functions instead of the top club's function, you're still indirectly showing the dominant club respect. If you do go, understand you also have to go to any rival clubs' function, or you'll be broadcasting the VFWRG is not a "neutral association" as stated. It is imperative that you communicate to your District and State President that you are

attending these functions. Let the District and State Presidents know if you're going so that the rest of the Ohio VFWRG will not be put in jeopardy of running afoul of a breach in Biker Protocol.

A better way to support them and still give the appearance of being neutral is to attend only "open to the public" events that a motorcycle club may be sponsoring. If you feel that you do want or need to go to a "limited event", then you should not wear your VFWRG vest or other clothing or patches with our logo on it. Go representing yourself. Remember, if you're wearing your VFWRG patch, you are considered by everyone to be representing the Ohio VFW Riders. If an altercation, then the whole could wind up with problems down the road. Also, once the rivals of that club you visited find out (and they will within a day or two), those rivals will see you as no longer being neutral, and you could be considered a rival of theirs too.

12. No Chapter Location Bars, (CLB's), territory rockers, or anything giving the appearance of a rocker should be worn with the VFWRG back patch. State flags, state logos, diamonds (front and back), cube shape or rockers worn on the back of your vest could be taken as you claiming you are a 1% MC/MC member.
13. If someone from a motorcycle club tells you to remove your vest/patch, don't argue. The best reply is, "No Problem" & politely take it off and let your VFWRG Officers know what motorcycle club it was so they can deal with any potential problems. You normally will only get asked once.
14. If an establishment has a sign indicating "No Colors", even though your patch is not considered "colors", the vest should be removed out of respect to the other clubs and the policy of the establishment. While we may just be a riders group, it's only respectful to honor the house rules. Motorcycle clubs that honored the "house rules" would probably be deeply offended that you didn't. Also, remember many establishments choose to have this policy and it applies to all clubs and associations that use any kind of patch; they do not distinguish between an MC, an RG, or an Association. Be aware of the local motorcycle club hangouts & it's best not to wear our VFWRG patch into them without an invitation.
15. Do not wear your Patch into a motorcycle club clubhouse unless you have asked if it's ok to do so or have been invited for a "sit down" with the officers of the motorcycle club, or been invited as a VFWRG Member, to attend a function there.
16. Regarding women who are with an MC club, but not in the club: Old Lady is not a negative or derogatory term, it's just a slang term commonly used. "Property Of" patches are their way of showing support for their man and the club he's in.
17. A patch holder may not, and many times will not acknowledge your wife or girlfriend, especially upon a first meeting.
18. DO NOT touch or sit on a patch holder's bike unless invited to do so. Do not expect an invitation.
19. A prospect can usually be identified by the back patch they are wearing. There are many different ways motorcycle clubs identify prospects. They can have the rockers without the main patch. They

can actually have a patch saying "PROSPECT". Some do not wear any patch, because all the patch holders know who the prospects are. You want to treat a prospect or even someone you suspect is a prospect the same way you would treat a patch holder – with respect and courtesy.

20. Have absolutely no doubt that a motorcycle club is serious, and many have been known to physically educate a person who shows disrespect or displays a bad attitude.
21. Be aware of the behavior and attitude of the other VFWRG members who are with you at events. If necessary, try to take action to avoid problems before they happen. For example, if someone appears to be getting too angry or loud and possibly disrespectful, take them aside or suggest going somewhere else until things settle down. You could also let one of your Officers know about the situation. If an incident should occur despite your efforts when no Officers are present, make sure to let your Officers know as soon afterward as you can. If no Officers happen to be there, then ALL the VFWRG members that are there need to make the attempt to take that person aside, and strongly suggest that the offending VFWRG member go somewhere else to settle down.
22. Be aware that problems created in one part of the country by a VFWRG member, or issues with the VFWRG in one area have the potential to affect VFWRG members in other areas and states.
23. The term Brother or Bro has a special meaning to a patch holder. Do not call a Patch holder Brother or Bro. Their Brothers are fellow patch holders and those that have earned that term.
24. Don't ever touch any part of a club member's colors, which includes the vest or jacket it's sewn on. That is considered serious disrespect, which could cause them to aggressively educate the uninformed.
25. When on the road, whether in a group or riding alone, if you come up on a 1% MC, it is best not to pass them. However, if you must, there is a proper protocol that you must follow that shows the proper respect.
 1. The Road Captain leaves the pack, rides up to the MC's tail gunner in the passing lane, (DO NOT ride into their formation!), and requests to ride up to their Road Captain by signaling with a bladed hand back and forth, then giving the thumbs up. If the tail gunner indicates approval, the Road Captain then rides to the front of their pack and repeats the same gestures to their RC. If he also approves, the Road Captain falls back to the VFWRG, signals the lane change into the passing lane and then the group passes the MC at a reasonable speed and continues on its way. DO NOT BLOW BY the MC!
 2. If you do not get approval, fall back, and keep the group behind and back a respectful distance.
 3. This protocol should be used for any MC or riders association. Respect is respect.

Remember this is only the basic points you should understand regarding MC protocol. The "Golden Rule" of conduct that you should bear in mind while traveling in club circles, "SHOW THEM RESPECT" If you give respect, you will get respect.