



Member Tips

Growing Rotary Membership



June, 2009

Some Final Thoughts

Dennis Dinsmore, PDG District 6330

This is my last edition as editor of Member Tips. Due to the upcoming Zone reorganization, my Rotary club will be moving into Zone 24 and on to other challenges. PDG and RRIMC Jim Ives will be taking over the newsletter editing duties starting July 1, 2009.

So let me put my feet up, grab another cup of coffee and tell you everything I have learned about membership...

Well, er, ah, not much! Membership growth is one of those elusive topics where the more one learns, the more one realizes how much he doesn't know. However, after two years of editing this newsletter, talking with hundreds of Rotarians and reading everything I could get my hands on, two basic truths have become clear to me: First, *there is no magic bullet* and second, *membership is a process, not an event*.

There are lots of examples of "best practices" out there which clubs and districts have successfully used to grow their membership but there is no such thing as one foolproof technique. What works for one club might be totally useless for another. Rest assured, if there were one magic bullet solution Rotary would publish a pamphlet and put a lot of volunteer RRIMC's out of business.

The other basic truth is evidenced by our own history. We all know that Paul Harris and three friends started their little social club in 1905. What we forget is that two of the original four members, Gus Loehr and Hiram Shorey both quit after about six months. In other words, the first Rotary club had a 50% attrition rate in the first year! The real genius of Paul Harris was that he saw beyond this setback and continued to bring new members into Rotary who, in turn, brought more new members so that the club grew to more than 30 members by the end of the first year. Then, as now, new members joined Rotary for one reason – somebody they knew and liked *asked* them to join.

Big truths beget big questions. One question which is often asked but never be answered is, "What is the optimum size for a Rotary club?" and the related question, "How many members does Rotary really need?" Our membership goals have always been set on a growth model while overall numbers have remained static for twenty years. Suppose worldwide economic conditions push membership down despite our best efforts, are we prepared to cope with a smaller, leaner organization?

How will the changing cultural mix of membership influence the culture of Rotary? While our overall numbers have remained static at 1.2 million, it is because losses in the Western world have been offset by gains in the Eastern world. In 1905 the epicenter of Rotary was Chicago, Illinois, I suspect it is now somewhere in the Pacific Ocean and moving further eastward every year. Regardless of where Rotarians are found, I am convinced they will have the same humanitarian goals but the ways in which Rotary conducts its business will undoubtedly change. It was a real eye-opener to read in the April *Rotarian* about a club in India which partnered with a club in Ohio on a matching grant to furnish textbooks for an impoverished school in...Ohio.

In some respects I have come to look upon membership growth much like the brass pole in the firehouse. Brass poles have been around for a long time because nobody has ever come up with a faster or cheaper way to get firemen from floor 2 to floor 1. Despite our ability to split atoms and to walk on the moon, the firehouse brass pole remains the best solution to moving firemen quickly and safely. So too is the best solution to recruiting Rotary members – *Ask Someone*.

D.K. Lee's Membership Challenge for 2008-09

- Ten Percent (10%) Net Increase in Membership per Club;
- Formation of Two (2) New Clubs per District;
- Total Net Membership of 1,300,000 Rotarians at the end of RY 2008-09.

Editor's Note: The balance of this newsletter is a reprint of some of the most popular articles from the past two years. Enjoy!

Re-MEMBER-ing, Bringing Back Former Members

Betsy Demaray, PDG District 6290 - Michigan, USA & Ontario, Canada

As your club is looking for membership growth, one of the most obvious and most overlooked source of members are those people who once belonged to Rotary. So where do you find them?

Your club secretary has the ability to pull a list of every Past Rotarian from your club off the RI website. So what do you do with this list?

First of all, eliminate the obvious...those members who have died or moved to other communities. This leaves a list of people who at some time in the past wanted to be Rotarians and who still live in the community. These folks were once invited to join Rotary by another Rotarian, they accepted that offer and they were part of your club – maybe for a year, maybe for twenty years.

These past Rotarians might have been true Rotarians or they might have been Rotarians in name only. The circumstances in their lives at the time determined how they fit into Rotary, how much they participated and also determined how and why they left. People leave for different reasons.

Maybe their job changed and they couldn't make the meetings anymore. Maybe they lost their jobs and couldn't afford Rotary any longer. Maybe they didn't get along with someone in the club at the time. Maybe their family put pressure on them to be home more and drop out of activities. Maybe the club wasn't doing anything that interested them at the time. There are a lot of reasons why people might quit Rotary.

But times change. Now is the time to review that list of former Rotarians who are still around in your area. Maybe they have settled into that new job and now have the time. Maybe their children are older and they can devote more time to community service. Maybe, just maybe, they would like to be asked back but are embarrassed to say anything because they quit the club once.

The following letter is an example of what you might send to those former Rotarians that you would like. A project like this needs the support of your entire board and your membership committee and needs follow-up, but may just lead to re-growth in your club. Give it a try.

Dear _____

This letter is to invite you to rejoin the _____ Rotary Club. I know you were a member in the past and were a great addition to the club during that time. Circumstances were such that you chose to leave us, but we are hoping that those circumstances have changed and you might consider joining us again.

The Club still meets at (time) on (day), at (location). Our meetings are fun and informative and a great opportunity to network with fellow leaders in the community. At this time we are active in a number of community service projects, including _____

The more involved folks we have, the more impact we can have on our community. We invite you to come to (lunch, breakfast, dinner) on us, at your convenience and rekindle the friendships and acquaintances you made in Rotary...and make some new ones. One of the members of our Membership Committee will be giving you a call to personally invite you to (lunch, breakfast, dinner).

One of my favorite quotes is "Volunteers do not necessarily have the time; they just have the heart." Please consider making time to be part of Rotary again. We look forward to seeing you again.

Sincerely,

Club President

Reinvigorate to Retain

Roderick "Rod" W. Thomson, PDG District 5050 - British Columbia, Canada

Discussions about Rotary membership were, for many years, focused on recruitment. The thrust of many Membership Committees was to identify and recruit new members to Rotary Clubs. Attrition was recognized as an issue. However, the resolution of the issue was simply to recruit more actively. In recent years, there has been a new emphasis on retention of Rotary members. Rotary Clubs are encouraged to recruit, orient and engage new Rotarians while providing service and fellowship activities for the entire club.

Senior Rotary leaders are encouraging clubs to strengthen their organization by focusing on the Four Avenues of Service to ensure the experience for new and long-term is meaningful and rewarding. At the Presidential Membership Conference held 10-11 August 2007 in Vancouver, Past RIBI Pres. John Hockin challenged attendees to do more individually to enhance membership opportunities. John showed me the text of an article, which ran in the Link Magazine in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, D-1270. I believe the answers to the questions posed below will help you understand how you and your Rotary colleagues view your club and your service.

Suppose...

There comes a time when we all need to reflect on our situation, be it family, work or Rotary; a time to take stock in order to reinvigorate ourselves. So let us do a self-analysis of our Rotary involvement by playing the "suppose" game and answering a few simple questions.

1. Suppose the membership in your Rotary club was limited to 20.
Would you be in or out?
2. Suppose membership in your club was only good for one year and re-election depended upon the service you gave to your club, your community and the international during that time.
Would you be re-elected?
3. Suppose you were called upon to tell why you thought the club should keep you as a member.
Do you have a record of helpful participation to offer in your defense?
4. Suppose every member of your club did just as much as you are doing.
Would your club be one of the most active in the district or would it disappear into obscurity?

By analyzing the above 4 questions you should be able to tell whether you are a RINO (Rotarian In Name Only) or a TIGER (Totally Involved Generous Energetic Rotarian). Having carried out this personal self-analysis, it should be a simple matter to know whether you need to reinvigorate yourself in Rotary or whether the time has come for you to move on.

Once you do this self-analysis, spend a little time considering how you can become a TIGER, or if you are one, how will you help others in your club to Tiger up! You, your club and Rotary will be the better for it and you might be the one who starts a new retention program without even trying. Just suppose what would happen then.

Attracting Younger Members

From Rotary's *Membership Minute*. Vol. 3, Ed. 5

It almost goes without saying that attracting younger members into Rotary is the key to our future. A new member joining in his or her twenties will probably have 40 more years of potential service to Rotary than a member joining in his or her sixties.

The integration of more young members into Rotary remains an elusive goal. Currently only 11% of our members are under 40 years old and just 1% are under 30. The Membership Minute* newsletter recently offered the following tips for young member recruitment.

- **Induct several young members at once, instead of recruiting them one at a time.** If your club has no younger members, inducting several at the same time gives these new members an immediate peer group in the club.
- **Conduct service projects that are likely to appeal to younger members.** The Australian Bureau of Statistics found that volunteers in two age groups, 25-35 and 55-65, do the same amount of service work. But the younger volunteers were more likely to focus on areas such as education, sports, and family matters.
- **Recruit Rotaractors, GSE team members, and other Rotary program alumni.** Their participation in RI and Foundation programs shows that they already know about Rotary's ideals and are interested in pursuing its mission.
- **Consider lowering the total cost of membership in your club.** Some younger members have trouble meeting the financial obligations of club membership. To combat this problem, some clubs have lowered their fees or have a meal only once or twice a month instead of every week.
- **Consider waiving certain fees or expenses for the first year or two.** Younger members who aren't yet fully invested in Rotary may be more apprehensive about committing to all of the financial obligations of club membership. Once they become involved in your club and dedicated to Rotary's mission, they may be more willing and able to pay the full amount.
- **Make sure meetings are efficient and productive.** Younger members, who often have competing priorities, are more interested in attending meetings that are conducted efficiently. Also, make sure your club has an appropriate balance of meetings and hands-on projects and activities.
- **Recruit "up-and-comers."** Managers who are on their way to becoming important business and professional leaders are often interested in the networking and professional development benefits of Rotary. Getting them invested in Rotary while young can help ensure their dedication to Rotary when they reach top-level management, executive status, or ownership positions.
- **Be open to the new ideas of younger members.** Maintaining the status quo in your club may bore and discourage them. Younger members will be more likely to stay in your club if their opinions are valued and appreciated – and if they aren't treated like junior members.

* Additional newsletters can be found at www.rotary.org. From the home page, click on the [Members](#) tab then select [General information](#) from the sub menu.

Club in a Club

By Terry Mueller, PDG Regional Rotary International Membership Coordinator, Zone 27
With help from the Club in a Club website, www.clubinaclub.com

Is the old "bring a guest" methodology not working as a recruiting tool for your club? If not, are you willing to try a proven program that has worked on the west coast? This program can help you attract quality new members AND increase your membership by 10% to 35%-unbelievable but true.

There are many good programs for attracting new members. The "club in a club" program is a system that takes all those good ideas for starting a new club and uses them to bring a group of people into an existing club. What makes "club in a club" successful is that your entire club develops a plan and everyone pitches in to make it work. With everyone focused on membership, you will succeed. The new members you attract with this program are inducted as a group instead of one at a time.

The first step is to form a committee to make it happen. Take at least two meetings and give members time to fill out a list of potential Rotarians. Know who you are and who you want to be. Are your club members all over 45-do you want to attract younger members. Are you mostly men-do you want more female members. Identify several people from the same demographic. This approach will increase their comfort level. Keep it simple, just ask for names and occupations-you can track down addresses later. Give the members some trigger points-tell them to think about

- Their Neighbors
- Their Immediate supervisor
- Their Physicians, dentist, banker, minister, attorney, CPA, Veterinarian, their best friend or the person they admire the most. Each member should be able to identify 5 to 7 people

Take the same care when using this program that you would when picking any potential member. Circulate the list to the Board, the membership committee and the members for comment.

The next step is to plan a "special" informational meeting for the potential members to learn about Rotary and your club. Send a letter of invitation to those identified. Personalize the letter making them feel special and welcome and then follow up with an invitational phone call. The personal touch is worth the effort. Make the meeting informative as well as entertaining. You can inform them about your club with such information as time commitments, financial commitments, the good projects you have done in your community and internationally and certainly tell them about your fellowship activities and the fun you have. Have The Rotarian magazine, informational brochures and club displays available.

At the meeting you should be able to determine if the guests are interested in joining Rotary. If so, invite them to a regular club meeting.

Make follow-up phone calls after the meeting to thank each guest for attending. For those guests who cannot join Rotary at this time and for those who did not attend the meeting, set up a calendar for future contact. You can send them copies of your club bulletins, invite them to a future meeting with an interesting program, invite them to a hands on service project or send newspaper clippings about these projects.

Induct interested parties as a group and continue to mentor...mentor...mentor. Make sure you have a plan to keep these new members active and interested. They join as a group and have a common bond. With the fresh ideas and energy that these new members bring, they might possibly lead a new project of their own.

These are just a few of the benefits of bringing in members as a group. It breathes new life into the club

- n Increases club numbers
- n Injects new life and energy into clubs
- n Lowers average age
- n Involves all members in recruitment
- n Helps "tired" clubs
- n Increases fellowship
- n Enables larger projects
- n Increases retention
- n Captures the heart and spirit of Rotary

You are a business leader. You know how to hire, how to recruit, how to write job descriptions, how to make a business plan. You have the skills to build the club you envision.

It's simple - It's proven - Try it
Watch the benefits

For more information visit www.clubinaclub.com

Hi, would you marry me?

By Carlos Früm District 6440 Membership Committee Chair

"Hi, would you like to marry me?" is as silly a question as "Hi, would you like to be a Rotarian?" yet some of us are still trying to court new members this way.

There is a process, not unlike courtship or good salesmanship, that will secure an "I do!" from a candidate.

The First Date

The first step is to get a date. Invite somebody to your club's meeting. This is quite simple if you help the decision by giving two alternative dates, for example "Is this Wednesday or the next one more convenient to you?" The operational idea is to avoid a question that can be answer by yes or no. People will find it easy to say no to a single date and can give a very plausible reason. It is more difficult to give negative reasons to two alternatives.

The reason for the invitation must be stated. For example, "I would like you to meet some of our members." Or "We have a couple of programs coming up that you may enjoy."

Getting To Know The Candidate

At the meeting seat the candidate between you and a member that can provide good conversation and answer questions about the club and Rotary. Plan this step in advance and provide your helper with background information about the candidate. The questions must be broad so the candidate has an opportunity to talk about his or her feelings about service. "What type of service organizations have you been involved in the past?" or "What have you learned about Rotary so far?" are two examples.

When Will We See You Again?

The next step is trying to ascertain interest. Again the question must request a choice between alternatives: "Would you like to come back next Wednesday for the program on "X" or would you prefer the following week for the program on "Y"?"

It is a slow process but the steps are sure, methodical, and prevent waste of time and effort. One can determine early on if there is interest and if the candidate understands the commitment to service. The information about Rotary in the club must be spoon fed so as not to be overwhelming.

Asking For the Hand

After three or four visits the club and the individual know about each other and you can proceed to make a formal offer. A well designed orientation process will ensure that the candidate understands the commitment and helps retention in the critical first year. Much like planning a future together before the wedding!

The Wedding

Would you have a wedding without relatives? We hope the candidate will make Rotary a lifetime commitment and we should make the induction an event to remember. Family, special friends, and even a business associate or two should be invited. The presence of the District Governor or a governor representative will add weight to the proceedings. There should be a master of ceremonies with a well prepared monolog, a photographer, and the appropriate documentation, name tag, and pin. The idea is not to induct a member but accept a new Rotarian. Make it lightly and so it will be taken!

Remember that, except for Paul Harris, everybody else was asked to attend a Rotary meeting!

2009 -2010 Membership Team

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