

MEMBERSHIP DEVELOPMENT – Building the Plan

Last month we discussed “Lighting the Fire” - energizing your members to recruit new Rotarians. We talked about three steps. First, reviewing the membership situation with the club. Second, assembling a membership committee. Third, having the membership committee review how the club currently recruits, informs, and retains members. Armed with this information, it is time to build a Membership Development Plan.

A Membership Development Plan is a written club policy that outlines an organized, integrated process to accomplish the club's membership goals.

What are your membership goals? First things first...define your goal. The goals need to be measurable so you know when you have succeeded. For example, your annual goal might be to induct three new members, have a net gain of one for the year, and retain at least two-thirds of all new members. RI defines new members as members for three years or less.

The pieces of a Membership Development Plan include the goals as well as four other components: recruiting, informing, retaining, and public relations. Thus your plan is comprehensive in that it addresses all the parts of club growth, not just recruiting. What good does it do if you have ten new members come in the front door while another ten depart through the back door?

There are several characteristics of a solid plan.

Attainable goals. The expression of recruiting and retention goals must be explicit and measurable. They should be within the capacity of your club to achieve.

Integration. The plan coordinates and focuses the efforts of each pertinent committee or club leader. Your secretary, program director, and trainer are key players just as much as the president and PR chair.

Buy-in. The general membership understands the plan and supports it. Get agreement before you go final with the plan. Don't give anyone the opportunity to say, “Well, no one asked me.”

Efficiency. The plan assigns specific tasks to the persons or committees best able to accomplish them. The plan is precise. For example, the plan might state: “The immediate past president designs a Freshman Year Plan to integrate new members into the club.” Or this: “The vice president will ensure that departing members are surveyed/interviewed by appropriate persons to discern reasons for departure.”

Reviewable. The plan includes regular opportunities to meet with all the players to review the current status and to make course corrections as necessary. For example: “The board will discuss membership development status and issues with appropriate persons at the January board meeting.”

Rewards. The plan sets out a means to reward individuals or the club at large for achieving the stated goals. For example, if the club achieves its goals, it cuts dues in half for the following year and throws itself a party. Isn't revitalized membership worthy of serious reward?

Basic Questions that the Membership Development Plan should address:

Who analyses the current situation? How? [See the following resources listed on the District Website under Membership -- *Look in the Mirror*; *Healthy Club Checklist*]

Who establishes the goals? When is this done?

Who decides who and how to recruit? (Membership drive or something else)

Who publicizes events and how?

What goes on the website and who puts it there?

Who provides information to the prospective members and how is this done?

Who designs a streamlined way to bring candidates through the recruiting process?

Who develops a meaningful induction ceremony?

Who develops and conducts a meaningful freshman year?

Who analyses effectiveness of the plan? How?

Who adjusts the plan? How?

Who conducts exit interviews for departing members?

Who rewards success and how?

Who in the club applies for district recognition and when is this done?

Once the club has answers to these questions, put it all down on paper and share it with others and ask for comments. A club's Membership Development Plan can easily fit on two pages. See the District website for an example of a club's Membership Development Plan.

When to formulate the Plan? It would be best if the incoming president and board have an approved plan in hand on July 1st.

Now for some additional thoughts:

Our Goal. First and foremost, consider PDG Vickie Randel's lead comments found in the essay "Recruiting Tips" (found on the District website). "**Recruit new ROTARIANS, not just new members!** No point is more important than this. We don't want bodies or numbers – we want committed, dedicated, service-minded people, like you!"

Inclusiveness. Your club's membership effort needs to include everyone. Everyone has their role to play in renewing the club and ensuring that it remains a strong force in the community. **HOWEVER**, the plan must allocate specific tasks to specific positions. I cringe when I hear that "Everyone does everything for membership." Too often, when EVERYONE is responsible, no is responsible.

Membership Drives. A drive over a specific period is a way to focus the club. Be careful about other major events going on at the same time because it will divide the energy of your membership. My club, a breakfast club, runs an annual event at 5 p.m. at our usual meeting place. Everyone brings someone whom they want to inform about Rotary. There is no formal program, just a crowd of business and professional persons getting together to meet people like themselves. Adult beverages and others are available. The word is soft sell and the effects are always positive. Not every invitee will want to or be able to join right away, but they will know who in their community is a member. And they will know that someone thought enough of them to invite them.

Meetings. Consider inviting all prospective members to a specific meeting planned in advance. Feature a superb program. Upgrade the meal. Minimize administration. Have a packet of information available to give to the prospect. [see District website for “Prospect Package”]. That way the prospective members not only see your club at its best.

Information. You need to help prospective members make their decision. Make sure that candidates have no misconceptions over your club’s expectations. The Club President should meet with every applicant to review expectations and costs. [See District website “Prospect Expectations”]. Solicit their thoughts on what they hope to accomplish and outline the opportunities to fulfill their goals. Some clubs have candidates lunch with the membership chair to go over what it means to join. Another club has an information committee that meets with several candidates simultaneously and lays out what Rotary is, what programs are available, and what are the attendance and financial expectations. Do what you can to assist candidates in making the right decision for them because that will be the right decision for the club.

Make them Welcome. Add new members to your most active committee immediately after initiation. Immediately make them a greeter. Get them involved. Some clubs get new members together and treat them to a Freshman Year program. Remember, the new member is all alone in a room full of strangers – find ways to incorporate them into the club as quickly as possible.

Final takeaway. Your club can survive and can prosper and can be there for the next generations. You will best succeed if you take a systematic approach to the entire membership development process.