

MEMBERSHIP DEVELOPMENT – Lighting the Fire

By Rich Barbuto, District Membership Chair

Last month we discussed the first two steps in the membership development process. The first was to get a good handle on your club's membership situation going back a few years. The second was to improve your club such that business or professional persons will want to join immediately. While you are probably still tackling those steps, let's investigate step three – Lighting the Fire.

As you were doing steps one and two, presumably the club's leadership team came on board in whole-hearted support of improving membership development. Now the club's leaders need to ignite that sense of urgency with the membership at large. Remember, when it comes to recruiting, informing, and retaining new Rotarians, your club will be much more successful if the effort is supported by everyone and not just the current officers. How does the club leadership light the fire?

Perhaps the first move is to review the membership situation with the members, perhaps at a club assembly. Go over membership numbers for the past several years, new members as well as terminations. Did your investigation discern any trends in why good people departed the club? Address average age and diversity in the club – be frank. Discuss the possibility that the goodness of Rotary may be lessened [or disappear] in the community if trends aren't reversed. Then review with your members the findings from the "Healthy Club Checklist" and "Look in the Mirror." Tie these in to your efforts to improve the club. Let me suggest that these two reviews be presented by club officers other than the president. Club members need to see two things: that the club needs to address membership and that the club leaders are all behind this effort. At this point, a few members not among the club's leadership team may be offering suggestions. This is healthy. However, you are not quite at the point where best to implement new ideas. These people who stepped forward may be exactly the folks to populate your Membership Committee.

Membership Committee? Yup! If you don't have one, put one together now. Some of the club leadership team may be on this committee but it will be best to ensure that the rank and file members who want to work membership issues are put to work here. You need buy-in from the membership in order to succeed. The immediate goal of the membership committee is to review how the club currently does business. Specifically:

How does the club identify potential members?

How does the club approach them?

How does the club help them make a good decision to join or not?

What is the paperwork flow to get them signed up?

Finally, how does the club get the new member involved immediately?

Do these suggestions fly in the face of how you currently work membership development? Let me just say: "If you always do what you always did, you will pretty much get what you always got." Time to change how you think about membership development!

Next month: The Membership Development Plan!