

Make the most of new member ceremonies

By Michael Angelo Caruso

Rotary does a pretty good job of finding new members.

We are, after all, a very appealing premise. Rotary is a century old organization with a proven track record. We have 33,000 clubs worldwide and offer five avenues of service ranging from local involvement to international projects. We have some heavy-hitter partners such as the World Health Organization and a guy named Bill Gates. Our organization is one of the largest professional services organizations in the world.

But it turns out that Rotary can do a better job at keeping members around longer.

Despite all of our organizations positive attributes, many people join our ranks only to leave a little while later. Why? Research and exit surveys indicate the lack of a compelling value proposition, specifically a lack of new member engagement.

I've been invited to speak at hundreds of Rotary Clubs, assemblies, District Conferences, President-Elect Training Seminars, and Zone meetings. (I don't charge Rotary for talks and Rotary found out, so the invitations keep coming.)

In my travels, I've learned that the new member installation ceremony definitely sets the tone for new members. A lackluster, informal announcement can leave everyone feeling flat. A ceremonious event replete with pomp and circumstance, on the other hand, can almost obligate the new member to become a role model Rotarian.

By the way, this raises the question of what we should call this event. An "installation" sounds too technical. An "induction" sounds painful. A "ceremony" may seem too formal. I know this for sure—most Rotary clubs have been in the habit of using the same noun for a long time. I recommend trying out some other terms with new members to see what *they* like best.

Here are my best tips for making the most of that first impression known as the "member installation" and thereby deputizing the new Rotarian for a long time.

5 cool ideas for bringing new people into Rotary

1. Invite the new member to bring a guest or two.

Extra points if the guests include his or her boss. This is a great way for the boss to be exposed to the value of Rotary and for the club to gain two new members. Be sure to make a big deal that the boss is there and she may join, too.

2. Always take photos of the event.

Make sure you have a decent Rotary sign on the front of your podium. Invest in a good-looking pop-up banner for a photo backdrop that helps market your great club. Before digital cameras were invented, I used to joke that it didn't matter if film was in the camera. It's the process of flashbulbs popping that makes people feel special. Oh, wait—we don't have flash bulbs any more, either.

3. Make it a ceremony so the event seems like the honor it is.

Becoming a Rotarian is a big deal so make the installation ceremony a big event. Push out a head shot of the new member before and after the installation. Be organized enough to have all the materials (pin, badge, etc. on hand). Ask the inductee to say a few words.

4. Ask the new member what they would like to in Rotary.

Get him or her to actually say words such as serve on membership committee, work with youth, travel for a water project etc. Do this during the new member ceremony. Announcing his specific intentions in front of the club, his boss, the caterer, and everybody is a powerful and effective way to get the member engaged very quickly. Make sure that the appropriate person in the club reaches out to the new member and makes things happen right away.

5. Invite all members to stand up and personally congratulate the new member. The act of being congratulated by all and shaking hands with everyone in the room is a surprisingly unforgettable experience for all concerned!

Good luck and skill in retaining Rotarians for longer periods of time. They deserve it and so do you.

Submitted by Michael Angelo Caruso, Governor Nominee, Rotary District 6380, 2016-17. 248-224-9667. December 7, 2014.