

What Do Members Want?

(Retain to Gain – Part 1)

Your club – every club – has experienced this: You bring in a new member full of excitement and enthusiasm. Within a year or two the member quits, never having gotten involved in the club. And this is repeated many times throughout the Rotary year.

What happened? And more important, can it be stopped? Fortunately when you understand the answer to the first question, the answer to the second is YES! Thanks to surveys, we now know why members leave and the answer is no surprise: members leave when they no longer obtain from Rotary that for which they joined.

Why do people join Rotary? It differs by member but the most common are to give back to their community (service), to obtain professional development, to network and to meet new friends. All of these are perfectly legitimate goals for Rotary membership.

In Rotary, I think we sometimes fail to understand the full breadth of our great organization. Yes, Rotary is a service organization but “service” is much broader than most members think. We have Five Avenues of Service (Community, International, Club, Youth, and Vocational Service) which are all equal in importance.



Too often, we assume someone joins for just one reason – usually it is community service. I read an article in The Rotarian in which a long time member was quoted as saying he joined for the “wrong” reason (networking) and then stayed for the “right” reason – Community Service.



I completely disagree with many who say that networking is not a valid attraction to Rotary.

In fact, most young people join for Vocational Service (professional development and networking) and leave when their clubs provide too little in this Avenue to keep them interested! They never have a chance to learn about the other Avenues of Service that make Rotary membership a lifetime adventure!

Full disclosure: I joined Rotary to network. I caught the service bug after a couple years and that really started me on my Rotary journey. But networking was the hook that brought me in, as it is for many younger members. It was that for Paul Harris himself, who started Rotary to network and make friends! Let's embrace it as a valid entre' into Rotary.

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Job 1 is to find out what our current members want from Rotary. Not what the club is traditionally – that is what past members made it. The old days of making newer members fit into our box is gone. The world has changed and Rotary clubs need to change with it so we can bring in our future members.

We need to know what current members want and then we need to have the courage to implement changes to make those members happy. After all, today's and tomorrow's members are the club's customers!

How do you find out what members want? Ask them! Do club surveys, or discuss it in club assemblies. Do member focus groups. Surveys need not be long or complicated.

A few simple questions are all that is needed. There is a wealth of information to help you at www.rotary.org in the membership section or contact me and I will help you conduct a survey and implement results.

People have limited time and so they will only join and remain in organizations if they perceive the value to be worthy of their time and effort. In future articles we will talk about what your club's "value proposition" is – what do members receive from being involved in your club?

What are the benefits and satisfaction from joining your group? Once you understand this and what your target audience wants, then you are well on your way to success in growing your club!



The image shows a survey titled "Overall Performance Rating" with five options: "Did not meet Expectation", "Short of Expectation", "Met Expectation", "Exceed Expectation", and "Far Exceed Expectation". Each option has a corresponding checkbox. A hand is shown checking the box for "Far Exceed Expectation".

This is part 1 of the author's Membership Minute series titled Retain to Gain.

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