



Membership District 7090

Rotary 

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Is Your Club Ready to Recruit Young Professionals?

RESOURCES TO HELP OUR CLUBS GROW AND PROSPER

By Kevin Crosby, IPDG & District 7090 Membership Director

Most Rotary clubs in our District have an average age of “older”. Don’t get me wrong, there is nothing wrong with having older adults in your club. I should know. I’m one of them.

For all the benefits of having older members with their great worldly experience, business connections, more discretionary time and (perhaps) greater “disposable income,” we all recognize that clubs need to bring in younger members routinely. Clubs that fail to do this face two potentially fatal problems:

- (1) club leaders recycle to the point of burn-out in the absence of new members stepping up to leadership positions; and
- (2) natural attrition through retirement, relocation, illness or transfer to the Great Rotary Club in the Sky will threaten the long-term viability of the club.

So, if we agree that bringing in younger members is important, why does it seem to be such a challenge for so many Rotary clubs?

Is it us or is it them?

A lot has been written about the characteristics of different generations, as if they are homogeneous groups; e.g., Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) are hard-working, collegial, team players and motivated by money and recognition; Generation X (born 1965-1980) are self-reliant and skeptical, entrepreneurial, and need frequent reassurance; Generation Y (born 1981 – 2000) are goal-oriented and good at multi-tasking.

Whether or not you agree with the characterizations of different generations, I’ve often heard

Rotarians complain that young professionals just aren’t interested in joining service clubs like Rotary. Many of us may think, “Things were different when we were that age.”

So, is the difficulty in recruiting young professionals to Rotary a function of the traits of that generation? Not really.

The problem redefined

Rotary has done a lot of research about the challenge of recruiting young professionals. From what I’ve read, one thing seems clear. The problem really *isn’t* recruiting young professionals to Rotary. The problem is recruiting young professionals to the way Rotary *used to be*. Many of the customs, rituals, proud traditions, standard practices and other “trappings” of Rotary that have endured over

many, many years have special meaning to our veteran members and deserve our respect for their heritage and significance.

However, many of these customs and “proud traditions” will be unfamiliar, uninteresting, unappreciated, and perhaps uncomfortable for a young professional being introduced to Rotary. To put it bluntly, they are likely to be a “turn-off” and may be misinterpreted as essential elements of Rotary.

Let me be clear: I’m NOT referring to Rotary’s core values of service to others, “Doing Good in the World,” pursuing peace through understanding, promoting ethical conduct in business and personal life, eradicating polio, etc. I believe these are what young professionals will be attracted to. It’s just the rituals and customs they can do without.

So, what’s a club to do?

I believe there are a number of ways a club can improve its chances of successfully recruiting, engaging and retaining members who are young professionals. However, there isn’t one solution that will work for every club. Each club has to decide what it is willing to do.

Here are a few ideas to get the ball rolling:

- Have a club assembly and write down all of the

“rituals” that are observed routinely (e.g., reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, doing an invocation, fines or happy dollars, singing, etc.). Have a discussion with your current members about which of these are important to maintain and whether there is a good alternative for any of them.

- Invite a Rotaractor or a young professional not currently in Rotary to attend a meeting and offer an honest assessment of what parts of the meeting are appealing and which are unappealing. Later, your club can respond to this input.
- Invite a Rotaractor (or small group of Rotaractors) to speak to your club about what is appealing about joining Rotary and what are the obstacles.
- Use a club assembly or Board meeting to discuss your dues structure, meal costs and attendance policy and consider if there could be adjustments to these that would make it easier for a young professional to join.
- Make a deliberate effort to invite young prospective members to participate in a hands-on service project, social event, or fund-raiser prior

to coming to a club meeting.

In the fall (2017) our district will offer some workshops designed to help clubs be better prepared to recruit young professionals.

Great Resources for Membership

There are many great resources available from RI and other sources to assist clubs with their recruitment and retention strategies. Here’s a [great report](#) on a Young Professionals Summit sponsored by Rotary and the recommendations of participants for making Rotary clubs more attractive to this population.

Invitation to contribute to this newsletter

Do you have some good ideas about how clubs can develop membership? Perhaps it’s something your club has had success with. Perhaps you read about something being done by another club or district. Perhaps you came up with a clever idea all on your own!

If you would like to write an article for this newsletter, please contact me. I know we have a lot of smart Rotarians in our district and I’d like this newsletter to be a platform for sharing good ideas and best practices for membership development.

Questions or Comments? Contact IPDG Kevin Crosby, 2016-17 Membership Director, at kevin@d7090.org.