

## **District 9500-Strengthening Clubs through Recruitment and Retention**

### **The Problem**

*The world keeps changing. It is one of the paradoxes of success that the things and the ways, which got you to where you are, are seldom those that keep you there. -Charles Handy*

District 9500 has as part of its Strategic Plan to support and strengthen clubs by improving member recruitment and retention. This has been a District priority for a number of years.

Training and development in areas such as recruitment strategies, retention strategies, club flexibility and using current communication technology have been ongoing. Despite this focus, membership across the region has continued to decline.

At this time there is the strong likelihood that our District will change. This gives us a fantastic opportunity to take on transformational change at all levels of our organisation. We have to change to survive, but it's not just the clubs that need to change. The District also needs to change.

The District Strategic Plan could include a strategy to "Support and strengthen clubs to improve membership and retention by transforming both clubs and the District so they become more relevant and inclusive of people in our contemporary South Australian society."

The world keeps changing whether we like it or not. And so Rotary needs to change. The changes required of Rotary are not to the core values enshrined in Rotary, but to the culture of the District and the clubs. We need to change at all levels of our District from "This is how things have been done

around here" to "The way things are done around here are continually changing to reflect our contemporary society"

## **The Next Step Forward**

"The Clubs Leading Clubs" approach in District 9500 has been a great start, but it is far from finished. We need to continue to support members who are undertaking change in their clubs. We need to provide training and development in areas such as change management and change leadership, coping with resistance to change, changing organisational culture and building positive clubs.

The District needs to work in unison with clubs to transform Rotary at all levels of the organisation.

## **What Does This Mean?**

Transformational change is a metamorphosis of the clubs and the District from what they currently are into something new. What emerges is something different and unique and not completely predictable.

Although the clubs and District may have a vision and a plan for the future, the final outcome is not fully known and members move forward through some trial and error and continual adjustments to their vision and strategic planning. The change management strategy must be fluent and adaptable, because the actual change process emerges as the club moves forward.

Neither the club nor the District is managing a pre-determined, timed, linear process.

Transformational change:

- Must occur at all levels of the organisation simultaneously.
- Requires a systems approach as it looks at changes to the way we do things, systems and structures at all levels of the organisation.

- Is highly complex. It is an acceptance that people and institutions must change as society changes. If there is no change to member's understandings about how Rotary should operate, then ultimately members will undermine proposed organisational change.
- Is not a "one solution fits all" exercise for clubs? Each club needs to analyse its own situation and develop its own vision with accompanying goals and strategies that are supported by all members of that particular club. Just as importantly, they need the leadership to be able to adapt and change as the new contexts emerge.
- Is time consuming. This should be at least a 3-year project. Trying to fast track transformational change creates an illusion of success but will not produce long-term change if people go back to their old ways.
- Needs a flexible approach. There is no pre-determined, time-bound, linear strategic plan. Although there must be an over arching vision for change, the plan will need to course correct as problems are confronted and resolved. Transformational change involves a complex process of feedback, learning, problem solving, and negotiating and course correction. The change process continues to emerge as you proceed.
- Won't occur without the support of the vast majority of members.
- Can be challenging, frightening and even threatening to some members. This is made even more so because the emerging shape of Rotary cannot be articulated in every detail.
- May change the traditional roles and responsibilities of members at all levels of the organisation.

## **Shared Responsibility**

Transformational change cannot be done to people or even to clubs. It needs to be done with members and their clubs. The clubs and the District need to develop a shared vision for the future and work together. We need to develop a coalition of forward thinking, strategic, enthusiastic and positive transformational change leaders in our clubs and District.

The role of the District is to support and enable clubs and individuals to be creative leaders of change. This District, through the “Clubs Leading Clubs” project has been successful in building and supporting this leadership. We need to continue to build on the success we have achieved. The relationship between the Clubs and the District must become one of interdependence. The District, through its leadership and vision, supports the clubs and individual members to become the leaders and visionaries.

The solution to membership involves the creation of passionate volunteers at all levels of the organisation becoming advocates and leaders of change.

## **Summary**

We have a great opportunity to change Rotary in our State. We need to develop a truly shared vision of what Rotary could be in South Australia. We need to put in place a vision that is the product of the clubs and the District and then use this powerful coalition of Rotarians to undertake the transformational change required to continue to be a relevant organisation in our society.