



BE THE INSPIRATION

*Young Professional Observations and Recommendations
for Rotary International Clubs in District 6270*

Rotary International District 6270 | Kola Alayande, DG

Young Professionals Task Force:

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Introduction

During the 2018-2019 Rotary International (RI) year, District 6270 Governor Kola Alayande established a task force of young professionals (YP) from across the district to explore key issues that they and their fellow clubs seem to be facing. The intent was originally to focus on items solely related to YPs, but the group quickly realized that what affects a young Rotarian can just as similarly affect a Rotarian of any age. This report synthesizes ten distinct issues into three prime areas of focus: membership, communication, and value.

Methods

The YP task force met at least once every month over the fall and winter of the RI year to speak openly. They compiled a spreadsheet to organize their ideas into categories. Every idea had a subsequent explanation, list of what *has* and what *hasn't* worked, and recommendations suggested by each club. The spreadsheet was reviewed and added to independently by each YP task force member, edited during monthly meetings, and synthesized into this report to be shared across the district.

Findings

There were ten issues that came up time and again between each YP task force member. These issues can be distilled into three prime areas of focus: membership, communication, and value. One page of notes for each prime area are outlined on subsequent pages.

Membership

When it comes to membership, YPs will statistically decide whether they will continue with an activity within four months of beginning it. As this relates to RI, the YP task force sees two main issues within the membership category: member orientation, and member retention. A *purposeful* and *structured* orientation and subsequent follow-up from club leaders will go a long way in ensuring that YPs who visit or join will be inclined to stay.

Membership Recommendations

1. Make sure that sponsors are in place for new members, and that they actually *DO SOMETHING!* Young Professionals grew up during an era of increasingly structured mentorship. It's common for a YP to enter a new work environment and have a mentor at their job who guides their development. Our clubs should follow suit. Sponsors should follow up each week with their new members to make sure they're engaged, learning about RI, and being welcomed into the club and community.
2. Member orientation is a must. A quarterly standing meeting outside of club meeting hours is a good place to start. Each club should have a script to go over with new members outlining what RI is, the history of the club, member expectations, etc.
3. Retention dovetails into the value category, but this task force recommends increased amounts of "club socials" - any sort of extra club meeting activity that *builds goodwill and better friendships*. Examples of what has worked in YP task force member clubs include after-hour bar socials, holiday parties, bonfires, "name that Rotarian" games during meetings, and more. The quicker new members are able to build quality relationships within clubs, the more likely they will stay.
4. Good speakers. This should be obvious, but boring or irrelevant club meeting speakers are detrimental to membership retention, especially with new members.

Communication

As the largest category of club issues as seen through the eyes of the YP task force, the communication section includes: meeting times, meeting frequency, meeting content, communication & marketing, and openness to new ideas. The object of frustration here is that inefficient communication with these issues leads to confusion, irritation, and apathy.

Communication Recommendations

1. Noon seems to work the best for business professionals to engage over the lunch hour.
2. For those clubs not currently offering after-hours options, this is worth exploring (see membership recommendations bullet 3)
3. Fewer meetings make it easier to attend, but on the flip side, if a member misses too many meetings they will become disengaged. Meet no less than every other week.
4. Keep up on your newsletter! Communication is the key. If you disrupt a weekly club meeting frequency, members will easily lose track of what's happening, where, and when.
5. Speakers are important. Communicate to members that everyone is welcome to reach out within their network to find interesting speakers whose presentations will add value to the club.
6. Where meeting content is concerned, some clubs differ in their communication to presenters whether they can solicit members during their presentations. Limit the amount of speakers (nonprofits in particular) whose presentation is a glorified pitch for money.
7. Every club would benefit from an ongoing spreadsheet outlining important details from week to week including but not limited to: who was speaker, who was greeter, who was invocator, communication information, etc.
8. Every club should have an updated website. All of the tools are right there provided by RI. There are no excuses for a poor digital front.
9. Utilize marketing materials provided by RI.
10. Facebook is an effective platform for promoting club events and fundraisers. Clubs should make sure to allocate funds in their annual budget to boost events in order to obtain proper exposure and ROI.
11. Seasoned club members need to be encouraged to be open to new ideas. Yes, there is great value in continuing an event that is "set in stone", but if clubs ignore new ideas then they will never grow. YPs are discouraged by "cliques" within the established club membership.

Value

This YP task force asserts that all membership organizations are suffering. What truly is the value in being a member of something in the current digital era? This is a question that should be at the forefront of club communication to both members and their community. Within the category of value the task force identified the issues of: competition, service, and cost/value proposition.

Value Recommendations

1. Within our district, the most-encouraged memberships for YPs by their employers are chamber of business YP groups. Our clubs not only need to have a presence there, but we need to start sponsoring chamber socials. *We need to be visible in a big way within these groups.* This is not necessarily a situation across all of RI or our zone even, but within our district it is certainly the case.
2. Lions and Kiwanis are dying - very few YPs join these groups. RI members need to be there to catch members of all ages as they fall away from those groups.
3. "Isn't that for old men?" - we need to get over that as an organization still decades after the men-only club membership rule was dropped. How can a club offer value to a community if when the word "Rotary" is brought up in conversation people still scoff at old false information? This task force recommends a marketing campaign for our zone called "Rotary - not just for old men", or something similar.
4. How long will we be waiting for a Gen X RI President, let alone a Millennial? If RI wants more YPs, then we need to put our people in visible leadership roles to serve as an example for our generation.
5. Many groups offer an aspect of service, but RI is one of the few who offer service opportunities without geographic or religious boundaries. Part of RI's value is the INTERNATIONAL aspect of the club. This should be conveyed better.
6. It's hard to persuade a new member to pay out of pocket during their first few years before they've "drank the RI Kool Aid." The decline we see in membership correlates with a substitution of many small businesses with fewer big businesses. As an organization we *must find a way* to improve the corporate sponsorship model. Nobody in this YP task force has had a truly positive and successful story with this model, but we all agree that it is very important.
7. It should also be said that RI is an excellent group for building character and value for club members and their families. Family members should always be encouraged to attend meetings as guests, and to volunteer whenever possible. It's even a good thing when YPs bring their young children to meetings occasionally to build those strong "Rotary family" relationships.

Conclusions

Rotary International has a long and cherished history of service in our communities across the entire planet. Every committed member is proud to call themselves a Rotarian, and YPs are no different. By remembering that continuous improvement is an ongoing journey and not a destination, RI can always stay ahead of the curve. This YP task force has identified key issues that clubs in our district are facing, and they have provided recommendations for how to address them. Rome wasn't built in a day. If every club picked one or two recommendations from each category and slowly integrated them into their club goals, our district would strategically and systematically improve.