



Membership Retention Initiative

Introduction

Evidence from across RIBI suggests that about 40% of new Rotarians leave our organisation within the first two years of their membership. The number of Rotarians within District 1220 has been on a downward path for several years now. Couple these matters with the fact that the age profile of Rotarians in RIBI is the highest in the Rotary world and it is easy to see that we need to take some action if Rotary in District 1220 is to survive, let alone grow over coming years.

The Membership Committee of District 1220 has over the last couple of years been identifying ways in which we can take steps in an attempt to reverse the national trend. We have drawn together a number of strands towards a comprehensive Membership Recruitment and Retention Strategy to assist Clubs with their ongoing efforts in this regard. To date they have produced initiatives in the following areas:-

- The District Business Initiative
- Visioning
- District-wide Leavers Questionnaire

Many clubs have already made good use of one or more of these initiatives. Should you wish to know more of any of them, please contact the District Membership Chairman.

Clearly membership retention, as opposed to recruitment, is a major factor in maintaining or improving our overall numbers and one that perhaps in the past we have to a certain extent neglected.

Membership Retention

After initial meetings of a group from the District Membership Team it was agreed that we should seek out the assistance of Rotarians in the District to further this project. It was proposed that we should ask the Sherwood Group Presidents if they would be prepared to act as guinea pigs for this work. They willingly agreed to this proposal.

During preparatory work with the Presidents and other members of Clubs within the Sherwood Group it soon became obvious that simply producing a guide for mentors was not the whole answer to the problem of membership retention. It is just a part of it.

Quite clearly for a club to succeed in keeping those members that it wishes to recruit, attention must also be given to many aspects of recruitment and retention, including, but not exclusively the following:-



- Ensuring the climate, culture and ethos of the club is welcoming to new members and allows them a voice.
- A lively, strong social programme with a balance between formal and informal interaction and with a capacity for humour.
- Identifying suitable high calibre candidates emphasising quality not quantity.
- Appraising candidates of the true nature of the club, the work it does together with the commitments and enjoyment of membership
- Candidates attending a reasonable number of club meetings and being able to chat to different Rotarians
- Matching suitable mentors to potential new members
- Ensuring that appropriate, but not overbearing, mentoring takes place
- Allowing new members to take a full and active role in the club
- Maintaining a strong, vibrant, non-prescriptive mentoring scheme that allows new members to have a voice in decision

The reason for having Mentors

Many clubs already appoint mentors, with varying results. Rotary is large and complex and its members use a lot of jargon. To an outsider it can be somewhat intimidating. The very reputation of a Rotary Club can in itself be intimidating to would be members.

Listening to the clubs who have successfully adopted mentoring we have produced the following notes outlining their reasons for having them.

- It helps in the retention of new members
- It helps new members to establish a rapport and relationship with existing members
- It helps the integration of new members
- It explains something about what the nature of Rotary
- Mentors can be kept in place for as long (or as short), a period as is needed by the new Rotarian
- It help the new member to quickly become part of the club
- Importantly it helps new members to quickly feel *Valued, Empowered and Involved*
- New members may need "befriending"

Identifying Suitable Mentors

It is vitally important that any Rotarian selected to become a mentor should have the skills and abilities appropriate to the job. There should be a good match between mentor and new Rotarian with some common ground to assist the bonding process. The following is a list of the skills considered most suitable:-

- A good listener
- A good communicator
- Be really enthusiastic about Rotary and be able to transfer this enthusiasm to others
- Have a reasonable knowledge of Rotary – Need not be the A-Z of Rotary
- Adaptable to the needs of new members
- Responsive to events and situations as they arise
- Recognise that different personalities have different needs
- Committed to regular contact with the new Rotarian
- Need not have been the person to introduce the new Rotarian to the club



Role and Responsibilities of Mentor

Before accepting the role of a Mentor, Rotarians should be aware of the role and responsibilities that it entails. The following identifies in general terms what might be required of them. Of course this may well vary from Club to Club.

- Jargon busting – explaining terminology
- Integrating the new member into club fellowship
- Being available to the new member as and when required
- Should be a part of complete Induction process
- Should act in a “one to one” capacity with the new member
- Important to be a good listener and not to push their own ideas too hard
- Does not need to be the source of All Rotary information – simply a conduit
- Not to lecture
- Should be on Club Council or report to the Club Council
- Should prompt questions from new member
- Be able to explain Rotary, in simple terms
- Should be in place and start the process before induction
- Should be part of a total recruitment process
- Assist with the welfare of the new member
- Prompt the Club to seek out the views of new members on a regular basis

Benefits of Mentoring

It is a well-established fact that many organisations have adopted retention strategies, including the use of mentors, to retain their members. Within District 1220 the way that each club makes use of mentors is determined by many factors such as the size of the club, the number of new members, its structure and culture etc.,.

Well-structured mentoring as part of a comprehensive induction can be really effective and offer a number of benefits to the new member, the mentor and the club. The overall benefits of taking the system to heart should include the following:

Benefits to the new member

- It helps to fulfil their expectations of Rotary
- Improves their inclusion within the club
- It helps empower them to contribute to Club issues
- It prompts new members to bring in other new members
- It ensures that their potential is utilised to the full
- Quickly becomes a positive Ambassador for the club
- It allows new members to “think big”
- New members become quickly engaged in a responsible role



Benefits to the Mentor

- Real satisfaction in the role
- Recognition of other club members
- A good role for appropriate less active members
- Enhances their skills and abilities

Benefits to the Club

- Retention of members improved
- Creates opportunity for change
- Creates better club officers and progression
- Makes use of the Vocational profile, skills and abilities of members,
- Circulates good practice
- Generates club enthusiasm
- Helps to push the momentum of the club
- Possibility of more new members
- A good professional approach

Conclusion

The District Membership Team wish to make it clear that this guide is just that – a guide. It is not intended as a set of rules that must be rigidly followed. Please take from it whatever you think is appropriate for your club.

Remember though that committed Rotarians are what make Rotary Clubs successful. Unless your club makes the best use of the human resources (new Members) presented to it, then it will be much more difficult for you to survive and succeed and thrive.

District 1220 Membership Team
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