

# Rotary Voices

Stories of service from around the world

## How to identify your club's membership problem

Posted on [August 17, 2016](#)



Members of the Rotary Club of James River, Richmond, Virginia, USA.

*By Richard Cunningham, Rotary Club of James River, Richmond, Virginia, USA*

My club is a relatively young club (10 years) and does not carry some of the baggage older clubs do, although we certainly have had our problems. The club had dwindled down to just four members at one point before I transferred into it in 2012.

Near the end of 2012, a small team embarked on a structured and planned process of cultural change. Under the umbrella of "Service-Centered Leadership," we have been able to achieve some amazing results. The club has grown to 24 members and is on its way to

stabilizing at 40 active members, at which time we will look to seed another club.

What is the secret of our success? We take a strategic, not tactical approach. Our core membership message mirrors RI President John Germ's recipe for growth: engage members in community activities. We have dynamic projects in both basic education and literacy, and maternal and child health. Every one of our last five new members has a connection with either the medical field or education, or both. One new member was a transfer, who switched because their previous club was not involved in any major projects. We have also reached out to the recently retired; two of our newest members just retired this year.

I say all this not to brag, but to share what can be achieved with a vision, a plan, high volunteer expectations, and a solid, sustained team effort. Almost every member of our club is engaged. We do not settle for less in a new member, and have been committed to this approach for three years now.

We've shared our message at zone meetings and in discussion forums. When coaching leaders how to help a club with membership issues, we always advise they first take a hard look at what they are dealing with. The first step to problem-solving is always identifying the real problem. We've often found it to be one or more of the following:

- **A deeper root problem.** In almost all cases, there are several other areas of club operations and leadership that aren't going well. Declining membership is usually the symptom of a deeper dysfunction, not the root problem.
- **Lack of a sustainable strategy.** These are clubs with few plans for keeping a pipeline of future leaders. They may be led by a group of mostly inexperienced Rotarians with less than three years in Rotary, or by a highly experienced group who like the prestige of leadership but have long since lost their passion for steadily improving the club.
- **Mired in status quo.** The club may have been dysfunctional so long that the leadership team has no experience of a vibrant club. All they have seen is the current state and they don't actually know what "good" looks like.
- **Lack of knowledge.** The leadership team has never honestly diagnosed the problem. They have a lot of guesses, but no facts. It could be retention, a lack of prospects, an inability to close the deal on prospects, lack of curb appeal, the existence of "toxic" members, or something else.
- **Lack of history.** The leadership team doesn't have a sense of the club's membership trends. They don't know how many members have joined or resigned in the past decade, or seen any patterns in the club's membership.

The first step to addressing your club's membership problem, or helping another club, is to do some fact finding. Pull whatever membership history is available and see what it tells you. Even if it doesn't provide answers, it should tell you the questions you need to be asking as you engage your club in solving the problem.

Armed with facts, or at least questions, you can begin to develop intentional strategies to create a culture of membership growth.

Use [Membership Assessment Tools](#) to analyze your member profile and add value to your club experience. Register for our webinar, [Revitalize and Rethink Your Rotary Club: Crafting Your Member Experience](#) 11:00 Chicago time on Wednesday, 24 August.

This entry was posted in [Developing leaders](#) and tagged [Membership](#) by [Rotary International](#). Bookmark the [permalink \[https://blog.rotary.org/2016/08/17/how-to-identify-your-clubs-membership-problem/\]](https://blog.rotary.org/2016/08/17/how-to-identify-your-clubs-membership-problem/).

7 THOUGHTS ON "HOW TO IDENTIFY YOUR CLUB'S MEMBERSHIP PROBLEM"



SAALUMUN martins  
on [July 3, 2022 at 06:31](#) said:

Members Sha conduct themselves mutual respect decency towards each other at all times

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Peter Cartledge  
on [October 9, 2021 at 14:57](#) said:

It's a great pity for those who are really struggling that NONE of the links work. More dysfunctional useless stuff from Rotary. Are you hoping clubs will die? WHY?

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Barry Gordon  
on [January 21, 2019 at 07:43](#) said:

Is there an online tool to survey membership

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**Bala**

on **August 18, 2016 at 00:52** said:

Reblogged this on [shanakyar](#).

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**ecay03**

on **August 18, 2016 at 00:36** said:

Reblogged this on [Rotaract Club at University of Dar Es Salaam](#).

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Pingback: [How to identify your club's membership problem | The Rotary Club of Carteret](#)



Ghazala Chapman

on **August 17, 2016 at 17:06** said:

Congratulations for reviving your club. The problem becomes acute if all the club members are not involved in charitable projects.

The sharing of responsibilities in the execution of projects makes all the members of the club interested in what is going on within their sphere.

Tightly controlled centralised power structure within a club, is a definite threat to the long life of that club.



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