

Membership Growth: Stay Above the Curve

The law of diminishing returns is that a "success" curve flattens out at the top. Regardless of the amount of extra work you put in, you just can't expect to get the same proportionate result. But have you ever thought about the declining curve? When an undertaking begins to slip over the edge, you will find the curve tends to plunge. The further along you go, the steeper the slope and the harder the recovery.

So, be warned! If your club's membership remains at a low level, you may be on the beginning of such a curve. If it's declining, you're on the slippery slope. Don't ignore it or delay your plan to rectify it. There's no time like the present to implement a plan. Act rather than react and you'll get better results!

Membership growth is not a long-range goal. It's an immediate need! It's known that people will join a club because they have a keen interest in what it stands for and how it will benefit them. Generally, this includes community involvement and building relationships. Consequently, they will leave the club if they fail to achieve this purpose. Basically, the reconstruction process involves **three simple factors**: an analysis of the problems impeding your club, the establishment of goals and improvement strategies, and sheer effort.

To determine what factors are **hindering your membership efforts**, take a look at where your club falls short. The most prevalent problem is weakness in club programming. Good programs aren't presented with the charter. They must be developed and maintained by dedicated club officers. Here is an action drive that can get your club back on the road to excellence:

- 1. Focus** on the needs of individual members by presenting the different opportunities that the club can offer. These opportunities are not just limited to what you may think are the main goals of a club. Perhaps some members are seeking the social aspects of joining a club, or enjoy the networking exposure, or perhaps they simply enjoy belonging to various types of groups. Have

information regarding membership readily available. This may be in the form of a club brochure, a guest invitation card, or simply your "elevator speech".

2. Seek Information. Find out what does the member wants, their long and short range goals and how can the club help to achieve these purposes? Do this via a club survey, an impromptu meeting or perhaps you can assemble a team to call on each member. Remember, sometimes the answers are clearly out there, it's just a matter of asking!

3. Seek Help. Work with your Area Governor and District Officers in preparing a rescue plan for your club. These roles exist for the sole benefit of helping your club. Your district officers have experience with club membership issues and will be able to offer personalized, real-life advice on how to improve your club.

Establishing goals and improvement strategies is easier said than done, but it isn't impossible. First things first - it must be determined what are the goals to be accomplished. Keep this list as specific as possible; remember that goals are specific milestones you work to achieve. Once a list has been compiled, the next action item is to figure out how this will be done. You shouldn't be afraid to have a brainstorming session and encourage open communication among members. Perhaps you want to have a cluster meeting to boost membership in your area or region. Chances are, other clubs in your area may be facing the same challenges, and having a cross-club membership campaign may be a project to consider. Working with other clubs also keeps the creative juices flowing and cultivates new and exciting opportunities for your club. Strategies must be realistic and easily able to be implemented. Club officers must also keep in mind that these strategies should be items that all club members will agree upon and will have no problem executing. This will allow the desired goals to be easily attainable and your club will continue to engage in team and relationship building along the way.

As life is so busy for the majority of club members, taking on the responsibility of a leadership or officer type role adds to the load. An "A" for effort simply isn't adequate anymore as everyone could honestly say that amongst the full and hectic schedule they possess that "they tried".

Putting forth effort requires dedication, hard work and excitement for the cause at hand. It is the responsibility of club leaders to make sure that they are always positive, encouraging, ready and willing to lend time and effort to ensure the club's success. These attributes are contagious and it's known that a troop is only as good as its leader!

In the end, it is important to pinpoint what factors are preventing your club from growing. The need to establish goals and create strategies presents a wealth of opportunity for enhancing your club's image and increasing your membership roster. Although this requires a great deal of effort, it will yield strong rewards in the end and perhaps your club will be the model for all others in your district as a success story!

Adapted from Toastmasters International

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