

# Eight Ways to Reduce the Cost of Rotary Membership

September 26, 2015

Membership, New Generations, P/R and Marketing

<http://kensolowrotary.com/2015/09/26/eight-ways-to-reduce-the-cost-of-rotary-membership-2/>

Growing the membership of your Rotary club is all about the value you provide for prospective members. The value equation is relatively simple and looks something like this: local and community service + networking and business development + professional growth and leadership opportunities + fellowship + fun / cost of membership = Value of Rotary. We tend to focus on the numerator in this equation all of the time. ( er...the numerator was all the stuff before the divisor “/” sign.) Today we are going to focus on the denominator, for the good reasons of 1) cost of membership is cold and lonely and we just don’t talk about it enough, and 2) it is the quickest way to improve the value equation.

The good news is messing with the denominator of membership cost has a huge impact in the membership value equation. The bad news (depending on your point of view) is that solving the cost issue often goes directly to the issue posed by Rotary General Secretary, John Hewko, “What’s more important...Rotary attendance or Rotary engagement?’ As you will see, the cost solution often runs directly counter to many of the best known techniques for bolstering attendance. So if you are a traditionalist who believes that attendance is one of the fundamental core values that Rotary has promoted for more than 100 years and therefore unwinding tools and techniques that promote attendance is a big mistake, you ain’t gonna be happy with some of the suggestions below.

So...here’s what I suggest. If you are a traditionalist you may find that the following ideas bring your blood to a boil. In fact, your reaction might be quite similar to this scene from the movie, *The Great Gatsby*, starring Leonardo DiCaprio. If you find yourself responding to this post in a similar emotional state, try taking four deep cleansing breaths and then repeat a calming statement like, “I am a calm and reasonable Rotarian.” I just learned this technique at our District’s Peace and Conflict Transformation seminar this week....not that I particularly needed to attend...

See if any of these ideas might work for your club. We all understand that the value equation has a lot of inputs in the numerator, but if you can reduce your club’s cost of membership your club will immediately offer better value for potential new members.

1) Unbundle your meal costs from your dues. “Prepaying” for meals by adding them to member dues payments is a great way to encourage attendance, but it’s a lousy way to encourage engagement and higher membership. Pay as you go meals takes financial pressure off of members who could save \$100 in costs if they miss five meetings at \$20 per meal. If you think that isn’t a lot of money, you are correct. But the optics of having to pay for meals when you can’t attend are terrible.

2) Closely following number 1, once you unbundle meals you can now discuss your dues without including meal costs. “Our dues are \$350 per year. Oh yes....and you pay for your meals when you attend the meetings.” That sounds a lot better than “our dues are about \$1,000 per year.” Traditionalists say this encourages members not to attend. Engagers say you will gain 20 new members at a lower price point and if the meetings are interesting then all members will attend. If the meetings stink, then paying for meals in advance isn’t going to rescue the club anyway.

3) Get rid of all fundraising commitments. Some Rotary clubs ask members to sell tickets and sponsorships to the club’s fundraiser, with the provision that if the member doesn’t sell a specified minimum number of tickets, they must pay for the difference themselves. Engagers say that if your members won’t sell tickets, then don’t bother with a fundraiser. Fundraising commitments

are nothing but a giant negative to membership growth where the costs of Rotary membership may already be daunting. If the non-profits in your community need your club's financial support, then rally your membership and have a great fundraiser. If no one sells any tickets then you might want to rethink why you are doing a fundraiser in the first place.

4) Rule of 35. The Rotary Club of Washington DC offers special discounted dues to members who are younger than age 35. The 50% discount comes with the expectation that younger members are active participants in "hands on" Rotary projects. Rotary clubs can choose any age they want for offering discounted dues, and they could create their own rules for who is eligible for discounts. Discounts don't necessarily have to be based on age. Use your imagination. For me, any negotiation that exchanges service work in the community for lower dues payments meets the spirit of choosing engagement over attendance.

attendance

5) Have your club schedule a busy season of service projects that can take the place of club meetings. What if your club scheduled one service project each month and encouraged members to make up at these service oriented events? As long as the club takes attendance at the service project they will get the double barrel benefit of reducing the cost of membership as members don't pay for a dozen meals during the year, AND they get a much healthier Rotary club that is seriously engaged in doing service work in the community. RI tells us service projects count as makeups. Why not take advantage of the rules as a part of your club's financial structure?

6) Reduce the cost of your meals. I personally love Happy Hour clubs. Happy Hour clubs are a lot like dinner clubs, with the exception that 1) the happy hour menu is a lot cheaper than buying dinner, 2) you don't have to order anything if you don't want to, and 3) the meetings are finished a lot earlier in the evening so members with children get home in time for family commitments. Breakfast clubs have a similar advantage. Have members bring their own coffee and bagels twice a month and save on meal costs. Yes...you have to negotiate with the restaurant where you meet, but reducing meal costs is doable if you are committed to growing your club and prioritizing engagement over attendance. Maybe mix in a Happy Hour meeting instead of dinner once each month? Be creative.

7) Corporate memberships are an interesting way to reduce Rotary costs. No...businesses can't be Rotary members. But the Columbia Patuxent Rotary club offers businesses the following proposition. They ask the owner/CEO to join and pay full dues, including meal costs. Since the owner is worried about attendance, he or she can name two other employees to be members of the club where they only pay RI and District dues. In this structure, all three employees are Rotary members, and any of the three can attend the meetings. If junior employees attend at the same time as the CEO then they are charged for the meal. Oh...in exchange for this offer Columbia Patuxent asks the company to make a contribution to the club's fundraiser. This is a great deal for younger members of the business who should be getting involved in community service and promoting the business locally anyway.

8) Ask members with deep pockets to "sponsor" a new member by offsetting 50% of their membership dues for one year. The sponsoring member is recognized by the club and the new member is expected to attend all service projects and club social projects during the year.

Maybe it's time your club challenged some long held ideas and made a serious dent in the cost of membership.