

MEMBERSHIP RETENTION

The Ultimate Bottom Line

The First Year Member

While the first year of membership offers the best opportunity to lay the foundation for long-term loyalty to your Club, it's also the year that Members are most likely to leave your Club.

Successful businesses not only go after new customers, but also spend a considerable amount of time and effort retaining current customers. Whether you are focusing on first or second year Members, take the time to find out what each individual wants from his or her Club. When new Members feel they are getting a lot out of their Club, they will be more willing to dive deeper into their participation and commit to remaining a Member for years to come.

Is it a “privilege” to be a Member of your Club?

- **Retention starts with recruitment.**
- **When you lose a Member you must recruit two in order to show growth.**
- **Renewal is only the last step in the long process of retention.**
- **Members are neither identical nor interchangeable.**
- **Pay special attention to new Members so they will convert to lifetime Members.**

Raising Attendance

Poor attendance and excessive losses are symptoms of the same problem. Steps to improve one usually improve the other. The Membership Committee's method of enrolling and involving new members, an active Fellowship Committee, and good meeting programs have a beneficial effect upon attendance and member tenure.

Correcting the basic problems requires broad perspective and actions not available to Club Committees. A Club's Board of Directors is uniquely suited to make necessary evaluations and initiate corrective actions.

Correcting basic underlying problems is far more important than quick cures and simple answers.

Reasons for Losing Members

A small fraction of losses can't be prevented. Most uncontrollable losses fall into one of the following categories:

1. Death
2. Economics
3. Health
4. Military Service
5. Business Conflicts
6. Moving from the Community

Historically, all Optimist Clubs combined lose 20% of their membership each year!

The effective Board will concentrate on dealing with controllable losses and will avoid wasting energy and time trying to solve uncontrollable losses.

An analysis of Club practices and procedures will reveal reasons that fall into a few broad categories. Depending on the Board's willingness to take action and effect improvements, all categories are manageable.

CONTROLLABLE LOSSES

Club Leadership

Failure to assign responsibility.

Old-timers usurp leadership.

Internal politics.

President operates one-person administration.

Club leadership problems are immediately corrected by applying the right remedial measures. An effective President will:

- + Distribute responsibilities to give more Members the opportunity for service and recognition.
- + Understand the type of organization he or she leads and recognize the reasons individuals join.
- + Provide opportunities for all Members to use their talents and leadership skills.

Club Activity

Service activities program too narrow; lacks variety.

Absence of service opportunities.

Too much time or work required.

Neglect of Club objectives.

Lack of social affairs.

No activities including spouses/families.

The Club with a wide variety of activities will motivate a greater number of Members than the Club with limited projects. Without activity, a Club's membership will soon diminish to the few who joined simply to belong to something.

Most Members will object to too much work, like ticket selling or fundraising. Share assignments and responsibilities to prevent resentment and ill feeling.

Overcoming inactivity will revitalize a Club and make it an integral part of a progressive community, give current Members pride in membership, and motivate other individuals in the community to join.

Club Meeting

No programs or poor programs.

Business at meetings.

Lack of punctuality in starting and adjourning.

Poor meals or service.

Less than desirable meeting place.

Problems in this category are easily corrected. Varied, interesting and meaningful meeting programs are the key. Experience proves that the absence of meeting programs is sufficient in itself to cause a Club's eventual downfall.

Another factor affecting attendance is meeting punctuality. A member may refuse to attend if meetings consistently start late and run overtime.

The meeting place, location and menu are also important factors affecting attendance and tenure. Optimist International's recommended policy on meeting places and use of alcoholic beverages was established to maintain a good public image for every Club.

Education and Orientation

Members not acquainted with Club objectives.
Lack of proper orientation for new Members.
Lack of opportunity for participation.
Absence of, or poor, induction ceremony.
No assignments of new Members to Committees.

Establish a routine for making each new Member a part of Club activity. This will result in more Members becoming active, interested and proud participants in the Club's operation. Too often, the working, dedicated Member acquired these qualities by accident. An annual reindoctrination for ALL Members is a good procedure with many benefits.

Personal Objections

Personal slight or embarrassment of Members.
Dislike of Club officers.
Lack of recognition for efforts.
Lack of fellowship.

Various kinds of personal objections contribute to membership loss. They are seldom voiced; the very nature of the reason inhibits the individual. A Member may instead claim lost interest, little time or business conflicts as a reason for resignation.

The Board should create policies and practices that will reduce, if not eliminate, the chance of insult or embarrassment of Members. Even the most playful ridicule may cause the loss of a Member.

Club officers should constantly watch their relationships with Members. The President should strive to seek the friendship and confidence of every Member. Fellowship is the keystone of Optimist Club membership.

Financial

*Objection to the practice of fining Members.
Fines too high.
Expensive meals.
Excessive demand for cash contributions from Members.*

Financial objections cause Member losses.

Excessive fining and frequent demands for cash contributions are the leading objections. They are best eliminated by an adequate dues structure and a successful fundraising project.

Club leaders should realize that costs are a factor in Members' tenure and attempt to prevent unusual, unexpected financial demands.

BOARD ACTION

If the disenchantment of Members is to be checked, the Board must take remedial action.

The only alternative is continued membership decline and eventual disintegration of the Club.

There are strong, active Clubs everywhere that set splendid examples of what can be accomplished with the proper approach to preventing controllable membership losses.

