



8 tips for getting young people interested in your Rotary Club

The Halloween-inspired walk featured ghost stories and neighborhood history. It also replaced a regular meeting of the Rotary Club of Dupont Circle Washington. It's just the kind of activity that can attract young people -- or the young at heart -- to Rotary.

"This type of club meeting not only shakes up the tradition-bound notions of Rotary, it also creates an event to show off our club to younger prospects," says Post, a founding member of the Dupont Circle club.

Although Smith has since moved out of the country, while he was a member of the Rotary Club of Bondi Junction in Sydney, he and Post, a former Rotary Peace Fellow, discovered that they used similar strategies for attracting and keeping younger members. Here are some of their tips to help your club do the same:

1. Organize interesting meetings

Post says her club has found that organizing at least two special meetings a year creates a unique experience for attracting new members and cements friendships among club members. Explore your community for activities that you can use to create a different kind of club experience.

2. Look at your traditions

Smith says newer generations aren't impressed by pomp and circumstance. He points to the Rotary Club of Crawley in Western Australia, whose membership is one of the fastest growing and most diverse. They no longer sing the national anthem or fine their members.

"Some tradition is important, but too much time spent on these rituals may prevent a younger member from feeling at home in your club," he adds.

3. Update how and where you talk about Rotary

When the Rotary Club of Bondi Junction started referring to itself as a "social enterprise that delivers social change," it saw an immediate uptick in interest from younger members. Choosing the right communication channels for your club is equally important, whether it's Facebook, LinkedIn, or your website.

"The trickiest part is keeping it updated, but this is also critical. If your presence on these sites becomes stagnant, you'll lose the opportunity to hook a younger audience," says Smith.

4. Examine your club dues

The Dupont Circle club decided to offer appetizers and a cash bar rather than a full meal at its meetings to keep dues affordable for young professionals. You might also consider offering reduced dues to younger members for their first year.

5. Provide alternatives to weekly attendance

"Attendance is another challenge," says Post. "Members in our club often travel for work, plus they have family or other personal commitments that vie for their time."

The Dupont Circle club makes make-ups easier by counting participation in service days, committee meetings, district trainings, and club social events.

6. Plan events that members can attend easily

In many urban areas, young people rely on public transportation to get around. Choose meeting locations with that in mind. And hold some events on the weekend so members with full-time jobs and young families can attend.

7. Involve young members early to build club loyalty

Involve new members in club projects right from the start. Seek their input. Give them responsibilities so they feel a sense of accomplishment and worth. And assign them mentors in the club to ensure that they feel valued.

8. Plan family-friendly projects and activities

Plan club meetings, service projects, and events that appeal to young families. For instance, the Dupont Circle club threw a baby shower to celebrate three upcoming births. The shower was held in a space that offered plenty of room for the children of other club members to play together.