



Rotary

6 Failed Membership Strategies Rotary Clubs Love

The Rotary Zone 33 Rotary Coordinator Team has been successfully training clubs on attracting, onboarding and retaining members, recommending [10 Intentional Membership Strategies](#) proven by clubs to work. Surprisingly, a set of legendary strategies that **don't work** continue to appeal to clubs. To save your club a lot of time and frustration, **here's a list of strategies to avoid:**

1. Club socials, "meet and greets" with prospective members invited as guests
2. Invite prospective members to regular club meetings
3. Incentives -- Offer members an incentive, such as "free dues for a quarter", gift cards or gift certificates, Foundation Recognition Points, etc. for proposing a new member
4. Free or reduced dues for new members
5. Podium announcements, newsletters, bulletins, emails, etc. asking members in mass to propose new members
6. Direct mail, print advertising, billboards, post cards or emails inviting prospects to events or meetings

WHY these strategies don't work to attract members

- **Club socials, "meet and greets" with prospective members invited as guests** -- Clubs love this idea. Who wouldn't? Have a party and use membership as an excuse. Trouble is, a good social is a lousy venue for having a serious, informative conversation about what Rotary is and does. Members mostly talk with each other, guests feel a bit awkward and go home with, at best, a feeling that Rotary "may be OK".
No call to action = no action.
- **Invite prospective members to regular club meetings** - Almost as ineffective as socials. In the average club meeting, 2 or 3 minutes focused on what Rotary is or does would be the exception. Prospects meet some nice people, perhaps hear a good program, have a great meal, and leave without knowing any more about Rotary than when they came in. They go home wondering, "What's that all about?" Conversion rates of 1 in 10 (1 new member for every 10 prospects at meetings) for this strategy are about the best you can expect, even with great member follow-up.
Rather, a focused [Rotary Membership Event](#) can yield 1 new member for every 2 prospects.
- **Incentives** --- Offering members an incentive, such as "free dues for a quarter", gift cards or gift certificates, Foundation Recognition Points, etc. for proposing a new member -- For a full understanding of this one, read *Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces That Shape Our Decisions*. A weird thing happens when you attach money to something. Suddenly, instead of thinking, "That's even a better reason to do something I ought to do anyway" the member starts thinking, "There are probably easier ways for me to make \$150." The problem is, you can't make it big enough to make the money matter in its own right. If you could offer, say, \$2,000 it might work. If your budget will support that, give it a try.
This strategy also makes the prospect feel like they are being "sold" on Rotary. We do not want to recruit anyone – we would rather attract those who have a genuine interest. If you recruit a new member to Rotary, the recruiting doesn't end there, because you then need to recruit them to pay dues, recruit to meetings, recruit to club functions, etc. This new recruited member just became a lot of work. If anyone needs more work to do, then incentives will guarantee you that result.



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- **Free or reduced dues for new members** -- In general, community service isn't free and community service including a meal several times per month surely isn't free. Rotary isn't for everyone, and particularly not for someone for whom the cost is a hardship. We don't do anyone any favors by asking them to give up something else to be part of Rotary. If the "sticker price" of Rotary is too much, reducing that by half or to zero for a while is just postponing the inevitable. When the full dues rate kicks in, it will still be too much and you just upped your attrition, or reduced your retention. .
Note: The jury is out on the intentional strategy of bringing in Young Professionals who age out of subsidized dues by, say, age 35. It seems to work for country clubs and may work for Rotary, as well.
- **Podium announcements, newsletters, emails, etc. asking members in mass to propose new members** -- In even a group of 20 people, let alone 200, a general "ask" is anonymous - everyone at the table assumes the speaker is talking to the person on his left or right -- that someone else will take care of it. A real one-on-one conversation in person or by phone (a personal "ask") where you ask for and receive a commitment, is a whole different deal.
- **Direct mail, print advertising, billboards, post cards or emails inviting prospects to events or meetings** -- Clubs love this because it's easy. Doesn't work at all. If our own members won't pay attention to an anonymous "ask", why would prospects respond to an anonymous ask? The way to get prospects to a membership event (not a regular club meeting) is for a member who knows them to invite them personally, get their firm (not "Maybe" or "I'll try") commitment to come and offer to pick them up.
If you really want to try this strategy, it would be a lot more entertaining to take the same money spent on these ideas, but instead convert it all to \$1 bills and throw them down main street and watch the mayhem. Your results for attracting new members will be about the same.

If you really want your club to be successful in attracting, onboarding and retaining members, have a look at [10 Intentional Membership Strategies](#) proven by clubs to work. You need at least 1 strategy for each of the Membership Key Success Factors:

- Prospect Identification (Lead Generation)
- Attraction
- Onboarding
- Retention