When we encounter a club that’s either not growing -- rocking along at about the same size for several years (MGI Report “Yellow Line”), or, of greater concern, a club that’s been steadily leaking a few members per year (MGI Report “Red Line”), it’s time for a face-to-face conversation with the club President and, hopefully, 2-3 other club leaders (whether holding an office or not). Such meetings would generally be initiated by the DG or a District Membership Committee member and usually include the Assistant Governor.

Arrange to meet on the club’s ground – a place where they’re comfortable.

* Clarify that the conversation is not about “The Numbers” – it’s about their MEMBERS, and the fact that they’re on a trend of zero growth (or consistently losing 1-2 members per year). It’s about the effect/impact of this continuing decline on their **members**.
* Listen – Ask questions to get to the core of their beliefs and biases. Avoid responding to any of those – rather, “tell me more about that”. “what do you mean by that?”, etc. Get all the laundry out on the table:
  + Are you and other club leaders concerned about becoming a steadily smaller club (or that your club is smaller today than it was 5 years ago)?
  + Where do you see the club in another 5 years?
  + What challenges has your club had in attracting or keeping members?
  + What’s getting in the way of moderately growing your club (rather than shrinking)?
    - Is this view shared by everyone, or is it a small, vocal minority?
  + Do you think there are members who are troubled by this?
* You’ll likely get one or more typical “reasons” for the club’s membership decline:
  + “We’re just the right size – We don’t want to become one of those big clubs where nobody knows anyone.”
  + “We’re not losing members – the room is full”
  + “We all like each other – we’re fine with the members we have now”
  + “Our members don’t like change”
  + “We’ve been here 65 years – we’re OK”
  + We have some vocal members who don’t want a bunch of new people”
* “I’ve heard those reasons from other clubs. Let’s review together what’s happened over the past few years.”
  + Hand out copies of the club’s Goal Setting Worksheet and review the 5-year July 1 member count graph
  + Discuss Attrition Rates and Attraction Rates. In many cases, declining clubs do NOT have an attrition problem – many have attrition rates close to or BELOW the District Average.
  + Help them understand the PTS (Problem to Solve) – in many cases it’s just a low attraction rate
* Underscore that a successful, sustainable club has an intentional approach to membership – **consistently and moderately growing** the number of **members** in the club year over year. We’re not talking about a 20-member club growing to 50 – we’re talking about growing to 21 or 22, then to 24 or 25. What other clubs find is that new members bring a lot to table:
  + New ideas
  + New perspectives
  + New candidates for future leadership – we won’t have to be president 2-3 times
  + New skills and talents
  + More hands – we can do more or bigger projects
  + More fundraising capacity
  + MOST IMPORTANTLY, the **value proposition** of Rotary membership is the network of other Rotarians –
    - More members = more value to all members
    - Fewer members = less value to all members
    - People who can help with challenges or opportunities in your life or business
    - People who know others outside Rotary who could be helpful to you
    - A durable, lifetime network that’s not going away (like your school network did or like you’re work network did)
    - High quality people of high personal integrity
* Bottom Line: Think of **what’s in it for your** **MEMBERS**. The fact is they get more value and more benefit of a club that’s larger, rather than smaller. **“What could your club do if you had more members?”**
* **IF** you get a “We’re just the right size, we don’t want to grow. We don’t want to become a big club” objection, see the **Appendix** --
* Let’s turn for a moment to the downsides of steady membership decline:
  + Budgets get tighter
  + Less capacity for service projects
  + Limited supply of new leaders – same ideas, same results, 2-3 terms as President
  + Smaller meetings – harder to attract interesting speakers
  + Aging out together
  + Loss of Sustainability – Club becomes UNABLE to attract enough members to maintain critical mass
  + Actually, smaller clubs are **harder to run** than larger clubs. With more members, you get beyond 2-3 people doing everything
  + “What would this community look like without your Rotary club?”
  + “Are you prepared to be the last generation of Rotarians in town?”
* The objective is to find someone willing to be a **Change Agent** in the club – someone who we can help with leading a change in **club culture** – from a culture of low expectations and steady decline to a culture of becoming an **irresistible** club, a **culture of inviting** – something others want to be part of and current members want to remain part of. We want to help that person with the basics of **Changing Club Culture:** [**https://www.rizones33-34.org/?s=culture**](https://www.rizones33-34.org/?s=culture)
  + Reset the “bar” – redefine what “Good” looks like
  + Assessment – A Member Satisfaction Survey – what do members WANT?
  + Create a Coalition – A small core group of members in favor of a moderately growing club
  + Create a Vision – What does the club look like in the future? How do we create a “**culture of inviting”**, where it’s the “norm” to invite others to join? What’s getting in the way?
  + Communication Script and Plan – Consistent, frequent messaging to all members about attracting new members
  + Teach members how to attract new members
  + Create some short-term “Wins” – a successful Rotary Information Hour (Discover Rotary)
* Seek to engage our Club Assistance Team to work with club leaders on becoming an **Irresistible Club,** employing successful strategies to enhance the **Club Experience,** thereby **reducing attrition** and **increasing attraction** of new members. Achieving Rotary’s Action Plan:
  + Increase our Impact
  + Expanding our Reach
  + Enhancing Participant Engagement
  + Increase our Ability to Adapt

**Appendix:**

**Handling Objections to Growth**

**The Situation**

Many Rotary club leaders are unaware of the realities of a membership organization, one of which is that **attrition is real**. While working diligently to make our clubs irresistible and retaining every member we can, we realize that “life happens” and some people leave membership organizations every year for reasons beyond anyone’s control.

It’s not unusual for a club leader to adopt an attitude of “We’re just the right size – we don’t want to be any bigger”. Nice idea, and rarely achieved. In business or in Rotary, one of the laws of nature is that “If you don’t have a growth strategy, you’re probably shrinking.” Sadly, this plays out when they unexpectedly lose a member toward the end of the year, when they have no time to recover, and the club ends up 1 or 2 members smaller than when the year started.

Not understanding the fallacy of a “breakeven” mentality, the successor club leader adopts the same attitude, and it’s “lather, rinse, repeat”, a replay of a net membership loss for yet another year.

**Talking Points**

Here are some “Talking Points” you can use in coaching and mentoring clubs with low aspirations – clubs thinking that by putting little intentional effort into membership growth, things will somehow work out “just fine”. Trouble is, they rarely do. Some ideas for those conversations:

* “Our attrition is going to be lower this year”

“Jim, a lot of presidents have hoped for that, and they’re almost always disappointed. What’s the worst possible outcome of taking my word for it, and planning on enough new members to cover that likely loss?”

* “We’re just the right size – we don’t want to get bigger.”

Looking at the club’s 5-year membership history, where are they today vs. where they used to be? If appropriate, point out that “we’re just the right size” has actually resulted in steadily declining membership.

“You know, Jim, I’ve heard that from other clubs. There’s a hidden pitfall when you set “Breakeven” as a goal. What happens is you’ll rarely overshoot that, and you’ll regularly miss it by a couple of members. That sets up a year-after-year downward trend in membership, and it’s not long ‘till you realize you just can’t serve your community the same way you did when you were a larger club.

“Now, I’m not suggesting you shoot to become a big club. What I am suggesting is that if you don’t have moderate growth as a goal – just a few percent or a few members – you’re likely to see year after year membership decline. If you set a goal to grow by, say, 2-3 members and you miss it by a couple, you still maintain the size you need to do what you do.

* “We tried an event to attract new members once, and it didn’t work”

“Tell me about that – what did you do? What happened?”

“Actually, there are some more effective ways to do that. Hundreds of clubs have done them and we can help your club do one successfully.” Then help them understand where they strayed from the Recipe for a Successful Rotary Information Hour and how to avoid the pitfalls they experienced.