

**Membership Growth has 2 integral components; i.e., membership recruitment and membership retention.** It seems as if recruitment receives more focus than that of retention. After spending much effort in recruiting a member, retaining that individual should be a high priority. Historically, our OI organization's annual retention rate averages between 83 to 85 per cent; i.e., our organization loses between 15 to 17 per cent of our members each year. Increasing our annual retention rate will facilitate attaining membership growth.

I believe the following factors are key to increasing our membership retention rate.

### **Involvement of New Members**

In order for new members to acquire ownership in their new clubs, we must ensure they get actively involved as soon as possible. To facilitate this, I would suggest creating a new member checklist to be given each new member listing all of your Club's committees, service projects, and fundraising projects and have new members indicate where their interests are. It should be stressed to them that they are not expected to be involved in all of your Club's activities; they can pick and choose.

### **Communication**

Effective communication is absolutely essential to the success of any endeavor to include the retention of a club's membership. I would estimate that an average club has less than 50 percent attendance of its members at club meetings. Assuming this is correct, it is critical to communicate, in some manner, what is happening within the club; e.g., results of service/fundraising projects undertaken; dates and times of upcoming service/fundraising projects; upcoming guest speakers; members' birthdays; recap of board meetings; etc. to those members not in attendance at a given club meeting. Over time, it is very possible that a member who can not attend meetings on a regular basis will become disinterested as a result of not knowing what is going on and consider dropping his/her membership. I believe that preparing an email for distribution to all members recapping what transpired during each club meeting is the most effective means of communication to keep all members "in the loop".

In addition, it is very important to communicate with members who have not attended a meeting over a period of time to let them know they have been missed and to encourage them to attend an upcoming meeting. A "calling committee" could be established to accomplish this; having such a committee would open up an opportunity to get involved for those members who would enjoy serving on it.

### **Mentoring**

Another important factor in membership retention is building a level of comfort within new members and indoctrinating them into your club. Mentoring is a proven way of accomplishing this. The mentor of a new member should not be the member's sponsor

but another member of the club. For more information on OI's mentoring program, access OI's website, [www. optimist.org](http://www.optimist.org). Click on the "Members" tab; click on the "Membership" tab; click on "Member Recruitment and Retention"; scroll down to "Optimist Mentoring Program".

## **Camaraderie**

Building a high level of camaraderie among club members is also a key factor in retaining members. Such camaraderie results in a closer, caring relationship among members; take an active interest in the well-being of each other; members enjoy being in the company of other members; they look forward to coming to club meetings to associate with other members. While I was Club President 7 years ago, I took a survey of members at one of our club meetings. I posed the question: Why do you come to club meetings? I gave them several possible answers- to hear guest speakers; to learn of upcoming service/fundraising projects and results of projects completed; to honor the oath taken when they became a member; for the camaraderie among members; and a few other possible answers. The overwhelming choice was for the camaraderie among members. Our Club fosters camaraderie in a number of ways; acknowledgement of members' birthdays; having monthly dining out evenings with members and their spouses; an annual softball game; an annual Christmas party; having members give a bio of themselves at club meetings; sending get well cards to members; telling jokes during club meetings; etc.

## **Exit Interviews**

I believe that another means to improve membership retention is to ascertain why members choose to forgo their club membership. What prompts a person to resign from an organization that they were so excited to become a part of when they joined. What has changed? Depending on what specific factors are resulting in members giving up their memberships (other than moving, dying, or other factors beyond our control), we possibly can make some changes which will make such factors less bothersome and, hopefully, keep them as members. Thus, I would suggest that an exit interview be held with a member choosing to give up his/her membership to determine the specific reasons for resigning.

Yours in Optimism.

Governor Dave