



## Tips & Techniques for Running a Healthy Rotaract Club

### 1. Recruitment and Retention

Recruitment and retention are necessary for any organization to be successful, and the two must work hand in hand. There is no point recruiting new members if they are only going to leave within a short space of time. A healthy club needs both its existing members to remain members for many years, to allow for continuity and the development and passing on of knowledge and skills, and for new blood to be constantly entering, with fresh ideas and enthusiasm.

#### 1. Retention of Members

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Retention is the first thing that needs to be focused on; it is very hard to attract new members to a club that the existing members don't enjoy being a part of! The key to retaining members is to ensure that they enjoy the experience, and that their needs are being met. There are three main areas that a club needs to assess in regards to membership retention – the club meetings, the club's program, and most importantly, a member's sense of belonging.

##### 1.1 Club Meetings

The fortnightly meetings are not Rotaract; it is the other activities that define who we are and why we exist. Just holding meetings fortnightly does not achieve anything, and is extremely boring. However, the meetings are still an important part of Rotaract, and a boring, unprofessional meeting can be a big turn off for members.

##### 1.1.1 Meeting Venue

The choice and location of meeting venue is very important. Even if the meetings themselves are lively and fun, a hard to find venue may make it difficult for new members to join. A good meeting venue should be:

- **Well lit**, for safety
- **Easy to find**, readily visible from the street, without requiring complicated instructions about how to find the entrance / room.
- **Have ample parking**, preferably out the front (for safety)
- **Within a short walking distance to a café** (preferable) or pub, or have a kitchen that can be used, for fellowship after the meeting
- **Quiet**, so that the meeting can be conducted with everyone able to hear what is being said
- **Readily available for every meeting**, without fear of being double booked to someone else or requiring someone else to open up or lock up the venue
- **Little or no cost**; free is preferable, but make sure they won't double book to a paying client!
- **An enclosed area with a door, large enough for everyone to fit comfortably**, or if using a hall or other open space, the club should be the only occupants at the time of the meeting.

It is desirable to be able to have a lockable cupboard readily accessible at the meeting venue to keep any club paraphernalia like banners, lecturns, gong, posters, bannerette displays etc, but it is not essential.

A meeting venue needs to remain as constant as possible; if a venue changes regularly, guests and prospective members may not be able to find the club, and existing members may become frustrated not knowing where to go, or inadvertently turning up to the wrong venue.



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If the meeting venue has a cost involved, holding a small raffle may be an appropriate way of raising money to pay for it.

#### 1.1.2 Meeting Format

Meetings need to be professional yet fun. The President (and indeed, the whole club) should dress in at least smart casual clothes, and an agenda should be drawn up and adhered to to ensure the meetings aren't too long. And if a special presentation is being made, such as inducting a new member, make it a formal occasion by wearing the President's collar.

Meetings are a report back to the club, with the organization of projects and activities taking place at separate board and committee meetings. The meeting is for raising awareness about what the club has done recently, and what is coming up. It is appropriate to involve all members by seeking ideas and coordinators for activities, but the detailed planning should not happen at the club meeting.

The business part of the meeting should be conducted as swiftly as possible, so that there is ample time to enjoy some fellowship together.

Rotaract Clubs do not generally have guest speakers at every meeting; the occasional speaker is fine provided they are interesting and do not speak for more than 10 – 15 minutes. It may be most appropriate to invite as guest speakers:

- **past Rotaractors** to share their experiences and how Rotaract has impacted their life, for motivation;
- **Rotarians**, to talk about Rotary programs and projects (for Rotary training) or important lessons they have learnt in their careers (for career development)
- **current Rotaractors**, to talk about themselves, for both public speaking practise, and to get to know each other better!

If new members are present, it helps if explanations are offered at each step as to what the projects are about and what the different committees do; if they don't understand what happens at a meeting, they are less likely to come back.

#### 1.2 Club Program – the Activities Calendar

Clubs work best when they have a full calendar of activities from all four avenues of service (club service, international service, community service, and professional development). This is the core of Rotaract, and the most fun and rewarding part! It is also easier to entice new members along when a club can not only show them what they are doing but give them something they can get involved with quickly.

Ideally, a club should have an activity (other than meetings) at least once a month; to keep the momentum going, it may be worth scheduling activities in all the "off" weeks, eg if a club meets on the 1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> of a month, it may be worth holding a social or fundraising activity in the 2<sup>nd</sup> week, a project or training seminar / workshop in the 4<sup>th</sup> week, and an interest meeting in the 5<sup>th</sup> week of the month.

To kickstart their planning, Rotaract clubs should plan to complete the 4 activities required to celebrate World Rotaract Week, participate in Dial-A-Santa, and aim to complete activities required to be awarded the Presidential citation. Rotary programs and projects like RYLA and



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Handicamp should also be included in a club's calendar (dates will be available on the Rotaract District website).

Neither the projects nor events need to be big, and Rotaract clubs are only required to complete one major community service project and one major international service project a year, one of which should be held in World Rotaract Week, where "major" means that as many members of the club as possible should participate, and it must be something the club initiates, plans, and implements.

Some key points to keep in mind when selecting events and projects:

- Activities should be varied, to take into account as many members' interests as possible. Try to foster a culture of being willing to give new things a go, by being supportive about trying new things.
- Endeavour to select projects that people are enthusiastic about, that are fun to participate in, and that provide opportunities for everyone to get involved. Hands on projects are best. Avoid just "volunteering" for other organisations where they just use you as a slave labour force (this includes Rotary Clubs!). If a project does involve working with another organisation, ensure that it is done so as an equal partnership, that Rotaract is equally involved in the planning as well as the implementation, and that subsequent publicity gives Rotaract the credit it deserves (have you ever seen a Rotary project without a prominent Rotary wheel somewhere? Rotaract should take the same approach).
- Activities should not be postponed or cancelled unless absolutely necessary. Plan well, to avoid any clashes of dates, and to ensure that people are willing and able to attend. The Rotaract Club of Perth used to only organize two largish events every year - a car rally (as a fundraiser) and a Halloween Party - but they always set the dates a year or more in advance and promoted both events well extensively. Consequently, they generally had extremely good turn outs.
- Regularly assess what works and what doesn't work. Seek feedback from the club about what they enjoy and what they don't (questionnaires are available for this). Learn from mistakes. At the end of each activity, review the project, and identify what the strengths were, and what could be improved if it was done again.
- Try to encourage Rotarians in sponsoring clubs to attend, but don't get disheartened if they plan events that clash with yours even if you let them know well in advance what your plans are.

#### 1.2.1 Club Service

Events which allow members the opportunity to interact are best, eg going to the movies is not the best way to get to know other Rotaractors! Costs should be kept to a minimum (eg instead of going out for a dinner at a restaurant or cafe, have dinner together at someone's house, and ask everyone to bring a plate - choosing a theme can make it more interesting), and should include some activities that members wouldn't necessarily try on their own, such as rock climbing or ice skating.

#### 1.2.2 International Service

International service is not just about humanitarian aid, but also learning about other cultures and promoting peace. RotaractNET (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/rotaractnet>) is the best



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resource for locating Rotaract clubs overseas to undertake projects with. Some examples of fun hands-on projects with low costs which regularly crop up on RotaractNET include:

- A Hand for Polio (<http://www.geocities.com/unamanoporlapolio/>)
- designing a tile, to send to another club overseas for them to assemble a public mosaic showcasing messages from Rotaract clubs worldwide
- organizing exhibitions of children's drawings from other countries to promote peace and their view of their countries and cultures
- sending a "mascot" around the world, to learn about the different countries it visits
- constructing an international library, by asking clubs to send a book about their country or culture
- finding ways to spread the message "May Peace Prevail on Earth"

Another good international project is Rotary's "Aquabox". A club can purchase an Aquabox for \$100, fill it with new and second hand items - ask each club member to choose some items to add to the box - and return it to the Rotary Club of Kalamunda, who will coordinate sending it where it is most needed.

#### 1.2.3 Community Service

Just volunteering for other organisations should be avoided, particularly if the organisations or events are already well supported by many members of the public or other organisations volunteering as well. Where possible, projects conducted by the club should be initiated by the club. Hands on projects are usually reported as being the most rewarding type to participate in.

Dial-A-Santa ([www.dialasanta.com](http://www.dialasanta.com)) is Rotaract's premier community service project at a state level, and should be supported by all clubs, even if it is the only community project undertaken.

Some easy Rotary project ideas which can involve Rotaractors:

- going tree planting, and other environmental projects
- collecting corks for recycling (can be made more fun by turning it into a competition)

#### 1.2.4 Professional Development

This is the main part of Rotaract. Informal leadership development should be a part of every club meeting, by offering club members opportunities to practise public speaking and to get experience organising projects. Clubs should also consider organising workshops and seminars (see if any Rotarians are business coaches or have experience in public relations, and ask them to run small workshops for you), and consider organizing tours of different organisations to learn more about different industries and careers. Having relevant guest speakers at club meetings may also be appropriate.

### 1.3 Ensuring Members Feel a Sense of Belonging

In addition to giving member a sense of ownership of a club's activities by asking for their ideas and preferences (and acting on them where possible) and encouraging them to coordinate some activities, there are some other vital issues to address to ensure that



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everyone feels like they are a welcome part of the club.

### *1.3.1 Communication*

Communication within the club is vital – it can't be stressed enough how important this is to the success of your club. The President, Secretary, Club Service Director and Membership Officer, as appropriate, should work together to ensure all club members are kept informed about activities (eg if a club member can't make it to a meeting, make sure they are filled in via email or telephone as to what they missed). If someone misses a meeting or two, take the initiative to phone them and have a chat, to make sure everything is ok; don't expect they will necessarily let you know about any problems they may be experiencing.

A regular (ideally fortnightly) newsletter is a useful, and quite necessary, way of being able to keep current members, as well as prospective members and your sponsoring Rotary club, informed about what is happening. Where possible, email it out a day or two before the club meeting (which serves as a useful way to remind people about the upcoming meeting), and where a member doesn't have an email address, ensure the bulletin is posted to them promptly. Also make sure some hard copies of the bulletin are taken to the club meeting, for any guests and any members who may not have read it. A bulletin at a meeting is invaluable for prospective members to have a record of what is coming up, as well as some other information about the club (eg phone numbers and email addresses of the Club Board).

Clubs may also wish to provide questionnaires to prospective members and current members to gauge their perception about different aspects of the club. Sample questionnaires are available from the District website ([www.rotaract9470.org/resources.html](http://www.rotaract9470.org/resources.html)).

### *1.3.2 Celebrate!*

Help club members feel special by celebrating the little things – members' birthdays, the club anniversary, World Rotaract Day & Week, successful projects and events... Celebrating members' birthdays in particular offers a variety of fellowship options, such as ensuring a cake is brought to the meeting to share, organising a social event of their choice on or close to their birthday to help them celebrate, acknowledge their birthday in the newsletter, and possibly even organise a card and / or small gift from the club.

If projects and events are successful, don't be afraid to publicly acknowledge that success, and where possible, acknowledge the club members who contributed to that success. Quick thank you notes can also brighten a member's day!

Members who contribute well to the club or who go above and beyond the call of duty can also be rewarded publicly at the Changeover Night with Certificates of Recognition, Appreciation, and Excellence. Details about suggested criteria for these awards will be added to the District Website. Attendance percentages should also be diligently kept so that 100% Attendance can also be rewarded at the Changeover (there is a pin for the first time it is awarded, and a Certificate thereafter). And for members who turn 30, we also have a Certificate of Service to acknowledge their contribution during their time as a Rotaractor. Clubs may also like to consider a system for recognising a "Rotaractor of the Year". The President should consult with the DRR about Rotaractors they feel have earned any of the above recognition, so the DRR can present the awards at each Changeover.



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#### 2. Recruitment of Members

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Once a club has addressed the issues listed in the previous section in respect to retaining members, it can consider the other side of the coin – recruiting new members. There are three main parts to this: (1) Sourcing new members; (2) Attracting them to a Rotaract meeting or activity; (3) Convincing them to keep coming back!

##### 2.1 Sourcing New Members

In an ideal world, the Rotarians in our sponsoring clubs and in neighbouring clubs, as well as on the District youth program committees, would channel to us all people of Rotaract age who:

- are past Interactors;
- have attended RYLA or Handicamp;
- are youth exchange, National Youth Science Forum, Group Study Exchange, and Ambassadorial Scholar alumni

or anyone else of Rotaract age that they come across. In practise, this doesn't happen, so the sourcing of new members lies 100% with existing Rotaractors.

Any Rotaractors who are involved with any of the abovementioned programs – especially RYLA – should not be afraid to take the initiative and sell Rotaract to the others. We ourselves are the best advertisements about Rotaract! The same applies to family and friends, or anyone at all you know aged between 18 and 28. Tell them about Rotaract, and how much you enjoy them. Invite them to projects and social events, and to meetings. If they say no the first time, ask again later! (It took 2 years of invitations from a variety of people before I finally attended my first Rotaract meeting!)

Clubs should always keep an eye out for avenues to promote the club and to seek new members in the most cost effective way possible. Experience has shown that putting up posters and distributing brochures, placing ads in newspapers (including the Xpress), and having stalls at University Orientation Days do not work. Some of them involve great expense, and rarely yield any new members at all.

The most effective form of advertising to date has been the internet – and best yet, it's free. There are a variety of sites, like Seek Volunteer, where you can place ads for members (though you do need to provide proof of incorporation to do this – consult with the DRR or your sponsoring Rotary Club about how to go about incorporating the club if yours has not done so yet). Such sites have proven track records of channelling members to Rotaract.

It also can't be stressed enough how important it is to have an up-to-date, informative website. The District fees that all clubs pay primarily cover the cost of our district domain name and web hosting (which has been discounted by the ISP we use), and all clubs have available to them their own rotaract9470.org subdomain name for a club website and Rotaract email addresses. Even making use of a blog as a way to ensure new content is posted regularly is an effective way to promote your club to the world – a your subdomain name can be redirected to any site you wish to use!

Get your club in the public eye by sending media releases to newspapers. If you post regular information about your club's activities on your website, it is possible that local newspapers



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may contact you looking to do a story about one of your projects (it's happened to the Rotaract Club of South Perth on a number of occasions!).

Members should also refer to "Easy Tips for Promoting Rotaract" for other inexpensive ways to get Rotaract out in the public eye.

#### 2.2 Attracting New Members to their 1<sup>st</sup> Rotaract Meeting or Activity

Once a prospective member has made contact, or you have finally convinced a friend or family member to accompany you, it is vitally important to be in constant contact with them.

If someone responds to an ad on Seek Volunteer, get in touch with them ASAP, preferably by telephone, to be able to answer any questions they have, and to find out what aspects of Rotaract interest them. Also find out what their interests are in general, so you can relate them to how Rotaract can be of benefit to them. Also offer to send them the club bulletin regularly, and get them on the club mailing list ASAP. Even if some prospective members don't get around to a meeting or activity for some months, they generally enjoy reading about the activities of the club, and it gives them more incentive to finally take the plunge (likewise for friends – ask if they would like to read the bulletin, and ensure they are also added to the distribution list).

If someone has expressed interest, but hasn't turned up to a meeting when they said they would, send them a friendly email, or give them a quick call, to make sure everything is ok. Usually something will have come up at the last minute, or they forgot, or they may have had an attack of nerves about meeting unknown people. Let them know that you are interested in their wellbeing – they generally appreciate that! Keep in contact via email and phone at least once a month, calling to let them know about activities that are coming up that might interest them. Also offer to organise for someone to pick them to carpool to a meeting or event, to remove some of the fear about trying to find unknown people in an unknown venue.

#### 2.3 Ensuring New Members Come Again

In order for someone to want to come back to Rotaract, they need to feel welcome at the club, and find activities that are of interest to them.

At their first activity, welcome them warmly, and talk to them – find out about who they are and what they are interested in. Introduce yourself in return, and explain to them what is happening as you go along so they don't feel overwhelmed. All club members should wear their name badge, and ensure blank conference badges are available so that all guests (and members who forget their badges) can write their name on a temporary badge as well.

If possible, give them a "Welcome to Rotaract" pack (ask South Perth for a sample), which includes a 2 page flyer about Rotaract, a questionnaire about what they thought of the meeting, an information sheet about what they can get out of being a member (taken from an appendix of the Rotaract Handbook), and a membership form.

Encourage the prospective member to join you for fellowship after the meeting, so they can continue getting to know you (and you, them!) and have the freedom to ask any questions they may have about what happened in the meeting.



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It helps if a member of the club, preferably one of the more experienced members, can be assigned as a "mentor" to the new person, who will take on the responsibility of keeping in close contact with the prospective member – calling them to see how they are doing, letting them know about upcoming meeting and activities, answering any questions that arise, and possibly arranging car pooling to events.

Try to involve new members in activities as soon as possible, and encourage them to voice their ideas and opinions.

When they are inducted, continue to keep in touch with them and give them extra encouragement, and if appropriate, encourage them to take on organisation of a small social event. Provide them with training about the basics of Rotaract, and encourage their participation in egroups so they can get to know Rotaractors in the district and beyond!