

DOWN BUT NOT OUT

For the past decade, Rotary's membership has lingered around 1.2 million. That means for every person who joined in the last 10 years, another person left. Today's numbers show Rotary is not only stagnant but in decline in many areas. Our membership total as of 1 July 2013 was 1,185,000 – the lowest figure in almost a decade. What are we doing about it? In this issue, we talk with RI President Ron Burton about the challenges facing the organization and the \$3 million effort to help clubs get and keep members. We explore the four pilot programs that 700 clubs around the globe are testing to keep current members engaged and to attract others. We also talk to leaders in areas where Rotary is growing rapidly and ask, "What's your secret?" Read on to find out what they say and get ideas to grow your club.

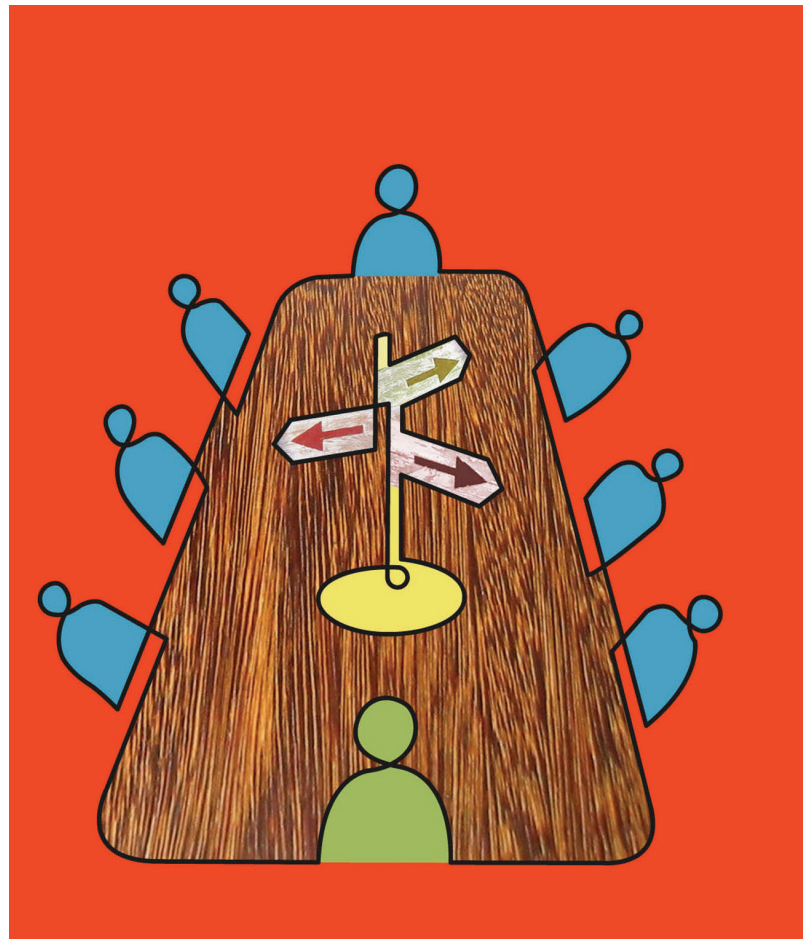
EXPERT ANALYSIS

RI PRESIDENT RON BURTON ON WHY MEMBERS LEAVE AND WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT

Ron Burton is the 2013-14 president of Rotary International. But 30 years ago, he was an uninspired Rotarian ready to quit his club. That's why he calls on Rotarians around the world to *Engage Rotary, Change Lives* – because he knows firsthand that without a sense of purpose and belonging within their club, members leave. After polio eradication, increasing membership is Rotary's highest priority. With global membership stalling and numbers in many regions dropping, Rotary's leaders aim to renew the organization through a series of plans created from member feedback. The 16 regional plans provide a roadmap of reasonable goals to help every club build Rotary. We spoke with Burton to find out how these plans will affect you and your club.

How do you describe the regional membership plans?

The idea is to allow a region of Rotary to develop a plan for recruiting and retaining members that will work in that region. We know that one size doesn't fit all. What works in the United States may not work in other places, so the plans give Rotarians flexibility in how they attract members, and they build a sense of ownership, since the plans are based on member feedback.



How will these plans help Rotary gain members?

I think it's the enthusiasm we're injecting into this. People respond to a challenge. We've asked all the directors to give us a definite number of members we can hold them accountable for adding. They've gone to every district governor to get a number. The plans put our goals on paper and build support from the directors, the district governors, club presidents, and members.

You've seen all 16 regional plans. Is there one tactic to attract new members that stands out?

One strategy involves giving Rotarians who sponsor new members recognition on their Rotary pin. It's a flat backer that fits behind the pin, and its color signifies how many members the person has brought in. It's an incentive, and it looks pretty slick.

How will the plans affect the average Rotarian?

Most of us had to be invited by a friend to become a Rotarian. Once we invite new members, we have to give them a reason to stay. We can always use more hearts, hands, and feet on the ground to do the great work of Rotary. The plans challenge members to accept that even in their hometowns, they could do more and be more productive if their club had more members.

What if some clubs are happy as they are?

Add a new club with a new look. A fourth club was chartered in my hometown of Norman, Okla., USA, last year. We're a community of 110,000, and we have about 300 Rotarians – that means there's a few people left who would be good members. For example, my club is a lunch club on Thursdays. Some people just can't do lunch on Thursday. We kept a list of those people and contacted them when we started a breakfast club. Every community has a couple of champions who can help charter a new club.

Is there a "silver bullet" that will boost Rotary's membership?

Engagement. I quit my Rotary club because I didn't have anything to do. Then they asked me if I'd chair a committee. The club president said, "We'd like you to be in the club. Would you chair our Rotary Foundation committee next year?" I stayed because I thought it was an important role. The key is to give people the opportunity to contribute to their communities.

You quit your club?

I did. I joke about it now, but 30 years ago, I had little kids, a full-time job, and you do the things you think are important. If all you're doing is eating a bad meal every week at the Holiday Inn, you're not going to stay in your club. That's why I stress the importance of engagement. We all have so many things calling on us that, to retain members, each one of us has to feel fully engaged.

What do you think turns people off about Rotary?

I ask this question all the time. I say, "Look at your Rotary club. Would you join this club today? If not, why not? What would you do to change it?" Some people get turned off by singing. Some clubs have a lot of fines. That's not to say that every tradition is silly, but it may not be for everybody. Find out what people like and don't like about your club by doing exit interviews.

Where is Rotary growing?

Rotary is growing in India and many parts of Asia. It's strong in Thailand and Taiwan. We also have a big effort to grow in Africa.

What can other Rotarians learn from these regions?

There's excitement about Rotary in these areas, especially in India. Rotary is visible. It's a prestigious organization there, and people know what Rotary is and does. But I think people feel good when they help someone else, no matter where they are in the world, so if there's one thing to learn, it is to identify and take on great club projects that meet a need in your community.

What's one thing any member could do right now to support Rotary?

Invite someone. Get them involved, and keep them involved. If you find that magic, they'll keep themselves involved and invite others. I'm living proof of that. ■



"German clubs put an emphasis on personal connections between members and their families, and try to develop programs and events in which many play an active role," says Rotary Coordinator Peter Iblher. "We try to create an impression of club life as being rewarding and valuable for members and their families."

Per Høyen, who will serve as 2014-16 RI director, credits some of the membership growth in his zone, particularly in Lithuania (which has doubled its number of Rotarians since 2003), to favorable media coverage and positive government relations. "Lithuanian Rotarians get the media interested in the projects they are doing all over the country. This 'free' PR creates a lot of interest among people and makes it easier to get new members, because people know what Rotary is doing."

WHERE IS ROTARY GROWING AND WHY?

“The average age of Rotarians in Africa is younger than in the United States or Europe. Clubs are relevant and vibrant, and support the belief that it is an honor and a big deal to become a Rotarian,” says Thomas Branum, Reach Out to Africa Committee chair and past RI director.

In India, three districts are collecting data to develop a plan for starting new Rotary clubs for the sons and daughters of Rotarians. Members also recognize Rotarians who recruit new members, and invite prospective members to half-day seminars to learn about Rotary. “We target former Rotaractors and encourage them to form new Rotary clubs,” adds Ulhas Kolhatkar, a Rotary coordinator and past district governor. “We also encourage participation from second-generation Rotarians.”

“One way we’ve been successful in Taiwan is by focusing on alumni – people who were in Group Study Exchange and former Rotaractors. We keep track of these people. If we can sponsor a club with a short meeting and no big meal, that will help to keep them,” says Gary C.K. Huang, who will serve as 2014-15 RI president.

Countries and areas with largest membership declines, 2003-13

	# of members lost	% loss
UNITED STATES	-58,481	-15%
JAPAN	-23,248	-21%
ENGLAND	-7,743	-16%
AUSTRALIA	-5,260	-14%
CANADA	-4,167	-14%

Countries and areas with largest membership gains, 2003-13

	# of members gained	% gain
INDIA	+34,068	+38%
KOREA	+12,671	+26%
GERMANY	+11,114	+27%
TAIWAN	+7,567	+49%
BRAZIL	+4,045	+8%

THE \$3 MILLION PLAN TO RENEW ROTARY

The RI Board of Directors allocated US\$3 million to create and support regional membership plans, recognizing that a global approach would not be as effective as local strategies guided by member feedback. The aim is to increase Rotary membership around the world.

The plans outline goals for 16 regions and the steps for achieving them. “The world is different now,” says Allan Jagger, chair of the RI Membership Development and Retention Committee and past RI director. Jagger was involved in creating the plan for clubs in Great Britain and Ireland. “We have to look at where we’ve come from, what’s working, and change what isn’t.”

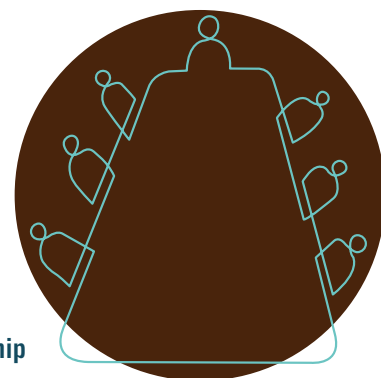
In Great Britain and Ireland, an analysis of the data found that bringing in new members isn’t the problem – it’s keeping them. Jagger says the team looked into why and discovered that the way Rotary was sold to prospective members didn’t fit the reality of joining a club. The membership plan for Rotary International in Great Britain and Ireland responded by recommending a club “visioning” process to help clubs become more attractive to members, both new ones and the ones they already have – something Jagger says hinges on service. “The only way to make clubs more effective is to do more service,” he explains. “The more service you do, the more recognition Rotary will get. The more recognition, the more members you will acquire.”

In Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands, regional leaders focused on what they already do well. “There will always be weaknesses,” says Jessie Harman, a Rotary coordinator from Australia. “This is about identifying strengths and giving Rotarians and clubs examples of best practices and other tools they can use to strengthen Rotary.” One asset in this region is member diversity. To remain strong in this area, leaders set a goal of increasing female members by 6 percent, young members by 5 percent, and culturally diverse members by 3 percent. To work toward that, the Rotary Club of Christchurch South has launched an effort to recruit past Rotary Youth Leadership Awards participants as members.

Though regional leaders developed the plans, it is up to individual Rotarians to make their clubs into groups that people will want to join – and stay in.

700 CLUBS TEST NEW WAYS TO ENGAGE AND ATTRACT MEMBERS

Four pilot programs that allow clubs more freedom to determine meeting frequency, add new categories of membership, and gain flexibility in club operations launched in 2011-12. The pilots – Corporate Membership, Associate Membership, Innovative and Flexible Club, and Satellite Club – run through 2016-17.

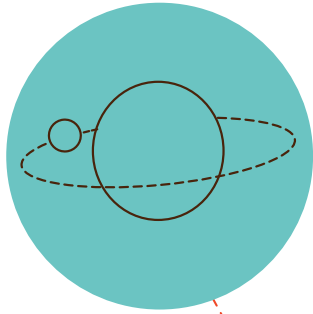


Corporate Membership

Gives companies the opportunity to partner with their local Rotary club and appoint up to four employees as active members

TIP: LESS IS MORE

In a pilot study that ran from July 2007 until June 2013, biweekly meetings were linked to a higher rate of membership growth. The pilot showed an overall 90 percent positive impact, with improvement not only in membership but also in fundraising, community service, and support for The Rotary Foundation. The pilot enlisted 200 clubs. Of those, 80 percent chose to hold meetings either twice a month or every two weeks.



Satellite Club

Allows clubs to conduct multiple meetings during a week, each taking place at a different location, day, or time



Associate Membership

Offers a trial membership without the full rights and responsibilities of active members



Innovative and Flexible Club

Provides the freedom to create a club that better fits community and member needs



QUESTIONS?

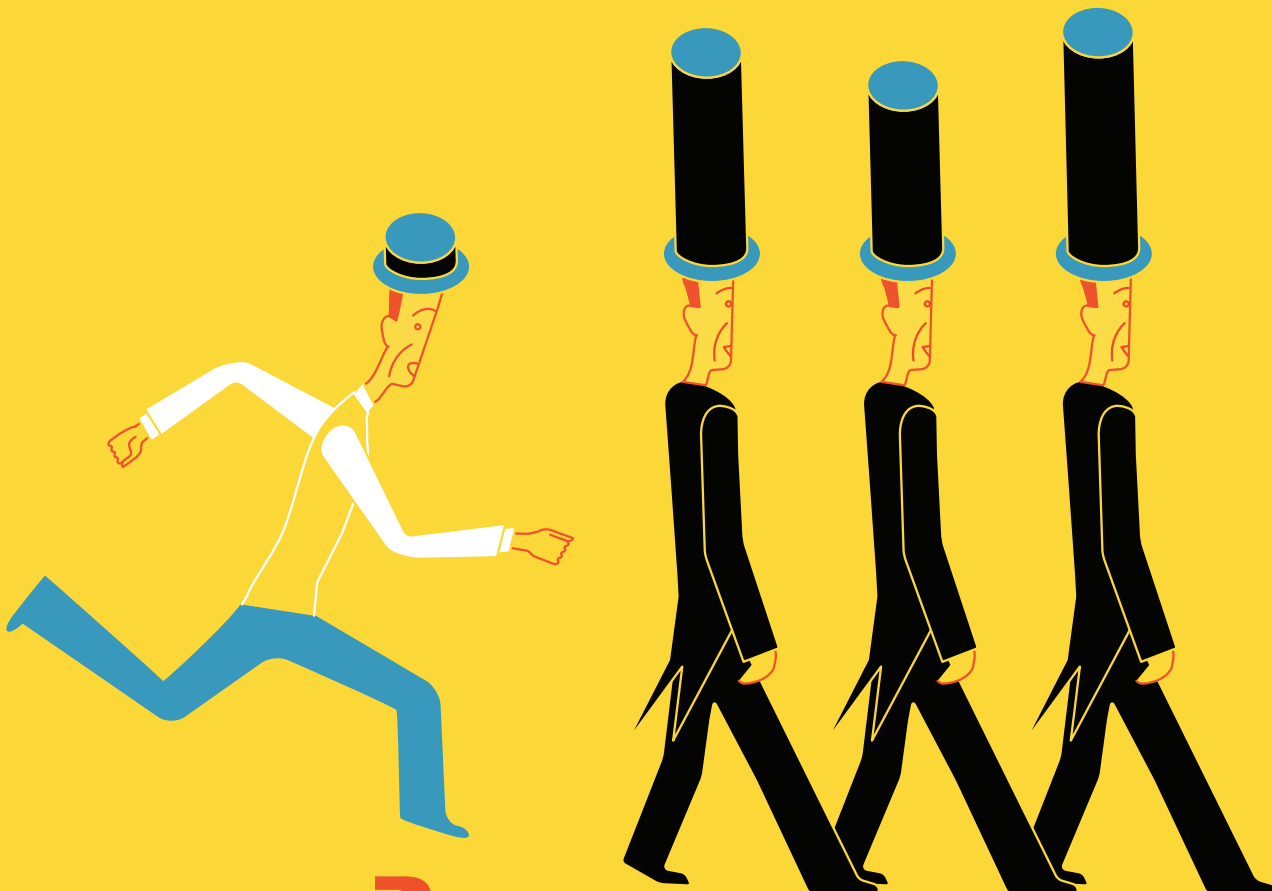
Email ripilotprograms@rotary.org

CASE STUDY: FROM SCHOLARS TO ROTARIANS

Members in Japan are recruiting recipients of the Yoneyama Scholarship, which is sponsored by Rotarians. The effort has already produced two new clubs: the Rotary Club of Tokyo Yoneyama Yuai (with 32 members, all former scholars living in Japan but originally from 10 different countries), and the Rotary E-Club of District 2750 Tokyo Yoneyama (with 27 members who meet through the club's website and live chat, but gather in person for club events).

CASE STUDY: BUDDY SYSTEM

One strategy for member retention in District 5790 (Texas, USA) is the "buddy system." Groups of four members stay in touch and support one another. Members are paired with one close buddy, and the membership chair assigns a minimum of two more buddies to make a team. One person is appointed the team leader and coordinates occasional get-togethers and activities.



TAKE ACTION

Not sure **why** your club is shrinking? Ask these questions:

- (1)** Is my club's meeting time, format, and location convenient for members with families or younger professionals still building their careers?
- (2)** How well does my club reflect the age, gender, and professional diversity of my community?
- (3)** Whose interests are reflected in my club's programs?
- (4)** Do ceremonial activities take time away from speakers, club business, project planning, and networking?
- (5)** Does my club have a plan in place to contact guests after they visit?

MORE ONLINE View your region's plan by searching for "membership plans" at www.rotary.org/myrotary.