

*Excerpted from a November 2019 Rotarian Magazine article with Louisa Horne, Governor of District 7820.*

### **1. Your club, the Rotary Club of Halifax Harbourside, Nova Scotia, went from 22 to 60 members in three years. How did you do it?**

It started with recognizing that we needed to ask some different questions. The question had always been, "How do we get more members?" So we'd have everybody invite somebody, or we'd host an event. But membership challenges are a symptom. We needed to look in the mirror to figure out how the club itself could be irresistible.

So we looked at every interaction a potential member had with us. We asked ourselves:

- If someone were coming to a meeting for the first time, what would they see?
- What does the room look like?
- Is it easy for them to find us?
- Does the seating arrangement work?
- What do we eat?

Then we went on to the avenues of service.

- What are our projects?
- Are they "same old, same old"?
- Are they interesting for a range of people?

We looked at fundraisers.

- How do we do them?
- Are we driving ourselves crazy pushing tickets at the same people all the time?
- Does that draw people in?

Finally, we asked: Is our club one that you would get up early on a Friday in winter for, because you don't want to miss it?

### **2. What were the specific steps you took?**

- We did some workshops within the club
- We did in-depth interviews with everyone who had left in the past few years
  - Those who had come once and hadn't come back
  - Those who we thought would join but didn't.

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Too often, we focus on the people who are there. But what we need to understand **is what's going on with the people who don't choose to be there.**

We started with Rotary's Member Satisfaction Survey, modified some questions to be more specific to our own activities, and added questions about other things.

From the interviews with people who had left, we heard about

- Cost
- Club culture (too formal)
- Food (not great)
- Engagement in activities (not involved or not asked)
- Lack of inclusion, diversity, and respect for other cultures
  - Saying Christian grace
  - Not clearly welcoming LGBTQ people).

We started by picking off the low-hanging fruit. Not everything is going to work, but when you try things and you start seeing different people showing up, that's golden. If you find yourself trying to talk somebody into coming, you're barking up the wrong tree.

### 3. Can you give more specifics?

- We eliminated fines. Some people have to drop their kids off at day care, which means they were five minutes late to every meeting, and they were made fun of every time. It wears on you.
- Paying for meals was a big thing for some members who didn't want a big breakfast; they just wanted coffee. We worked with the venue on that.
- We got rid of a beloved fund-raiser that didn't make any money.
- We walked in the Pride parade.

All of those were part of the transformation to becoming a vibrant, growing, diverse club.

Data were a big part of getting support for changes. For example, there was a data point that people didn't necessarily like all of the club rituals. In our case, those included saying grace. It's easy to say that nobody minds that. But **seven of the 10 people who left** brought that up.

### 4. What things are you still working on?

We will always be working on inclusion — that is an ongoing focus — as well as being creative in the ways we engage people and ensure that we have the range of activities that will be irresistible to a range of passions. It is a moving target in terms of community needs and of the



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interests of people who are attracted to us, and it is our responsibility to meet those needs and enable people to live those passions.