

Meet Them Where They Are

“Meeting people where they are is about giving others what they need, when they need it.” — Tom Epperson

You're reading this newsletter because you care about Rotary's growth. You know our membership number has hovered around 1.2 million people for decades. You know we need more Rotarians to increase our impact.

But it isn't about the numbers.

As another Rotary year comes to an end, it is the time to fall into step and march out our traditional district membership growth plans. We promote a District-wide challenge to increase numbers and instruct membership chairs to "Grow Rotary." Essentially, we create sales quotas for Clubs.

But it isn't about the numbers.

The higher leaders rise in any organization, the more often we risk losing sight of what is happening on the front lines. We forget that our membership roster is broken down by Clubs, then further into individual names. Do we know these people who are serving our mission on the front lines? What are their goals? What do they want from Rotary? What do they hope to achieve?

It isn't about the numbers; and it shouldn't be. Because it is about **them**.

I'd bet there are very few Rotarians who care if Rotary membership increases from 1.2 million to 1.3 million. I'd also bet many club leaders would prefer to have a smaller group of more dedicated Rotarians than just a deeper roster with more casual members.

We know how Innovative Clubs can help them grow, but if they aren't ready or it isn't their goal, it may have the opposite effect we are hoping for and encounter even more resistance to change.

Innovative ideas draw a mixed bag - A few clubs may be ready to dive right in. Others may need to dip a toe in and test the water. Still others won't even look at the water.

The leadership intent should be to facilitate simple movement from one step to the next.

How?

First, we need to meet the clubs where they are. This means communicating with the clubs individually, understanding their goals and challenges, and then bolster them to choose their own way.

Proposed changes should always be about the needs of the individual Club. Change doesn't have to come at the cost of what dedicated Rotarians have come to know and love about their club.

For some clubs it may be creating multiple satellite clubs. For others it may be as simple as offering a new membership type without meal cost.

Getting that club to offer a new membership type needs to be recognized and celebrated because they have

taken a step outside of their comfort zone, which took a lot of hard work. Give them credit for success because they have done something brand new.

As membership advocates, we all want to see Rotary grow in members and impact with new satellite clubs or cause-based clubs. However, our priorities are not everyone else's. It is up to the clubs to determine what is best for them.

To truly help Rotary grow, we must meet Clubs where they are.

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