



Rotary

Recipe for Changing Club Culture

Rotary clubs are as resistant to change as any organization - perhaps more than most. That's because the club inherits a culture over time and that culture is propagated by the self-selection of members. Those who like it stay, and those who don't leave. Leaders come out of that same culture and reinforce it.

Yes, your club has a culture, whether it's one you like or not. Long term, that culture embraces the status quo and becomes greatly resistant to change, which is natural. It's a "status quo" mentality.

With respect, for example, to membership, a club's culture can be oriented toward growth and vitality, which is the case with 25%-30% of Rotary clubs. The remainder of clubs are content with rocking along at about the same size, with some dropping an average of 2 members per year. That seems to be within the threshold of pain for most clubs. It's also how your 40 member club gets to 30 over 5 years, and to 20 over the next 5.

What if you're in a failing club and want to turn that trend around? You'll be bucking a culture of mediocrity or decline that's probably taken decades to mature. That change won't happen by itself. You'll need an intentional strategy to change that culture - otherwise it will push back **hard** against the change you're trying to make, in this case putting the club on a consistent, moderate growth path.

The Situation

Most of your members are completely happy with the way things are.

The Problem

Here's what you're probably facing:

- Everyone's happy with the status quo –
 - Expectations are low
 - Everyone's OK with a net decline of a couple of members a year
 - Nobody sees a problem
- **I'm all by myself** -- nobody else "gets it". You now understand that chronic membership decline spells an eventual collapse of the club.
- **They'll be pushing back**, defending the status quo, making excuses -- It's the nature of humans to want to keep things as they are - comfortable. The members don't understand that if a change is not made the club is doomed to failure.

You have to decide whether you're going to become a "Change Agent". If so, you recognize that "Doing more of what we're doing will get us more of what we've got". The status quo will continue unless you act.

Club culture cannot be taken "head-on". Culture can't be changed directly. You have to:

- First: **Change Strategies** to those likely to get the results we want. Decide upon intentional strategies that are known to work and promote those.
- Second: **Change Behaviors** to support the new Strategies and accomplish some **short-term "wins"**. This is the "secret sauce" of your change management strategy. You need to get people doing different things than the ones that haven't worked before.
- Third: **Reinforce** the new Strategies and Behaviors and **Culture will follow**. Short-term "wins", along with recognition of those members who are doing what you want will get others onboard.

The Implication

If your club has embraced a culture of decline, it's only a matter of time until someone has to decide on who's turning out the lights. Chronic membership decline is a cultural disease that will kill your club long term.

Checklist for Changing Club Culture

Effecting change in an organization is not accidental. It requires a very intentional, "checklist" approach. Here's a "can't fail" checklist borrowed from John Kotter, a Harvard Business School professor and arguably the world's thought leader in organizational change management. Like any recipe if you skip steps you can expect that the result may not be what you wanted:

What situation in your club could benefit from a change in culture or mindset?

Intentional steps to make that change (make notes on your plan):

- Reset the bar - **Redefine what "good" is** - consistent, moderate membership growth. If necessary, create a crisis -- "If we keep doing what we're doing...." Make it an **urgent** priority.

- Assessment** – Use the **Club Health Check** to spot areas that need to be fixed for improvements in both attraction and retention. Members vote with their checkbooks to join and with their feet to leave when their expectations are not met. Take a "Man from Mars" look - from an external perspective.

- Create a Coalition** - Enlist people who see things the way you do. **Include** them in developing your strategy. List candidates:

- Create a Vision** -- a future different from the past. Give your members something to believe in. Include your Coalition.

I see our club as...

- Build a Script -- SPIN**

Situation -- Here are the facts...._____

Problem -- The **problem** with that is.._____

Implication -- If we keep doing what we're doing..._____

Need -- What we need to do is.._____

- Teach** your members how to do what you visualize. They don't know HOW to grow a Rotary club. You do (now). Work on the **club experience** (see Assessment above). In parallel, work on strategies to **attract** more members to your club.

- o **Different Strategies** (intentional, to get the different results you want)
- o **Different Behaviors** that support the new strategies
- o **Reinforce** the new Behaviors and Culture will follow

- Communicate, Communicate, Communicate** -- Keep membership top-of-mind (step up your initial instinct by a factor of **10**)

- o Face to Face
- o Phone (live conversation vs. voicemail)
- o Email
- o Print - bulletins, handouts
- o Meetings (use your **SPIN** Script)

- Confront** those in the way -- win them over or neutralize them.

- Set up some **short-term "wins"** -- Prove that what you're promoting works. **Recognize and praise** the members who are doing what you want. Possible short-term wins:

Keep your **Long-Term Goal** in mind – to **create a growth culture** in your club. We're not running membership drives or campaigns.

Vision Examples:

Works best starting with "I see". What does success look like? What does "good" look like? Inspiring, compelling, and a purpose that's worth the time and energy of those you'd like to have follow you.

- I see our club growing steadily - by 10% or more per year. Those new members will bring energy, service hours and financial contributions that will help us more effectively serve our community. They will also be a steady supply of leaders of the future, so we can have future presidents identified 3 or 4 years in advance.
- I see our club meaningfully contributing to The Rotary Foundation, helping our members understand that there's more to Rotary than our own club. We need to be averaging at least \$100/year per member, which would qualify us for District Grants from the Foundation for projects in our own community. More awareness of Rotary beyond our club's boundaries will help attract new members and retain existing members who want to make a bigger impact than our local club can do on its own.
- I see our club becoming far more visible in our community, attracting new members who hear about us and want to become Rotarians. We would have at least one "signature" project a year, highly publicized, and prominently displaying the Rotary brand. Press releases would keep us visible in our local media, and an active social media campaign would keep us visible on the web. We will become **the most-recognized** community service club in our area.
- I see our club reinventing itself, finding ways to attract members and getting back to a sustainable critical mass of at least 25 members. With more members, we can create and fund some new projects that will not only attract new members but also re-energize our long-time members, reminding them of what Rotary is really about. Our meeting will exude energy and include speakers that our members find interesting, informational and inspirational.