

ROTARY CLUBS UNDER THE X-RAY SOME SURPRISING RESULTS FROM SELF-EXAMINATION

By over eleven hundred (1,100) Rotarians and Dave Cresson

It's embarrassing to everyone – especially to Club leaders - when a Rotarian decides to leave their club. When a member leaves a club it is almost always because something bad has happened. Nobody likes to talk about bad things. But, if we don't admit their leaving, we can never really explore the reasons for the leaks.

Let's shine a bright light on the losses. And on the reasons that some of our friends decide to leave us.

HIGHLIGHTS AND SUMMARY...

Most of our club members are currently very satisfied with their Rotary experience. But not nearly all.

The basic rewards for Rotary membership include:

- Being involved in service
- Being with a group of acquaintances and friends
- Being rewarded for the time they spend at Rotary meetings

There are three immediate and critical difficulties tied to staying in, or leaving Rotary:

1) **CLOSED MINDS**

Some of our club leadership (Committee Chairs, The Board, or the President) may seem closed minded, or are not receptive to members' ideas and thinking.

2) **DISORGANIZED, POOR MANAGEMENT**

Some clubs appear to be disorganized or poorly managed.

3) **COSTS**

To some members, the costs required to be a member seem excessive. RI and district dues are generally a small part of the cost, and not controlled by clubs. Clubs might review ways to identify particular cost sectors (like food or forced donations). Clubs might be sensitive to their members whose life and spirit of volunteer work might be interrupted by those costs that they don't feel are as related to service and fellowship.

The weekly club meeting offers great opportunity to show members a good time (through the program, fellowship and fun)... To demonstrate organization and management... And to remind all of the good service they and their club and Rotary International are performing.

Members' attitudes about the way the club operates is much more likely to predict satisfaction than are demographics - like gender, age, attendance or time in Rotary.

The leadership most appreciated by Rotarians includes sensitivity and respect for the forces that motivate members: Service, acquaintance, professionalism, and a reward for time and effort spent.

Conventional Wisdom:

Rotary folklore tells us that ten percent of every club leaves each year. The folklore goes on to say that half leave for health reasons or because they are moving. The other half might be preventable. There's a lot of myth there. Health probably does take out about two or three percent of us. But Rotarians, being successful professionals and leaders, are not likely to be very mobile. Moving probably does not account for more than another two percent. And, as for only ten percent of our members leaving every year... it looks like it's a lot more than that.

Exit Interview:

Presidents are encouraged to give departing Rotarians an "Exit Interview," to ask them why they are leaving. A pleasant idea, but really... if someone decided they didn't want to be a member of the club, why would they admit their mistake, or want to lay blame on the club? Better to leave pleasantly ("Work pressures force me to change my time priorities"). Burn no bridges and leave no ill feelings. If an exit interview were done by an independent, trained third party... maybe. But can a concerned, responsible club leader interview and uncover an uncomfortable criticism? Unlikely.

The fact is that almost nobody keeps a count of the Rotarians who leave their clubs. Districts don't keep track, so RI doesn't have a good estimate. Believe it or not, a few districts' records show that really, something between fifteen and twenty percent of Rotarians leave their clubs every year. And most of that can be prevented by our club's leadership – our President, their Board of Directors, and their committee Chairs.

How satisfied are our members?

This year, well over one thousand Rotarians answered detailed questions about their Rotary experiences. The key question was: "How likely are you to be in the club next year?" Eighty-seven percent said they were very likely to stay. To put it another way, the remaining thirteen percent did ***not*** say they were very likely to be there.

As interesting as it is that one out of eight aren't very likely to stay, the more interesting issue is about how these people see Rotary differently from the more satisfied members.

In this analysis, two groups were compared to each other:

- I. **The eighty seven percent who say they are very likely to be in their club next year, and**
- II. **The remaining thirteen percent who are not very likely to remain.**

This report looks at the differences between these two groups to find out why so many Rotarians aren't certain that they will be with us next year.

Serious causes for leaving:

There are three big, and surprising, problems for these Rotarians.

1) Closed Minds

About one third of all members say they are not “Very satisfied” with their club leadership for being *open to ideas and criticism*. That seems like a lot of Rotarians who have been disappointed by their leaders reactions to ideas and problems. But what makes it even worse is that these are all too often the same people who say they are less likely to stay with the club. Not being open to members’ ideas or problems strikes a serious blow to Rotarians being happy in their club.

Each year in training and mentoring club leaders in District Assemblies and at PETS (President-Elect Training Seminars), experts and pundits say “This is your year. Be bold, and do what you want. It’s your year to shine.” Maybe we should tell club leaders that they are here to lead their club – BUT pay closest attention to where these members want to be lead. And listen - LISTEN – to their problems, issues and observations. Every Rotarian, every club member, is a leader, or they wouldn’t be in Rotary. Leading Rotarians isn’t exactly the same as being the boss on an assembly line. In Rotary, your workers are also leaders – and are used to being treated that way. And they’re volunteers who don’t have time to be ignored.

2) Disorganized, Poor Management

Also, about a third stated that they are not very satisfied that their club is organized and well run. Being *disorganized or appearing to be a poor manager* is the other leadership quality that is closely tied to the possibility of leaving the club. Again, members of Rotary are business and professional leaders. Most feel that Rotary deserves the same attention to detail and planning that professional organizations get. When they see a Board of Directors, club committees, or President looking disorganized, they apparently begin to question the commitment that they have made to their club.

Of course, the most conspicuous place for a club President to show their organization is at the weekly meeting. Members may not enjoy meetings that don’t look thoughtfully prepared, that aren’t timed and planned, that don’t reflect thought about how that hour or two going to a meeting every week will be used.

3) Cost

The measure of a “good” Rotarian is how effectively they serve. It is unfortunate if an effective member is disturbed by the *costs of being a Rotarian*. Yet, high costs are revealed as being strongly related to thoughts of leaving the club. In the U.S., the International dues (along with that subscription to the Rotarian magazine) are small. District dues are usually not even as much as the R.I. dues.

Club dues (club fixed costs) are usually fairly small. SO, if dollar costs are a problem for some Rotarians, it would be the cost of meals and the “demands” for financial contributions to service.

Club leadership might be ever-aware of particular Rotarians who may serve well but be a bit less capable (or willing) to contribute dollars as compared to time or effort. All members are financially equal... but knowing that costs ARE an issue of member retention, perhaps a special leadership creative sensitivity could be arranged for some Rotarians. (Read that as: “Can some Rotary members be able to opt out of some of the costly aspects of membership?”)

Other causes for leaving:

People join Rotary for two fundamental reasons: 1) to work to help the less privileged, and 2) to meet and harmonize with like-minded leaders, managers and professionals.

So naturally, if Rotarians aren't satisfied with their club's service, or with their fellowship opportunities, they are not going to be as satisfied with their club. And they will be less likely to remain in the organization.

“Involvement:”

Keeping our members in service is good for Rotary and it's good for our communities. People in Rotary want to be involved in some part of Rotary work. Club leaders want to be sure that every member has some important assignments. Apparently clubs (or the members) are doing a pretty good job in getting members to a satisfying level of involvement.

Our clubs certainly should keep us busy and involved. But whether a Rotarian feels they are working too hard, or not enough, that feeling doesn't affect their intention to stay in Rotary.

The Weekly Meeting:

Rotarians (like all humans) like things that reward them. Every week they go to their Rotary club meeting. Obviously they like to see that the meeting is organized and well run – and most are. That time is also filled with visits with friends, a good meal, AND a half hour program about something of interest – “The Weekly Program.”

Run a good, business-like agenda.

Make sure your members enjoy each other.

Give them a clean room and decent food.

Reward them with really good programs, programs that are...

Interesting or informative, educational or entertaining, AND

Presented by capable, experienced presenters.

Shown below is a list of the key elements of the Rotary experience that were measured in this survey. They are ranked from top to bottom in the order the survey indicated was their likelihood of remaining as a Rotarian. The “Retention Index” is the relationship between satisfaction and the likelihood of staying in the Rotary club next year. A “10” would mean that IF the member feels a problem in this area, then it would be a very important part of a decision to stay in the club. A “0” would mean that even if the member wasn’t very satisfied, it isn’t likely to affect a decision to stay in the club.

COST, EXPENSE OF BELONGING	8.4	} Very Important
ORGANIZED AND RUN WELL	6.8	
OPEN TO IDEAS AND CRITICISM	5.8	
GOOD SOCIAL, BE WITH FRIENDS	4.6	} Important
FREE OF INTERNAL BICKERING, POLITICS	4.5	
GOOD WEEKLY PROGRAMS	4.1	
TELLING OF ROTARY 'ROUND THE WORLD	3.7	
GOOD FUND RAISERS	2.7	
WELCOMES NEW ROTARIANS	2.3	} Small Effect
GOOD COMMUNITY SERVICE	2.3	
GOOD INTERNATIONAL SERVICE	2.0	
COULD DO MORE WORK	0.1	

Who’s likely to leave?

Newer members? Not really... Perhaps new members do discover that their choice of joining Rotary was a mistake. On the other hand, newer members may be more anxious to hang in on their new experience and give it a chance to work.

Whatever the case, new members (those who’ve joined in the past five years) do not appear to be any more ready to leave Rotary than the more experienced members. It does look like members who stay in for ten years or more tend to be a little more inclined to be satisfied and likely to keep their membership.

Attendance? No... The members who participated in this survey claim an 85% attendance rate. That’s probably a bit above the “official” average. In any event, attendance does not appear to be predicting a member’s likelihood of leaving the club.

Women may be very slightly more likely to leave Rotary than are men – not a dramatic difference, but a small, directional tendency for women to be less inclined to stay.

There is an identifiable, but very small indication that older Rotarians (those in their eighties) sense a higher chance that they might leave their club in the next year.

In sum, you can’t predict who’s likely to leave by looking at their age, gender, or time in Rotary. But you can by listening to their opinions.

All clubs lose too many members. And they all too often lose them because of the ways that people run the committees, the apparent attitudes of those on the club's Board, and sometimes even the person presiding. The big questions appear to be: Are our club leaders listening to our members? Are they trying to run a club that takes the time and energy to hear each member? Do the various meetings seem well organized, and professionally managed? Sure, some departures just have to happen, but...

The conclusion is clear: Club leaders who... Respect and listen to the members... Give the club the management and organization attention that they would give a profession... Respect every one of the members and their ideas... And give members a real reward for participating in Rotary – Friendship, good meetings, good programs.
They will be the leaders who make strong clubs and better Rotary.

YOUR INDIVIDUAL CLUB'S RESPONSES TO THE SURVEY:

This document is distributed only to you, as your club's President. How you interpret it, use it, or circulate it is entirely in your hands.

Here are some thoughts about ways to read this report:

First, heartfelt congratulations for being willing to measure your members' attitudes. The bigger the proportion of your members that responded, the more you can be certain it's a good reflection of your club's opinion of the club. Of course, the more people that responded, the better and truer the projection of your club's feelings. A smaller number, the fussier the picture might be.

The members' opinions are an accumulation of their experiences over the past days, months, and years. But it does indicate how they were feeling that day that they completed the survey.

The tables on the next page show each of the key measures of your club. Each of the key measures is shown in the order of their apparent importance to keeping your members in your club.

The top table shows the percent of all the surveyed clubs who are "very satisfied" with that aspect of their club. Next to it is the same information as reported by the members of your club.

Naturally, you want to be better than the average. So the chart below shows which elements you are either better or worse than average in. **Green** – to the right of the chart – is good. **Red** - going to the left – is the measure of how far a club is below the average.

If it's only a little above or below average – say, five or so percentage points - that probably doesn't mean much. If it's a big difference, that's probably important. It may be something to really pat your self and your members on the back for – if it's above the average. If it's below, maybe some new leadership or management action by you and your team might be beneficial to all concerned.

The higher in importance (to membership retention) the more attention it deserves. The most important are shown at the top of the bar chart – the less important, further down.

At the bottom of the chart are two measures. One is the pivotal answer – how many of your members state that they are "very likely" to be in your club in a year's time. You'd really like that answer to be 100%. Or at least at the average rate of 87%.

The other element - at the bottom of the table – is the proportion who say that they "could be doing more work" for Rotary. This doesn't appear to be related to staying in Rotary – but it certainly may reveal untapped enthusiasm to do Rotary work.

The next steps... are up to you. How you read the survey and how you may match it to your club... If the results mesh with your understanding of your club, there may be action steps that you, your Board or committee Chairs could take to strengthen the club.

SUMMARY RESULTS:
 ROTARY MEMBERSHIP SATISFACTION/RETENTION SURVEY
 ROTARY CLUB OF YOUR TOWN

	<u>ALL</u> <u>CLUBS</u>	<u>Your</u> <u>Town</u>
NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS:	1105	76
“VERY SATISFIED” BY CATEGORY:	%	%
COST, EXPENSE OF BELONGING	48.4	43.4
ORGANIZED AND RUN WELL	67.0	78.9
OPEN TO IDEAS AND CRITICISM	63.1	55.3
FREE OF INTERNAL BICKERING, POLITICS	57.6	43.4
GOOD SOCIAL, BE WITH FRIENDS	65.1	56.6
GOOD WEEKLY PROGRAMS	55.2	53.9
TELLING OF ROTARY 'ROUND THE WORLD	32.3	65.8
GOOD FUND RAISERS	70.4	85.5
WELCOMES NEW ROTARIANS	70.6	64.5
GOOD COMMUNITY SERVICE	73.2	81.6
GOOD INTERNATIONAL SERVICE	52.8	89.5
OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH CLUB	72.2	71.1
VERY LIKELY TO STAY	87.1	90.8
COULD DO MORE WORK	40.2	51.3

