

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS SEPTEMBER DANNIELLE CAMPOREALE

ARE NEW CLUBS A THREAT TO EXISTING CLUBS?

Often, when visiting meetings, the question of new clubs arises. Many times when these questions come up about new clubs potentially, forming in areas near other clubs I hear comments in the vein of **“they should be our members”** and **“how will we get new members with a club there”**. In response to the first question my answer is – **“if they are not in a club now then they are not members”**, and to the second question “that club will look very different to this club, it depends what the new member is looking for”.

Let us look at this a little deeper. When looking at a map of the locations of our current clubs there are some gaps that are not being covered by a Rotary Club. This can be for many different reasons. There may have been a club there previously but, for whatever reason, has folded or merged, there has never been any campaign to start a club in that particular area or there appears to be a significant lack of interest. It could also be because, at the time, Rotary did not offer what people were looking for.

When we consider our current clubs there are many clubs that continue to function in a traditional way. There is nothing wrong with that and many traditional clubs are doing exceptional work and are managing membership numbers well. The members of these clubs like things “just the way they are”. We all know how scary change can be so people grasp tighter to keep things the same because they are familiar. We also know that Rotary can be a very slow turning wheel. I have met with many clubs and individuals who speak about their dwindling numbers however are not prepared to critically analyse what it is about their clubs that results in a lack of engagement in case the outcome of that analysis suggests change.

So how can forming new clubs not be a threat to existing clubs? **New clubs are formed in the same way our existing clubs have been formed over the last century.** The difference is that they are being formed in modern times to suit modern society. When traditional clubs were formed 30, 40, 60 years ago they were formed under the structure of meeting every week for a dinner, following an agenda, etc. **Today, people are time poor and have greater pressures such as working longer hours, both partners working, children’s extra-curricular activities.** The traditional family looks very different today and people can be overwhelmed, especially when being asked to take on another commitment in their busy schedules. New clubs can be formed to offer a different type of structure that is more flexible and suits people who are generally time poor.

Meetings may be held on a weekend while participating in an event which kills two birds with one stone, rather than holding a meeting and then participating in an event, thus requiring less time commitment while still being able to make a difference.

Meetings may be held less frequently and less conventionally. There is no right or wrong way to meet as Rotarians anymore. At the end of the day we all come together to serve the same purpose and achieve the same goal to make a difference in the world. This does not negate the need for the traditional clubs we currently have and does not mean that existing clubs need to go and make a whole lot of changes, it just means we need to consider that Rotary is not a one size fits all product anymore.

Forming new clubs creates an opportunity for people, who otherwise are not engaged with Rotary, to potentially find a club style that suits them. When we consider that these people are most likely not engaged in Rotary in any way we should also consider that if creating a new club means more people connecting with Rotary then that is more people committed to making a difference and many hands make light work. The clubs we currently have are amazing and have paved the way over the years to continue serving their local, national and international communities and none of that is to be discredited.

These are the foundations that Rotary Clubs of the future are built on but like all things, with growth comes change. Hopefully the new clubs we form will pave the way for the longevity of Rotary in our District.

