

Secrets to Retention and Recruiting

by Past Council Chair Bill Filmore

We often talk about the problems with membership and retention, yet more times than not, talking is all we do. We report the numbers that continue to decline, year after year. Some even go so far as to bring Lions together and give seminars on the topics concerning membership. Others take the initiative and bring the district membership team together to devise a strategic plan.

Sometimes that strategic plan is sent out to the clubs for them to look at. Then near the end of the year or over a series of years we still wonder why membership has not improved. I believe that we have talked enough about the problem and we have planned this thing to death. We need to focus on *solutions*. The key to a solution in the area membership and retention is simple, it is often talked about, but it is rarely done.

Well, here is the answer. Are you ready? The answer is we must get our membership and retention plans implemented at the club level. I know this is easier said than done. I know what is standing in the way of implementation...time, money and commitment/desire.

These are not easy obstacles to overcome, but it can be done. Today I want to share two ideas that can be implemented at the club level. If they are, we will

achieve the results desired of more retained members and an increase in net membership.

Improving Retention

There is no question that retention is a serious problem. The membership charts clearly show the drops exceeding the adds each year in the USA and Canada. Does everyone know the No. 1 reason we have drops? It amazes me that we still have Lions starting from scratch to determine this—as if they can't believe the information that LCI has put out. I still see new retention chairs trying to get information from dropped members in their districts and multiples to try to find the reasons people left the club.

We know the No. 1 reason: it is *ineffective club meetings!* And LCI has already developed materials addressing each one of these issues.

We need interesting and productive meetings. We need meetings to be worthwhile. We need to plan and run effective meetings. Officers need to focus on meetings. We need to avoid cliques and politics. We need to keep members involved.

So what is something we can do to focus on having better meetings? What tool can we do to turn things around? How many clubs elect a new president for the year and that new president doesn't have any idea what to do to get his/her club

clicking on all cylinders? Here is an answer: it is called the *Lions Club Retention Index or LCRI*.

A Administration & Communication

N Networking & Socialization

S Service

W Work & Personnel Development

E Entertainment & Education

R Retention & Membership

Clubs that focus on the activities will be effective. Effective clubs will keep members active and involved. Active and involved members usually stay members. The result: drops reduced, membership increased.

Each area of the “answer” has a list of activities that can earn points. This is similar to a governor’s contest to select the best club and best secretary in the district. This is something that can be done on the district level as well as in individual clubs.

However, instead of the already overworked district governor having to keep up with the points, it will be the job of the district retention chair.

A club president who concentrates on all the areas of the LCRI will insure that the club is doing all it can to give its members the benefits of their

membership in Lions. This will result in most members feeling important and involved, which will retain their membership.

Improving Recruiting

Let's take a quick look at the key aspects of membership.

- Membership: recruiting and developing members in existing Lions Clubs.
- Extension: extending Lionism by chartering new clubs of various kinds.
- Retention: retaining the members in existing Lions Clubs.
- Leadership : the development of Lions Leaders on the club, district and MD levels

The focus in the last few years has been on retention, and it is a big problem without a doubt. However, membership is the *lifeblood* of our organization. Look at the numbers. I once said we don't have a membership problem, but we have a retention problem. Well, we have both. The number of new members in existing clubs has gone down. Since I was a governor in 1992, in the United States we are recruiting 10,000 less Lions per year. We are not out there bringing the new Lions in like we use to. Those are the facts. In order to turn things around, we need to *focus on recruiting*.

The definition of recruit is to renew or restore the health, vitality or intensity. Each time we recruit a new member we are adding a new dimension to our club. Each new member restores the vitality of your club. New ideas brought in by new members may mean change in the way we do things. However, as our international president has said, we must accept the *challenge to change*. This may mean focusing on bringing in women younger people below 40 years of age.

So where have we gone wrong in recruiting new members? We have membership committees, don't we? Well, yes we do, at least on paper. In the USA out of the 13,000+ clubs, more than 11,000 have a club membership chair for the club. However, this name is requested on the PU-101 form each year, and in most clubs a name is going in the space. Is there an actual committee and what are they doing about membership in the club?

I submit to you that in most clubs the chair is in name only and there is no committee, and nothing is being planned as a membership program in the club. So the answer in recruiting has to do with the desire and commitment to plan a club membership program. The solution that has proven to work is a "Lions Night Out" or "Friendship Night" that brings prospects to a dinner to introduce them to Lionism. So how is it done? The answer is a FOCUS on recruiting:

F Find Prospects

O Offer Opportunity to Come Together

C Convince Prospects to Attend

U Understand What Lions are About

S Secure a Commitment to Join

The question always is: does it work? Well, the Daleville Lions Club held their Lions Night Out and 16 prospects came to the dinner. The club ended the year with a net 16 new members going from 28 to 44 members. In addition to increasing membership the club was clicking on all other cylinders as well as shown by the club winning the MD-34 Rodderick Beddow Award for the most outstanding club in the multiple district. Once again, with the commitment of the club president and leadership, each club can implement a solution to the retention and membership problem. The more clubs that accept the challenge to focus their efforts using the tools above, the more our clubs, districts and multiples will experience net membership growth.

Filmore served as council chairman of MD-34, Alabama, in 2000-01.

Adapted from a presentation at a USA/Canada Lions Leadership Forum. Filmore's PowerPoint presentation is available [online](#).