

AI Summary of *The Most Important Avenue of Service: A Guide to Membership Growth and Improved Retention* (Revised 2.20.2024)

The paper argues that the key to reversing Rotary's long-term membership decline is **making Club Service the club's highest priority**. Rather than viewing Rotary as primarily a service organization, the author contends that Rotary clubs should operate as **membership organizations that provide service**. The central premise is that **club members are the club's customers**, and when members have an outstanding experience, membership growth and retention naturally follow.

Central Thesis

The author believes Rotary has spent decades concentrating on recruiting new members while failing to address the real issue—**retaining existing members**. The paper suggests that:

- Clubs focus too much on community projects and fundraising.
 - Too little attention is given to members' experiences.
 - Satisfied members become the club's best recruiters.
 - Membership growth is a by-product of a healthy club rather than the result of membership drives.
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The Most Important Avenue of Service

Although Rotary recognizes five Avenues of Service, the paper argues that **Club Service** is the foundation that makes all the others possible.

Healthy Club Service results in:

- stronger fellowship
- better organized clubs
- higher member engagement
- improved retention
- more volunteers
- greater community impact

In short:

Better Club Service → Happier Members → Better Retention → More Members → More Service.

Twenty Recommendations

The majority of the paper is devoted to twenty practical recommendations.

1. Restructure the Board

Use either six or twelve directors, depending on club size, to better distribute leadership responsibilities.

2. Two Secretaries

Separate administrative duties from communications by having:

- Recording Secretary
- Corresponding Secretary

3. Redefine the President's Role

The president should **lead meetings**, while the **board manages the club**.

This reduces dependence on one energetic president and creates year-to-year consistency.

4–6. Create Teams

Every director also becomes a Team Leader.

Teams rotate responsibility for:

- meeting duties
- welcoming guests
- Rotary education
- fun activities
- club socials

This spreads work beyond the traditional 20% of members doing 80% of the work.

7–9. Improve Organization

The paper recommends:

- shorter board meetings
- consent agendas
- annual planning calendars
- committee timelines
- published schedules

The goal is to operate more like a successful business.

10–12. Improve Communication

Maintain:

- an informative website
- active Facebook/social media
- a quality weekly newsletter

These serve both members and prospective members.

13. Donations

Instead of concentrating support on one charity, spread donations among organizations connected to club members.

This:

- strengthens member loyalty
- broadens community visibility
- creates more recruitment opportunities.

14. Membership

One of the paper's strongest recommendations is:

Never hold a membership drive.

Instead:

- make every meeting enjoyable
- build strong fellowship
- create an atmosphere members naturally want to share.

People join because of the experience—not because of speakers or meals.

15. New Member Retention

Integrate new members quickly through:

- projects
- socials
- meeting responsibilities
- Rotary presentations
- mentoring

The paper even proposes rewarding successful integration by allowing a donation in the new member's name to a charity of their choice.

16. Rotate Seating

Assign seating once each month so members meet different people and avoid cliques.

17. Member Scholarships

Provide confidential financial assistance for members temporarily unable to afford dues.

18. Corporate Membership

Allow a business representative to substitute for an active member when appropriate, encouraging eventual full membership.

19. Bylaws

After proving the new structure works, amend club bylaws so improvements survive changes in leadership.

20. Fun

Perhaps the most distinctive recommendation:

Include a short fun activity every month.

The author believes members should leave meetings looking forward to the next one.

Overall Philosophy

The paper repeatedly returns to one fundamental question:

Is Rotary a membership organization that provides service, or a service organization with members?

The author strongly advocates the first view.

He argues that:

- Friendship comes before service.
- Fellowship creates commitment.
- Commitment creates service.

- Strong clubs naturally attract new members.

Therefore, improving member experience—not recruiting campaigns—is the true solution to Rotary's membership decline.

Major Strengths

The paper offers several compelling ideas:

- Focuses on retention instead of only recruitment.
- Provides a practical organizational framework.
- Emphasizes fellowship, which aligns with Rotary's First Object.
- Reduces volunteer burnout by distributing work.
- Makes meetings more engaging and predictable.
- Encourages long-term planning instead of relying on each president's personality.

Potential Challenges

Some proposals may not fit every club:

- The team structure could feel overly formal for small clubs.
- Monthly socials and additional member activities require sustained participation.
- Some clubs may resist the philosophy that members are the club's "customers."
- The recommendation to **never** conduct membership drives is intentionally provocative and may not suit all clubs.

Overall Assessment

This paper presents a cohesive philosophy: **the health of a Rotary club begins with its members, not its projects.** Its central argument is that clubs should invest first in fellowship, organization, and member satisfaction, trusting that membership growth and community impact will follow. Whether or not every recommendation is adopted, the paper offers a thoughtful blueprint for clubs seeking to improve engagement, retention, and long-term sustainability.

