

# Educational Reading #1

## Membership and the Classification Principle

One of Rotary's most distinctive characteristics is that it brings together people from many different occupations and backgrounds. From its beginning in 1905, Rotary recognized that communities are strongest when leaders from all professions work together in the spirit of service.

This idea became known as the **Classification Principle**.

Originally, each Rotary club limited membership to one representative from each business or profession. The purpose was not exclusivity but diversity. Rotary wanted members with different experiences and expertise who could learn from one another and work together to solve community problems.

Over time, Rotary recognized that communities had changed. Businesses became larger, professions became more specialized, and many occupations included numerous qualified leaders. Today, clubs may have multiple members from the same profession, but the Classification Principle still encourages clubs to maintain a broad mix of occupations, ages, cultures, and experiences.

This diversity is one of Rotary's greatest strengths. A single service project might involve an engineer, teacher, physician, banker, contractor, attorney, nonprofit executive, farmer, police officer, and entrepreneur. Each brings unique skills and perspectives.

Rotary has also broadened its understanding of diversity beyond occupations. Clubs are encouraged to reflect the communities they serve by welcoming members of different ages, genders, ethnic backgrounds, cultures, and life experiences. The admission of women to Rotary in 1989 marked an important milestone, and today women serve at every level of Rotary leadership, including as Rotary International President.

Membership carries both privileges and responsibilities. Rotarians are expected to attend meetings regularly when possible, participate in service projects, contribute ideas, mentor new members, and support the Rotary Foundation. Membership is not simply paying dues—it is making a commitment to service and fellowship.

Every member also serves as an ambassador for Rotary. Friends, coworkers, and neighbors often form their impressions of Rotary based on the conduct and enthusiasm of individual members.

Strong clubs focus not only on recruiting new members but also on helping them become engaged. New members who quickly find opportunities to serve, build friendships, and contribute their talents are far more likely to remain active for many years.

Rotary's future depends on welcoming people who share its values while embracing new ideas, new professions, and new generations of leaders.

