

To Lead, You Need Members

Panel from Paul Bunyan Toastmasters

You can be the most fantastic leader in the world, but can you lead *if you have no members*? No! In Toastmasters it is the same. Members are the key to success: for individuals, clubs, areas, divisions, districts. TMI recognizes membership as an ongoing issue. They **expect** eight of twenty members to leave each year—a whopping 40% yearly attrition. Just replacing those eight members is a big task for some clubs.

The reason there are so many seminars is that people are looking for answers. They are looking for the new answer, the gem that others have kept from them, THE solution to their problems. The difficulty is that we do not know, going in, when that jewel we seek will pop up. We do not know who will deliver it. It may be an audience member who shares it. It may be an idea that one of the presenters has, after studying the problem and listening to others and thinking about it. Something that strikes everyone by its brilliance: 40-karat solution that satisfies us all. It may be a question that clarifies the issue, or the impromptu answer to a question.

The problem of this seminar is membership. We discussed the four solutions or four parts of the solution to this problem.

1. **Creating an atmosphere of "good will" towards Toastmasters** in your community or organization. This is the value of constant public relations. Newspapers, radio, TV, social media, websites, calendars, bulletin boards. They all play their part.
2. **Recruiting new members from the general public.** Strangers. How did they find you? Did it only take one mention of the word "Toastmasters"? That is unusual. Normally, a person has heard about TM without knowing what it is or what it does. Perhaps five or six mentions of TM are necessary to get a person to a meeting. It could be our PR, it could be a friend mentioning that she attends, perhaps a flier catches the eye, perhaps something on TV or radio, or possibly a calendar of meetings scheduled. One day it happens, and the person is ready.
3. **Recruiting from other sources:** Past members might rejoin. Recruit from your workplace, church, or any other organization. Friends are potential members. This year we had six reinstated members, several just because we asked or invited them. They know the value and the fun of TM. They just have to decide to return.
4. **Retention: Keeping the members you have.** What keeps a person coming back to TM? What are the secrets to keeping a member for 3 or 10 or 30 years. Ask what keeps them coming back. Ask why they left. Ask what they want. Constantly invite members to tell you these things. Do surveys. Plan new events for long-term members. The newer members will benefit from them as well—and a tradition is born.

Institutionalize your *efforts*, not just your successes. If you only know what worked before, you will be dooming your successors to fail in the same way again and again. Document your failures with the same enthusiasm and thoroughness as the successes. Determine to repeat what worked—avoid what didn't. Have the lessons learned from failure as a part of the history of the club. Only in this way can the club learn what to do next. Clubs change and times change, but people DO recognize value when they see it.