

The District membership team are on a mission.

A mission to help Rotary clubs across East Anglia to grow and strengthen their membership.

But it's not so easy. In fact it's getting harder!

For many years the primary approach to growing Rotary has been starting new clubs, moving meetings from lunch time to evening to breakfast, but always re-planting the same structures, format and rules. However, if you are reading this blog it's probably because you want to do something new, something different. You want to reach people who are not aware of the gift of Rotary membership and the work that Rotary does.

No matter what approach you are looking to take to grow membership in your area, there are a number of dilemmas that every club has to address, we've encountered them time and again as we've looked to grow our membership. We hope that the lessons we've learned will help you and give you the tools you need to overcome them.

We'll also share why we think that the **MEMBER GETS MEMBER** approach – rooted in the history and practice of Rotary worldwide – is the key to overcoming these dilemmas.

DILEMMA 1 – WHO ARE YOU TRYING TO REACH?

If you are starting a new kind of Rotary, it's because you have big dreams to reach people who don't know Rotary. **MEMBER GETS MEMBER** is an approach that effectively reaches numerous people in your local community. We didn't make this approach up on our own, but looked back at the rapid membership growth in these Islands during the 20th Century. By utilising **MEMBER GETS MEMBER** we see the same populations of people/professions finding their way into the local Rotary club as we witnessed during historical periods of rapid growth.

DILEMMA 2 – IS YOUR NEW GROUP REALLY ROTARY?

If you are going to start a new kind of Rotary, a Satellite group, you will encounter some skeptics! This is especially true if you are trying to reach people who don't normally 'do clubs'. Well-meaning Rotarians may look at you and say, "Is this really a Rotary club?" We often encounter this question when we are starting a satellite group.

The answer's clear:

Rotary has continued to grow across the globe over the past 100 years because a small number of people have come together to form a Rotary club, normally led by one or two dedicated, existing Rotarians.

Forming a satellite group allows potential Rotarians, who are not attracted to an existing Rotary club (for many diverse reasons) to join Rotary, grow in knowledge, enjoy a unique type of friendship and give Service Above Self in their local and international communities.

Traditional Rotary clubs often engage in reaching out to recruit with the hope of eventually having the people they encounter join their club. We cannot make any such assumptions that encounters will result in membership, they need help, guidance and understanding of what being a Rotarian involves, together with the joy and privilege of being a member of the greatest service organisation the world has ever seen.

DILEMMA 3 – WHAT DOES YOUR NEW KIND OF ROTARY EVEN LOOK LIKE?

Our imaginations are often limited by our previous experiences, what we've already seen or encountered. It will be difficult to start anew kind of Rotary group if you can't clearly describe what its gatherings look like.

So how do we describe a satellite group?

7.30am Friday morning - a champagne restaurant and coffee house at a business park north Cambridge. Picture the room with communal table and chairs, people arrive, greet each other, quickly grabbing a coffee at the bar. The room is buzzing with different kinds of people looking to network and to give back, we see small groups chatting, talk and laughter can be heard throughout the room. The Chair calls people to sit around a table and the business of the group is quickly undertaken. It may be a business issue or problem, raised by one of the members and all are encouraged to contribute to the discussion; or it may be planning a social event or organizing a fund-raiser. Issues and tasks are allocated over agreed deadlines. The next hour flies past and soon the Chair draws the discussion to a close, so that everyone can make their way to work. People linger after the meeting to chat and eventually things start to die down and people drift away. All communication outside the fortnightly meetings is by social media - email, face-book, twitter. There is no meal, no formality, no grace, no regalia and yet this is as much a Rotary meeting as any I have encountered.

DILEMMA 4 – WHY IS THIS VERSION SO IMPORTANT RIGHT NOW?

Anytime you start a new Rotary group it'll ruffle some feathers, the very idea carries an implicit judgment, it seems to say that the existing Rotary clubs are not enough. However, the District membership team believes more Rotary

groups/clubs have to be started and satellite groups are an approach that is uniquely appropriate for today. Unfortunately, we live in an era where Rotary clubs across RIBI are in decline, which begs the question, what is the future of Rotary if we are not reaching new populations of potential members? The single greatest reason Rotary is in decline is we have lost our ability to reach to potential members and introduce them to the gift of membership. In an effort to recover membership effectiveness, it is important to look back to a time in Rotary's history when we were effective at the skill of reaching peoples who were unfamiliar with Rotary and Rotary's values. During the last 100 years, Rotary grew from a movement of hundreds, to a movement of over one million members. At first it was made up mostly of business professionals, men, based on the North East American Rotary model. They met to network and 'boost' each other's business and the movement rapidly grew and spread across countries and all ethnic and socioeconomic groups and it happened using a simple methodology. The form of Rotary that spread was based on **MEMBER GETS MEMBER**, with small groups gathering where Rotary was shared and lives were transformed. This communal, relational approach was perfect to attract people who knew nothing about Rotary, which explains why the **MEMBER GETS MEMBER** approach is beginning to lift membership across the District. Once more, we need a way of doing Rotary that reveals the fellowship, friendship and gift of being a member. The **MEMBER GETS MEMBER** strategy isn't just another cool way of bringing trendy young people into Rotary, it is an historical, proven and powerful tool for effective growth. Perhaps this is why the early Rotarians clearly embedded Rotary in social encircling.

DILEMMA 5 – WHEN AND HOW DOES RECRUITMENT OCCUR?

Every Rotarian can 'go get a new member'. Whatever recruitment method you choose, a **MEMBER GETS MEMBER** approach will strengthen your club. Joining together, once a fortnight at a time, place and space that is natural to your community will attract new members. Members need to sit with potential members, gently leading them towards the benefits of joining Rotary.

DILEMMA 6 – WHERE WILL OUR NEW GROUP MEET?

"Where to meet?" is an unavoidable question all new Rotary groups navigate. Having started a number of new groups/clubs I've noticed a few elements that make for a great gathering place. New Rotary Groups work well in many locations, but seem to grow the fastest where there are large pockets of like-minded people, whether business or community minded. When the only logistical requirement is for tea/coffee, any place that potential members already like to gather works well. I've noticed that coffee shops and pubs are at their most empty on Mondays, making them an advantageous location and time for Rotary. Truthfully, any community space, available for sixty to ninety minutes, is a great time to gather around a table and talk.

DILEMMA 7 – HOW DO WE FUND OUR NEW GROUP?

You can't get round it: everyone who joins Rotary must pay RI dues, currently £62 per annum, payable six monthly on a pro rata basis. If satellite groups are using the Rotary name and logo they must be members of Rotary International. In addition, the District sub, currently £20 per annum, is due on 1st July only, if someone joins after 1st July then the district sub isn't payable until the following 1st July. This 'minimal cost' approach, along with the primary focus of working for the community, is proving to be a very attractive recruitment vehicle.

DILEMMA 8 – WHAT SHOULD YOU NAME YOUR GROUP?

Naming a Rotary club can often be hard. In past eras where new clubs focused on differentiating themselves from the established clubs, words were often added such as: Rotary club of Blank-town South, Rotary club of Blank-town Jubilee, or Rotary club of Blank-town and District. We've struggled with this in naming satellite groups and noticed that the word 'club' doesn't help us in today's society. The word 'club' is often irrelevant or off-putting in the minds of many people. Consider using names that describe the experience and don't shy away from its clear purpose: Rotary @ CBC, Rotary Business Forum or Rotary Community Group. Use names which steer away from evoking negative ideas about clubs and emphasises the idea of coming together, volunteering time and energy, as family and friends, working for local and overseas communities.

DILEMMA 9 – HOW DO WE ADVERTISE?

Whatever type of Rotary group you start, you need to get the word out there and Public Image is an important area for every club. The people that new Rotary groups reach tend to distrust slick advertising campaigns. A full-on colour mail-out invitation can have the exact opposite of what speaks to those who are attracted to these new Rotary groups. Often a simple message can go a lot further and make a greater impact. We have seen many years of advertising, both national and local, costing many thousands of pounds to members, with little or no effect on our membership numbers and recruitment. When it comes to advertising – I firmly believe local and simple is best. Needless to say, any Public Image we give, whether it is via social media or the parish magazine, must be right and appropriate. If in doubt, speak to our District PR guru – Ian Elliott, who will shape a strategy just for your club.

DILEMMA 10 – HOW DO YOU TALK ABOUT THIS VERSION OF ROTARY WITH TRADITIONAL ROTARIANS?

People think they know what Rotary is. This means that whether you're talking to existing Rotarians or potential members, you have to find the words to differentiate your new Rotary group from their perceptions or past experience. Particularly when your new group is especially focused on a specific group of

people or a particular approach; it's common to have trouble helping experienced Rotarians understand what you are doing. You must work hard to make a few things clear. First you want them to understand this is anything but a social group, further, it is not a new radical model, it is Rotary. When you talk about your satellite group, you need to be able to explain what you do and why you have chosen your specific focus.

DILEMMA11 – HOW MANY MEMBERS DO YOU NEED TO START A SATELLITE?

The first major challenge you will face when forming a new Rotary community is the transition from a dream in your head to a viable group with a shared purpose. To register a satellite group with RIBI you only need eight members, who can be new or existing Rotarians and there are only three roles that need to be allocated; Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary.

DILEMMA 12 – SHOULD YOU PARTNER WITH ANOTHER CLUB?

As new Rotary groups develop around East Anglia, we have seen different approaches and different models: “Parent partnership” approach, where an existing Rotary club ‘sponsors’ a new group or satellite. “Multi-site partnership” where a number of existing Rotary clubs, normally based in one geographical area, work together to form one satellite group across all the sponsor clubs involved. “Parachute Drop” where a single Rotarian moves into a new job or new home and begins reaching out to their new colleagues, or new neighbours, to form a satellite group.

THE BIGGEST DILEMMA: WILL YOU TAKE THE NEXT STEP?

If you've downloaded this document and read this blog, it's probably because you sense the need to do something about membership and start a new Rotary group to reach people who are not Rotarians. So what will you do now?

Here's what you can do next:

Learn more: look at some of the additional resources on this blog page.

Come visit: the best way to understand how these new groups are going, come along, or speak to me or one of the membership advocates who have established new satellite groups.

Discuss: discuss the idea fully with your club members and get their backing and support

Start planning: there is an easy to follow flow chart on the blog page which outlines the steps ahead of you.

Let's Go: if you are ready to start, we want to help you and are here to give you support and advise to make your journey easier.