

HOW TO GET YOUNGER MEMBERS INTO YOUR CLUB

Researched Rob Neary

The “Ratchet” method

Over a coffee, with a younger member, ask for names of their acquaintances and friends that you may send an invitation to for a visit to the club to learn about Probus.

The “Ladder” method

Every member is asked to bring along a friend 5 years their junior. And again, next time, the friend is to be 10 years their junior. Maybe there could be an award to the member who achieves the greatest intake of younger members.

Form a Membership Development Committee

- A 3 or 4 member committee should actively pursue, promote and make welcome new visitors.
- Introduction of prospective member by an existing member
- Think tank of committee with several younger members for names.
- Organise a “Bring a Friend Day”.
- Organise a Club “Open Day” with the help of the Association.
- Organise a joint “Open Day” with neighbouring clubs with the help of the Association.
- Circulate cards for members to nominate acquaintances for membership.
- Send out invitations, lots of invitations, to hear a good guest speaker and join in a significant visit.
- Promotion of your good monthly guest speaker at the library, the community hall and the shopping centre.
- Letter box drop of Probus South Pacific Limited Pamphlets.
- Publish a media release of interesting events.
- A static display at the local shopping centre using the banners from South Pacific.
- Seek potential members’ names from membership lists at bowling and golf clubs, art groups, sewing groups, etc.
- Offer to pick up, or arrange to have visitors picked up before the meeting.
- Red Ribbon – make your guest feel important and so that they stand out and ask all your members may make a particular effort to make them feel welcome. Perhaps a white ribbon to identify new members.
- Introduce the visitor to the president and as many other members as possible. Make the visitor feel welcome, and that their company is valued – a wallflower won’t be in a hurry to repeat the experience.
- Follow up after the meeting with a bulletin and a phone call invitation to the next meeting.

MEMBERSHIP DEVELOPMENT TOOL KIT

SOME POSSIBILITIES FOR ENHANCING YOUR MEMBERSHIP

Community announcements in your local paper and seniors newspapers (free of charge): Publicise your club, its meeting date, names of recent and planned guest speakers, recent and planned outings and events, name and phone number of a contact person (first name) for membership enquiries. Provide well written editorial copy, not too wordy, short sentences, and newspaper style. Include photos of Probians doing interesting activities (not just sitting around).

- *Paid ads in the local paper*, if funds permit; words such as:

RETIRED, SEMI-RETIRED OR NO LONGER WORKING FULL TIME?

PROBUS can offer members a great avenue of interests and new horizons and provides members of the community with fresh ideas to enrich and fulfill their lives in retirement.

Our motto is: Fun, Fellowship and Friendship.

PROBUS is Proud to be a Community Service Activity of Rotary clubs

Why not consider joining the Probus Club of XXXXXX which is a non-political, non-sectarian, non-fundraising social club having speakers, outings and interesting activities.

Contact xxxxxxxxxx on phone yyyyyyyy. Joining fee is \$xx with an annual fee of \$yy

- *Brochures about Probus:* Place these at local audiologists, pharmacies, hairdressers, real estate agents, doctors, dentists, libraries (although some libraries won't take them) bowls clubs, community halls, any location where retirees may visit. Generic Probus flyers are available from PSP; you can insert your clubs contact details. Purchase some plastic DL brochure stands for display at these places. (NB; someone needs to replenish stands each month and take note of which ones "work" and which don't - move the ones that don't). If you design your own flyer then make use of your local city councilor's free copying service - use coloured paper where possible.
- *Letter box drop your own flyers:* Be selective; avoid "no junk mail" signs and houses with children's toys out front. Also put flyers on community notice boards in your local shopping centre and elsewhere.
- *Bring a friend:* Challenge your members to bring one friend to a meeting, particularly when you know the speaker will be top class. Some clubs allow friends who visit for the first time to be guests of the club.
- *Keep in touch with visitors:* If they are on email create a "prospect" list in your address book and send a newsletter each month (blind copies if emailing), otherwise mail them a copy for a few months.
- *Membership suggestions from Rotary:* Ask your sponsoring Rotary club if it knows of anyone who would make a good Probus member and entering retirement.
- *Spare Probus magazines:* Encourage members not to throw them away when read, but to leave them in places mentioned above. Place stickers (with contact details) on the cover of each Probus magazine so that interested readers/prospective Probians are able to connect with your club.
- *Seek permission to set up a display table in your local shopping centre:* Some shopping centres allow for non-profit organizations to "man" a display table, free of charge. Use the free generic flyers (and your own) mentioned above as your resource material. Purchase, or borrow, a Probus display stand. Obtain Probus brochures, posters and balloons from PSPL (free of charge).
- *Signage (Probus meets here):* Organise for a sign (both indoor and outdoor) to be erected where you meet. Make sure they are in prominent positions.
- *Local community radio:* Take advantage of its community announcements and publicize your club and speakers. Use the Probus jingle (available from PSP).
- *Local retirement village:* Connect with the local retirement village (not aged care facilities!). It might include one of your monthly meetings in its outing list and invitations to join can follow.
- *Advertise at your club venue where possible:* Is it a bowls or services club? A hotel? Ask if you can leave promotional material for patrons to take, or purchase a stand-up sign to leave permanently in a place where it is seen (inside). Seek approval to play the Probus promotional DVD on closed circuit televisions.
- *A sub website for your club:* Look at having your own club sub website; either one through PSPL (\$90 one-off fee for establishment and option to self manage or have assistance from

PSPL staff) or create one of your own design. Remember that out-of-date web sites are counterproductive, so if you can't update it regularly then it is better not to have one.

- *Make visitors feel welcome:* Have a 'buddy system' where each visitor or new member is "looked after" by an established (buddy) member. Have new members wear a colored ribbon for the first couple of months to identify them within the club as a new member.
- *Look at your speakers:* Get together with your sponsoring Rotary club and cherry pick its better speakers. Sometimes the calibre of speaker can make a good news story for the local paper. Stay away from speakers who use the time to push a fundraising barrow. Carefully vet the ones selling wares/services to older folk. (Sometimes these may be of interest to some members).
- *Attract younger retirees:* Every club should try to have at least a small intake of new members, including younger retirees, each year. Ensure your club is attractive to younger retirees: Are you up with the technology? (data projectors, emailed newsletters, PA system). Is your club culture welcoming and friendly? Is your newsletter up to scratch? (i.e. is it a promotional tool for your club?). Are your meetings efficient?
- *Your meeting format:* Does it need refreshing? Do away with the "wedding table" – have your committee mixing with the members - which makes the latter feel more included. That way cliques can be broken up. (Discourage people sitting in the same place, with the same people, each meeting). Are the meetings interesting? Free of waffle?
- *Have a "busy" outings program:* Ensure there are outings for all tastes and capabilities. Survey members about their preferences for different kinds of outings / tours. Ask those not taking advantage of outings programs if there are other kinds of outings they would enjoy. Network with other nearby clubs to help fill buses and share experiences.
- *Develop interest groups:* Encourage formation of groups where there is sufficient interest and where someone with a passion (not necessarily a committee member) is willing to lead the group; if a movie or dining group forms, who cares if only a half a dozen go? It is another choice of activity. The more choices of interest groups the better! Be active, and be seen to be active. Interest groups can be used to promote membership. (e.g. establish a garden group and then promote it at the local nursery). Network with local clubs to join in your clubs interest groups and activities; this will assist the older clubs who may not be able to arrange such events and activities with dwindling membership numbers.
- *Be a caring club:* Ensure that members, who are sick, bereaved, or going through hard times are supported appropriately by the club. This might be a friendly telephone call or visit or a card. Be supportive but not intrusive. Don't leave it all to the welfare officer. Follow up, discreetly, on members absent for more than a couple of meetings.
- *Be an outward looking club:* Remember that when you join a Probus club you join a Probus family. Encourage members to participate in accredited Probus Information Days (particularly informative for all committee members), PSP sponsored annual Rendezvous, and interest groups and association events (friendship days, golf and bowls days, ecumenical services, etc).
- *Consider your venue:* Is your venue clean, cheerful, sufficient space, safe, adequate facilities with parking. Would another venue at the right price be more suitable?
- *Review your membership size (limit):* Is it the right size in terms of the size of your venue? Should it be bigger or smaller? Would another venue be better? Is your waiting list too large?

RETENTION OF MEMBERS – THE OTHER HALF OF THE EQUATION

- How well do we look after existing members – is there a hole in the bucket?
- Why do new Combined clubs not have a problem with membership or retention?

Do we:

- Say thank you to members doing good work?
- Follow up members who have missed three meetings?
- Introduce new programs to make the meetings more interesting?
- Have members have a HOBBY TALK and form an interest group as follow up.
- Ask members what they like and dislike in our meetings
- Have a four months forward program of events?
- Make sure members are involved and not excluded at meetings and outings?
- Make sure cliques are not too prevalent in your club?
- Give new members a job ASAP so they get involved?
- Make the meetings fun, great to be part of, a shame to depart from?
- Ask new members to give a job talk so the club can become acquainted with them.

TWO HARDEST THINGS FOR A VISITOR OR MEMBER TO DO AT A MEETING.

Front up to a meeting of say 80 people, not knowing a soul, and continue to walk through the door.
Ask a member to invite a friend to a Probus meeting because they are wary of a knock-back.

STOP SAYING THESE WORDS: WE HAVE A MEMBERSHIP PROBLEM.

SAY: WE HAVE A MEMBERSHIP CHALLENGE AND A PLAN OF ACTION THAT WILL BE DIFFERENT, FUN, AND EFFECTIVE FOR ALL CONCERNED.

RETIREMENT EVERYONE'S DOING IT. PROBIANS DO IT BETTER