

February 2003 Bulletin

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A new Toastmaster recently asked me why we put so much emphasis upon membership building. His question reminded me that in our preoccupation with attracting new people to our clubs, we sometimes neglect to first make sure everyone understands the necessity for doing so. Yet even the best membership building ideas will not be as effective unless all club members are committed to working toward this goal.

Many of us who have been in Toastmasters awhile, have learned through experience why new members are needed. We have sadly said good-bye to members due to such reasons as job changes, increased family commitments, illness, or an unexpected move. We recognize that people join Toastmasters with various goals. While we've heard it said, "If you want to get all you can out of Toastmasters, you'll never get out of Toastmasters," we've seen people who don't choose to remain members and reap all those benefits. We have also witnessed how temporary circumstances, such as increased job responsibilities, returning to school for career advancement, or caring for a new baby sometimes necessitates that members become inactive. While they expect to eventually return, their absence affects their availability as speakers or for other meeting roles.

So how do we convince our fellow club members to actively seek new members? Our first step might be to look at our own actions. Do we often talk to people about Toastmasters and invite guests to meetings or other club events? Do we distribute information about Toastmasters? Are we open to creative, new ideas in promoting our clubs? Do we really desire to draw in new members or are we content with our own little group? Do we volunteer to help with community outreach programs, such as Speechcraft, Youth Leadership, or as a Speaker's Bureau speaker? Our positive energy can be contagious, often inspiring others to get involved, too.

The next step depends upon the nature of our clubs. Small, struggling clubs, for instance, often need little convincing that they must gain more members, but they may lack people and resources to carry out ideas. One suggestion to these clubs might be to ask Toastmasters from other clubs for temporary assistance. These visiting Toastmasters can often provide emotional support as audience members, or practical assistance by filling in as speakers or in other meeting roles if needed. And by helping others we not only promote good will between clubs but also help ourselves, as there is something to be learned from every Toastmasters club we visit.

People will become enthusiastic about membership building once they see how it benefits them. For example, mentoring new members reinforces our own skills. Listening to new speakers broadens our knowledge and outlook. And more club members can bring us new friends to enrich our lives. Our clubs benefit, too, as new members bring in new talents and other new members.

The privilege and responsibility for membership building belongs to us all. While it takes some work, we will reap many rewards for our efforts. But to go forward with greatest success, all Toastmasters are needed on board the team. Building from within and between our clubs will truly bring out the best in us all! Let's do it!