

Focus on Club Dynamics

Smart Strategies
For Handling Cliques and Politics



PRESIDENT'S
*Retention
Campaign*





Retention Clinics Created for You

The President's Retention Campaign was developed to keep our quality club members interested and engaged. The campaign focuses on the three primary threats to retention and offers proven solutions to address these challenges. The President's Retention Campaign will help make your year as club president more successful and rewarding.

Research has shown that 50% of our new members drop out within the first three years. Fortunately, we know the main reasons why:

- Lengthy/boring meetings
- Club cliques and politics
- Lack of meaningful involvement

The Retention Clinics spotlight each of these challenges individually, helping you uncover weaknesses in your club and develop a plan. Each Retention Clinic will follow the same simple formula for identifying and solving the challenges:

- **LOOK** closely at the current state of your club
- **LISTEN** to input from fellow club members
- **LEARN** where problem areas exist
- **RESPOND** by implementing appropriate changes

This evaluation and implementation process is simple and not time-consuming. The benefits to your club will be well worth your efforts.

FIX IT FAST! Throughout the Retention Clinics, **FIX IT FAST!** features quick tips that are easily implemented. These ideas can be used on their own or to supplement more dramatic changes.

Building a Support System

As you go through this process, it will be helpful for you to share ideas, comments or concerns with other club presidents. You can contact other presidents in your district, region, or zone and suggest a brainstorming session. There is also help available via the Internet at the Club President Connection on the association's Web site (www.lionsclubs.org). The Club President Connection allows you to network with club presidents from around the globe. It is an excellent opportunity to learn what challenges others have faced and what solutions worked for them.

Retention Challenge

Negative cliques and club politics can leave members feeling left out and resentful. It is one of the chief reasons members drop out of their clubs.

How people fit into the club and how comfortable they feel can have a big impact on club functioning. If your club is splintered into “us” and “them” groups, or club proceedings are mired by politics, the Lions experience can turn into a negative one, making your club unattractive to new members and ineffectual in reaching its goals.

LOOK at Your Club

Taking the time to examine your club and honestly assessing its current status is the key to successfully making changes. Without pinpointing the areas that need attention, you might be fixing a problem that doesn't exist and ignoring a potential trouble spot. It is helpful to write down your observations as you undertake this process.



Begin by observing members during meetings and service activities:

- What is the general atmosphere of your club? Friendly? Welcoming? Fun? Boring? Tense? Dedicated? Productive?
- Are there well-defined, established “groups” within your club?
- If so, do these “groups” interact with each other? How is their relationship? Friendly? Respectful? Tense?
- If so, do these “groups” have any effect on the functioning of the club?
- Are new members warmly welcomed into your club?
- After an initial introduction, are new members made to feel a part of the club?
- Do you feel that your club is focused on meeting its service goals?
- Do club politics make it difficult for the club to meet its service goals?
- Do all members, new and old, feel that they are an equal part of the club?

FIX IT FAST! Attendance Cues – Paying careful attention to attendance trends can help uncover retention problems. Not attending meetings is one of the first signs of lack of member interest. Confer with your secretary and get a list of members who are “slipping.” If they have missed three meetings or more in a row, call them to find out why. Personally calling them will show that you care about them.

LISTEN to Input from Members

It is a good idea to enlist the help of several club members whose opinions you trust, or even your entire membership, to help with the evaluation process. To assist you in soliciting member input, a questionnaire is provided in the back of this publication.

LEARN Where Problem Areas Exist

Study your answers and the surveys from other members. Note the following:

- What trends do you see?
- Which areas need attention?
- Were you surprised at the responses you received?
- Was there a big difference between your assessment of your club’s dynamics and your fellow members’ assessment?

After examining feedback, decide which areas need attention. Use your best judgment when evaluating results. Certainly, if you notice a recurrence of the same comment, you should look for strategies for solving that particular problem. You might find that there are areas where you thought the club excelled that members think otherwise. Depending on answers received, perhaps all that is needed are a few small changes. However, there may be situations where some members of your club feel strongly one way, and others feel strongly another way. In these situations, you must consider what will be best for the club. If your club is trying to attract new, younger members, pay particular attention to the comments of those current members who are in the same demographic group you are trying to reach.



Your club members' involvement in this process doesn't have to stop with the evaluation. Report your findings and the changes you will make to improve your club. Enlist their enthusiasm and support. Together, you can make your club more successful.

RESPOND by Making Appropriate Changes

Start by recognizing that cliques very typically form in large groups, and that not all cliques are inherently “bad.” People will naturally gravitate to those that they feel comfortable with, or that they have known for a long time. However, if these sub-groups are making some members feel left out, or are affecting club functioning, they are detrimental to your club.



Cliques can be minimized if all members feel a part of the group as a whole. You can help keep members focused on their important role in the club by making sure they are involved, understand the goals and objectives of your club, and by implementing team-building strategies to bring the group closer together. For suggestions for making members feel more involved, please see the Focus on Involvement Retention Clinic.

Handling club politics involves understanding your club's goals and objectives, open communication, and leadership. Following are strategies for helping bring your club together to effectively serve your community.

FIX IT FAST! Set the Tone – As club president, you have the ability to set the tone for the club. How you manage the club will have an effect on how both current and new members will feel about being involved. When developing your goals for the year, keep in mind the kind of atmosphere you want the club to have. Make it a point to let your club members know what kind of club atmosphere you would like and how they can help achieve it.

Building Your Team: Making your club into a cohesive, productive team will help keep members interested, involved, and meet your club's service goals. Promoting a team atmosphere begins with open communication, shared goals, and positive reinforcement. Think of yourself as a coach as well as a club president.

In order to have a high-functioning team, members must know and trust one another. This will happen as the group works together on service activities. Club meetings are a good opportunity for the team to connect and learn more about one another, which is why it is important that meetings be well attended, interesting and productive. See the Focus on Meetings Retention Clinic for helpful advice in planning a productive meeting.

FIX IT FAST! Kudos to Club Members – Give praise often to club members for a job well done, a good idea or an effort beyond the call of duty. A simple “thank you” in front of the entire club will go a long way in building members' pride.

Another terrific team-building exercise is to hold brainstorming sessions. Besides the team-building benefit, brainstorming promotes the free flow of ideas. Sessions can be used within committees or by the club as a whole. You can brainstorm membership recruitment and retention ideas, new service activities, ways to improve existing service activities and ways to improve club meetings, etc. During a brainstorming session, all members are encouraged to participate, bouncing ideas off one another and building on what others have said. Have someone keep notes on all the ideas generated. Keep things positive – no idea is considered bad or unworkable. Once all the ideas are “out there,” they can be reviewed for relevancy.

Open communication is vital to the success of a team. Team members need to feel that they will be heard and that their input is valued. You can do this through brainstorming sessions, program evaluations, or implementing a suggestion box. It is also important for members to feel like they have an open forum to discuss more troubling issues and handle disputes. Working through problems successfully will help bring the team closer together.



FIX IT FAST! *Retention is for All Members* – While making sure new members feel welcomed, involved and comfortable, it is important to remember long-term members. As people belong to an organization for a longer period of time, their goals and needs may change. Let long-time members know that their continued membership is important by periodically asking them if they are still satisfied with the club.

Keeping Things Fresh: Long-standing, ingrained cliques often will form in clubs when things remain the same year after year. If people are allowed to be on the same committee indefinitely or perform the same function at a club activity, the clique will become tighter and tighter, making it harder for new people to



become a part of the group and harder for new ways of doing things to be introduced. Eventually, your club becomes stagnant and loses its relevancy in the community. Additionally, this can impact members negatively. People in the same position for a long time may become bored and complacent, while new members, at the same time, might become frustrated because they feel unimportant to the functioning of the club.

This doesn't mean that every year there must be a dramatic change in how your club functions and the projects it pursues – that would be very unproductive.

However, there are strategies that can be implemented each year that lessen the formation of cliques and that keep clubs fresh and vital while still meeting service goals.

To keep club atmosphere fresh for members, rotate committee members every year where possible to give people new opportunities. Not only will you be giving members a chance to try something new, the committees themselves will benefit from fresh perspectives.

After projects and service activities are completed, have the club work together to evaluate what went well and identify what could be improved next time. Make detailed notes for next year's committee. This can keep the activity successful, make members feel involved and promote team building.

FIX IT FAST! Scramble Seating Arrangements – Change seating arrangements at meetings from time to time to allow all members to become better acquainted.

Making New Members Feel Welcome: Many clubs do a great job warmly welcoming new members into their club, but after the initial introductions, don't follow up with members to make them feel part of the club. This often occurs if your current club members are very close or there are well-established cliques. Most new members need a period of nurturing to really feel a part of the club – both socially and in terms of their involvement. Make sure your club properly inducts, orients and involves new members in all aspects of the club.

FIX IT FAST! New Members Make Great Greeters – Have new members serve as greeters for club functions for the first several weeks of their membership. It's a great way for them to meet all club members.

Sponsors are very helpful during this nurturing process. Enlist them to help with initial introductions and orientations, as well as guiding their recruits through their first few years of membership. Have sponsors monitor their recruits periodically to make sure that these new members feel comfortable with their membership. If not, the sponsors can help the recruits seek solutions to their problems. Ask sponsors to report their findings to you so you can keep track of member satisfaction.



Current members should be made aware that involving new members fully in the club is a priority. Let them know that it is the responsibility of all members to make newcomers feel like an important part of the team.

Another good idea is to periodically solicit feedback from new members regarding their orientation into the club and ask them if they have any suggestions to improve the orientation/involvement process.

FIX IT FAST! *Make it Fun* – Have some fun while encouraging members to mix with their fellow members. Before a club meeting begins, select a member to be the “Secret Lion.” In a clique-free club everyone mingles freely and will eventually meet the Secret Lion. As the meeting nears a close, you ask the Secret Lion to identify those members who never made contact, and encourage the Tail Twister to humorously levy a fine. Done with a light touch, the Secret Lion method gets the “no-cliques” message across.

Getting Back to Basics: People become Lions for many reasons, but common to all is the desire to help those in need. This “We Serve” initiative is the reason Lions clubs exist. If politics are interfering with the efficient functioning of



your club and preventing you from meeting your club’s service goals, then you are not fulfilling the core objective of the association. An ineffective Lions club can be unattractive to potential members. It risks not being viewed as a vital part of the community.

Consider theming a club meeting around “reacquainting your club with its goals, objectives and mission.” Review your projects, look at how many people you’ve helped over the year and decide what can be done to help even more people in

the future. Write down your club’s goals and have them available for all to see. Craft a club mission statement that solidifies how your club feels about its goals. Not only will this strategy refocus your club, it will also function as an excellent team-building exercise.

FIX IT FAST! *Use Your Newsletter* – Share information about the changes you are implementing in your club’s newsletter and on your Web site. Explain the importance of building a team and retaining members. If your club has written a mission statement and/or redefined its goals, the newsletter and Web site are excellent vehicles for communicating this to your members.

Be a Strong Leader: Being a strong leader doesn't mean authoritarian and heavy-handed, but rather, fair, open-minded and decisive. These traits are important facets to being a successful club president. Your ability to lead the club, build a team and guide it through decisions is vital to the effective functioning of your club. If politics are making it tough for your club to make decisions, you should exercise your authority to navigate through the process.

FIX IT FAST! *Learning Leadership Skills* – If you feel you need more leadership training, there are many excellent reference materials to help you discover your personal leadership style and learn techniques for becoming a more effective leader. Contact your local library for sources, or you may also want to contact the Leadership Division for ideas as well as information about the Lions Leadership Institute program.

Implementing Changes: The key to successfully implementing changes in your club is communication. Answer all your members' potential questions – **WHAT** the changes are, **WHY** you are making them, **WHEN** they will be implemented and **HOW** they will affect them. Understanding the reasons behind changes will help obtain your members' support, which is critical to your success.

Be sure to let those members who are “slipping,” and not regularly attending club functions, know what changes you are making. Call these members personally, or enlist the help of a few members to phone these Lions and let them know that their attendance is missed, and what new changes are taking place. Chances are, if they aren't attending meetings, they won't actively read the Web site or newsletter to learn about the changes. Phoning them will let them know you care about the status of their membership.



A Final Note...

Retaining members is a critical, ongoing process. While advice offered in the Retention Clinics should have a positive impact on the functioning of your club and therefore, the successful retention of members, you should always keep your eyes open for potential stumbling blocks. Each year, the dynamics of a club change.

Sometimes these changes are subtle, with the effects not easily recognizable. Other changes will be obvious. Keep your observation skills honed and handle challenges as they occur. Be flexible and willing to make adjustments when needed. Offer to help the next leadership team make their meetings the best they can be. Share your success stories with other club presidents worldwide via the Club President Connection at www.lionsclubs.org.

Good luck as you continue to make changes to your club that will not only help retain members, but will also improve the functioning of your club. Over time, you will see that your attention to these matters will be well worth the effort. Keep up the good work!



For More Information

Please contact the Extension and Membership Division at:
telephone (630) 571-5466, ext. 355
fax (630) 571-1691
e-mail retention@lionsclubs.org

To network with fellow club presidents, log on to the *Club President Connection* at www.lionsclubs.org.

Club Dynamics Questionnaire

Please help us evaluate the quality of our club atmosphere by taking a few minutes to complete this survey. Your input is important to our club. Use the 1-5 rating values below. Please return survey to _____ by _____.

Always: 5 Often: 4 Sometimes: 3 Seldom: 2 Never: 1

Please use the space underneath each question to add comments. If necessary, use the back of this sheet for additional comments.

- 1) I feel like an important part of the club. _____
- 2) All members feel like an important part of the club. _____
- 3) There are well-established “groups”, or cliques, within the club. _____
- 4) These cliques have an effect on the functioning of the club. _____

Please describe: _____

- 5) New members are warmly welcomed into the club. _____
- 6) New members are made to feel like an important part of the club. _____
- 7) Politics affect the way that our club functions. _____

Please describe: _____

- 8) Politics prevent our club from reaching its goals. _____
- Please describe: _____

9) I became a Lion because _____

10) The way our club functions allows me to meet my goals for becoming a Lion. _____

11) I have been a Lion for _____.

12) I have continually performed the same role in a committee. _____

13) I repeatedly perform the same function at our club activities. _____

14) The members in our committees have essentially remained unchanged in the last several years. _____

15) Our club is focused on its service goals. _____

I believe these are our club's strengths:

These are the primary areas I think need improvement:

I would like to make the following suggestions:

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LIONS CLUBS INTERNATIONAL

300 W 22ND ST
OAK BROOK IL 60523-8842 USA
PHONE (630) 571-5466
FAX (630) 571-8890

www.lionsclubs.org