

Nourishing your Membership

I. Membership is a continuing challenge.

- We seem to have a revolving door with membership. Each year, we experience the recruitment of new members, but a loss of current and seasoned members, as well as some of the newer members.
- This issue may accelerate in the current economic environment.
 - Jobs are lost and more difficult to find, especially of the type most of our members hold.
 - Businesses are closing – some run by women (our members or potential members)
 - Current or “would be members” are more carefully scrutinizing how they spend their available dollars.
- We need to explore, therefore, what we can do, as an organization, to meet the challenges.

II. Characteristics of Zonta Members: They are:

- Leaders and managers in their fields
 - Used to taking charge
 - Used to giving direction and others following
 - They may be independent workers i.e. sole practice professionals, and
 - They may not be comfortable working as part of a team
- Diverse in areas such as age, profession and cultural background, resulting in
 - Differences in generational ideas and concepts,
 - Differences in professional preparation and skill sets, and
 - Differences in concepts, based on culture.
- Interested in service and advocacy to advance the status of women
- They are volunteers with different motivations for joining, that include the opportunity to:
 - Give something back
 - Make a difference/social change
 - Experience personal Growth
 - Seek a balance in life
 - Feel a sense of achievement, accomplishment and recognition
 - Develop friendships, support, a sense of bonding, and feeling of belonging and understanding
 - Have fun and enjoy participation

III. Recognizing the continuing challenges of membership, what can we do to maximize our members' satisfaction in order to stabilize and nourish membership?

- We are all **volunteers** and we need to maintain a club environment to satisfy volunteer motivation and maintain our commitment to membership. That includes:
 - Effective and efficient meetings: Members need to be comfortable that the time they devote to Zonta is productive, with definite outcomes – not sitting through cumbersome, lengthy meetings with no structure, no significant actions taken, and feeling that opinions are not encouraged, considered valuable or listened to. No one wants to feel that their choice of free time activity is time wasted.
 - Orientation: Be sure that we provide our new members with appropriate knowledge re: Zonta its structure and mission. This allows them to feel connected and gives them a sense of belonging to the organization. Periodic “renewal” for seasoned members may also help to keep them focused on mission.
 - Mentoring: Our new members, as well as seasoned members benefit from a mentoring process. Each of members brings her own personality, perspective, background and experiences to the relationship. Therefore, both members achieve a sense of accomplishment through this rewarding experience.

- The new member gains knowledge about the club and Zonta, as well as bonding with her mentor and developing a sense of belonging.
- The seasoned member, the mentor, is able to bond with the new member, gets to know more about her perspectives and background.
- Both have gained a friend.

The process of mentoring is usually one on one, seasoned member paired with a new member. The seasoned member volunteers to serve as a guide or coach for the new member. Activities usually occur outside the regular meeting times and can include:

- Phone calls and /or e-mails to assure comfort and, perhaps, car pool opportunities to club meetings and events to help them develop a comfort level in attending.
- Meeting for coffee or lunch to discuss and provide information.
- Helping them to understand club expectations and processes, as well as that of ZI
- Reinforcing the information provided at orientation and answering questions that the new member might have.

- Committees: It is important to involve members in committees, as soon as possible, preferably those that interest them. Taking part in committee discussions and decision-making helps them understand Zonta and feel a part of the activities.
- Projects :
 - Make every effort to structure service and advocacy projects to accomplish the mission of Zonta while satisfying the interests of members.
 - Communicate the outcome or progress with projects to assure that members draw a sense of accomplishment and recognition that their efforts have made some difference.
- Club responsibilities: encourage members, when ready, to take on additional club responsibilities, such as different committees, chairmanships and offices, thus encouraging personal growth within the club, a sense of belonging and recognition for the talents they have to offer.
- Communication: It is extremely important to communicate regularly with members related to Club, Area, District, and ZI issues, activities, and special events. Success in the area of communication will engender a sense of inclusion and belonging, as well as helping to encourage member participation and making decisions when club votes take place.
- Fellowship and fun: Over and above service, advocacy and fund raising, which should all be enjoyable, clubs should have strictly fun/fellowship events to permit everyone to get to know each other better and understand each others' backgrounds and ideas.

- Challenging economic times: Managing the financial commitments of members has been a growing issue, but, in the current economic times, this particular issue holds a special significance in maintaining and nourishing our clubs' membership. How do we begin to meet this challenge?

- Dues: It is a given that there are three parts to a member's dues commitment:
 - ZI per capita dues which the club must pay no later than June 1 each year, and is increasing by \$15.00 this coming year based on the delegate vote at convention.
 - District per capita dues, which the club must pay no later than June 1 each year, and
 - Club dues, which is collected each year, no later than April 1, in order to have the per capita dues paid to both District and ZI by the June 1 date.

Perhaps we as clubs need to look at what we can do to meet our per capita commitment to District and ZI, yet be a little more flexible at the club level. Can we, as individual clubs, have a dues payment plan that works? What are the pros and cons of such a plan? Some

clubs may already have a workable plan. Does it really work? Are there other viable options for flexibility, while assuring club survival?

Clubs may need to have that discussion to see what will work for them.

- Other membership expense issues:
 - Clubs should be looking at other expense commitments for members and determine what expenses are expected, optional (but encouraged), or totally optional. Members should be aware of those types of expenses before they commit to joining, in order to, hopefully, avoid non-renewal for expense reasons.
 - We as clubs probably need to reevaluate those expenses to determine if they can be modified to be more reasonable, while still making our service commitments as clubs. Sometimes we gain members then “nickel and dime” them “to death” once they become members.

When this happens, members begin to feel “put upon” and may stop participating or just leave.

We have a responsibility as clubs to try modify this financial commitment issue in order to effectively nourish our clubs.

- Other club challenges to appropriate club nourishment include:
 - “Playing” well together: We have now created an environment to have well nourished clubs. However, our strengths in membership characteristics may still create challenges for us to meet. Our members are:
 - Leaders and managers in their fields
 - Diverse in age, profession, and cultural background.

These membership characteristics may create instances when members’ difference in ideas and opinions clash.

We, as members, need to be mindful of the need to function as a team to provide for the work of Zonta (service and advocacy), and to respect and be sensitive to the value of the diversity of opinions in discussions based on our varied backgrounds. If we expect to nourish our membership, we need the diversity, available to us through our membership, to discuss issues and make good decisions. We cannot afford to be weakened by the disagreements of age and generation issues (seasoned vs. newer members) or issues based on professional or cultural backgrounds.

Periodically, when this sensitivity fails, the club leadership needs to take it on and negotiate a reasonable solution.

Such an issue cannot continue to “fester” or everyone will lose. Our members (volunteers) will no longer be satisfied with their experience and will stop participating and/or leave.

- Disruptive members: Periodically, there are members who chose to be disruptive during meetings or antagonizing toward other members. This situation will be very destructive to the club. It is another situation that cannot be permitted to continue as it will be divisive, undermining smooth club operation and progress toward our mission.

Suggestions for resolution:

- Try to determine the reason for the behavior – discuss it privately with the individual.
- Utilize the information gathered to attempt to resolve the member’s reason for being disruptive.

- If the disruptive activity continues after several attempts to resolve the issue, it may be necessary, for the good of the club membership to suggest to that the member may be happier in another organization.

Remember, the prime focus should be on the welfare and satisfaction of all the membership.

We are volunteers and should enjoy well nourished, functional clubs, while we work at advancing the status of women, globally and locally, through service and advocacy.

Breakout Group I

Affordable Dues Plan

Discuss the feasibility of utilizing a payment plan for club dues as a means to assist members in meeting the dues commitment.

The givens are:

- ZI per capita dues in its entirety must be paid by June 1 of each year
- District 11 per capita dues must be paid by June 1 each year

Please consider:

- The types of payment plans possible at the club level, i.e. monthly, etc.

- The pros and cons of managing such a plan and the possible financial impact on the club and its viability

- Based on the discussion held, indicate whether your discussion group would recommend a dues plan to assist in maintaining and/or growing membership in these difficult financial times.

Please have someone prepared to report the outcome of discussion.

Breakout Group II

Managing the Difficult or Disruptive Member

Scenario:

This group is the executive committee of a Zonta Club. It has been noticed that the club meetings have been more difficult to hold due to the continuous side discussions and interruptions by one of the members. This member has been openly critical of the President who is conducting the meetings. Club members have been upset by this behavior and, as a result have not been participating in discussions during the meeting. In fact some members have decided not to attend meetings, rather than put up with the disruption and negativity.

The disruptive member is a long term member who has chaired committees, and served in several offices, including President. She has also served at the District level. In the past, she has been a very productive, supportive member, and still regularly participates in activities.

Functioning as the executive committee, please consider what action, if any needs to be taken to resolve this issue.

- Is it an issue worth taking on? If not, why not

- If so, how would you go about it? What steps would you take?

- What would you consider a successful outcome? And Why?

Please have someone prepared to report the outcome of discussion