

PRIMA



Circle of Growth

Optimist International

Membership and Retention

Club Growth

This is a plan to assist your club to grow in all areas of it's activities. These include participation, orientation, maintaining members, club meeting attendance, and the recruitment of new members.

The ideas you see here are not new. In one way or another you have been exposed to these concepts, perhaps in bits and pieces. In 1990-1991 International President Tate Thigpen had an idea for a membership program. While it was originally meant to be a membership program, PRIMA touches all areas of what an Optimist Club should be doing for and with it's volunteer members.

The PRIMA program was reviewed and rewritten for the Arizona District to use during District and Club officer training in July of 1997. It still applies today. It should be used as an addition to the "Membership" booklet from Optimist International as they go hand in hand.

These are the basic steps each club must take to stay active, to grow, and to stay alive. Remember that "*when growth stops, decay begins.*"

PRIMA

The PRIMA program emphasizes many important aspects of building, or rebuilding a strong and an effective Optimist club. Club health and growth is a major challenge, one that demands a thoughtful and logical approach. While the recruitment of new members is one facet of this approach, if the other four facets are ignored or not given proper attention, then your club will not gain strength from the new members that you are able to bring in. This is a five-step approach in which *each step needs to be given equal attention.*

P	R	I	M	A
A	E	N	A	T
R	C	D	I	T
T	R	U	N	E
I	U	C	T	N
C	I	T	E	D
I	T	I	N	A
P	M	O	A	N
A	E	N	N	C
T	N		C	E
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O				
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Each of these five elements helps to form a circle of volunteer activity which when intact is strong enough to withstand time and challenges. Remove just one of these five pieces though, and the circle will collapse, unable to support even itself.

Participation

The first link in a proper growth plan is the development of total member participation. No club can expect to stay healthy or to be attractive to prospective members unless the current members are both involved in the activities of the club and are committed to the goals of the club. Getting members to participate in activities will give them a sense of worth, and will develop a commitment from them. This does not mean that each member must be involved in every project or activity, the goal is to have each member be involved in at least one of your clubs activities during the year. Once a member takes part in one activity, he or she will be more likely to show up for another one.

To help get your members get involved, you must do three very basic things.

1. At the beginning of your year, develop with your board a calendar of activities that the club plans to complete during the year. Be as comprehensive as you can, but also understand that opportunities will come up during the year to add to the calendar. Make sure that each club member receives a copy of your calendar, a member mailing will get it out to everyone.
2. Ask each member to identify the activities they would like to become involved in. To insure that each member is involved in at least one project, you may have to "recruit" some of your members for a project. Don't be shy, many times members are just waiting to be asked to do something. It may take some phone calls, but insure that everyone has an activity to become involved with.
3. This is critical !! Make sure that you recognize members for their contribution to club activities. People like to see their name in the club bulletin ... send thank you notes ... consider awards where it would be appropriate. The three most important words you will use during your year are: "Please" and "Thank You". Use them often.

Recruitment

The second link in the circle of growth is the recruitment of new members to your club. You have heard so much about going out and getting new members ... year after year ... that you may have lost sight of the reason that you need to recruit. History across your district and across Optimist International shows that a club can, on the average, expect an unavoidable loss from the current membership of approximately 15%. These losses come as members jobs change, they move, their family situation changes, or they die. Add to this another 5% or so who just plain give up, and you are looking at a need to recruit 20% of your membership number just to stay even from year to year.

Recruiting new members is no mystery, it is simple ... as they say: "Just ask someone". But it really is more involved than that. First and foremost, you must believe that your club is worth while; that it is something that you believe in; and that the service you provide is vital to the youth in your service area. Only then will you be able to "sell" your club to someone else. I suspect that if you are still a member, you do believe in it, see it as worth while and see it as filling a need. So what do you do? Here are some thoughts for individual members and for clubs on recruiting new members.

Ideas for clubs

Plan for a year round recruitment of new members.

Consider the member a month approach.

Use District and International awards for recruitment.

Set monthly goals, or at least quarterly goals to assist in establishing this as a year round process.

Ideas for members

New members may come from some unlikely places.

New members do not have to be "like" existing members.

Talk to a prospect before you bring them to a meeting. Tell them about what the club does.

Do NOT mention joining before or at the meeting your prospect is going to visit.

Ideas for Clubs

List guests in your club bulletin each week.

Use promotional gimmicks to focus attention on recruitment for short periods of time.

Make sure that you individually have each guest, each week introduced.

NEVER NEVER offer membership to a guest, a speaker, or anyone at a club meeting !!! This should be absolute !!

Establish your club as a place to do business networking! Encourage lead exchanges and advertising! Include a member's business name on his or her meeting badge.

In recruiting new members the club needs to establish up front who will pay for the meal of the guest. If possible, the club should absorb this cost so that recruitment does not become a financial burden to your members. Proper dues structure will provide for this. A guest should never be asked to pay for his or her own meal.

You see a **NEVER ... NEVER** above in the ideas for clubs. Your club is a unique blend of personalities and talents. It is a special thing. Do not give the impression that you will accept just anybody by ignoring this suggestion. Many clubs do it without thinking. It cheapens the product of service that you are trying to sell.

Inviting prospects to an activity you may have planned is an excellent way to let them see and feel what your club is all about. Don't miss this opportunity.

Ideas for Members

Follow up after the prospects first visit. Ask what he / she thought of the group.

Invite the person back for a second visit.

A day or so after the second visit, then ask them to join your club.

Have a membership application partially filled out for them to complete.

Bring the "new member" and the application to a third meeting to formally turn the application in.

Induction

The third link in the circle of growth is proper induction of new members. That must be followed by an orientation in to your club, and the Optimist organization in general. All too often clubs do not have a formal induction ceremony for new members, or if they do, it is hasty and not well thought out. HEY !! This is the introduction of a new person to your family. It should be made as meaningful as possible.

How would you feel if you thought you were buying a new car, only to see upon delivery a junker? This is the feeling you will give a new member if you do not provide a first class induction. The new member's first experience will be one of disappointment and a lack of worth.

An induction must be planned for each new member, which is formal and tells the member that they are important. It is easy to do following some simple guidelines.

👉 Begin with scheduling the induction. It should be within one or two weeks of the time that the member has been accepted for membership by your club. To wait longer will lessen the effect.

👉 Use the material that you will have in a new member kit from Optimist International. This will include a Membership certificate and an Optimist pin. It also contains some background material for the new member to review.

😊 Here is a good idea. Place a copy of your club By-Laws and club Policies into the new member kit. It is information that every member needs.

👉 Complete the membership certificate by using a computer or typewriter. *The only thing hand written on this certificate should be the signature.* Doing it this way will require some effort, but your club, and this new member are well worth the effort.

👉 Invest about a buck in this new member. Go to the local store and get a simple frame. When you present a new member with his or her membership certificate *have it in a frame*. This is an investment in your clubs future.

👉 Use the "Five Minute Induction" that you have received as your guide to an induction ceremony. This is the one time that you should demand that the normal side conversations at a meeting stop. Give the clubs full attention to the new member.

👉 After the induction, give the new member a couple of minutes to introduce himself / herself to the club. This is a time when they should be able to introduce the club to their business and brag about their family.

👉 At the end of the meeting, ask the new member to stand by the exit so that attending members can introduce themselves as they leave.

Orientation

Once you have properly inducted a new member into your club, the next step is to provide an orientation into your club, and about the Optimist organization. Far to many members learn about the club, other clubs, the district, and the International by simply watching and listening over a period of time. There are things you can do to help this orientation process along, and to make it a normal part of your clubs operation. Here are some ideas.

➤ Have the new member serve as the greeter for the two meetings following induction. This will help them to get to know the members.

➤ Make sure that the new member's name gets on the mailing list for your club bulletin. Also send in the club roster adjustment in a timely manner to Optimist International so that the Optimist magazine starts to come to this person, and his / her name is included in the label list districts use to mail their District bulletins (this is ordered from O.I.).

➤ Immediately get the new member involved on a club committee or with an activity that is coming up. Put them to work, that's why they joined.

➤ **At least once a quarter, consider conducting a New Member Orientation. This should be in the evening or on a weekend not at a regular club meeting. You can consider getting together with other clubs in your area and combine the general orientation so that it is easier, and has more meaning.**

➤ **The Optimist International program "Catch a Rising Star" is very well suited for this orientation. It should be conducted by club or district leaders who are knowledgeable about the material.**

➤ **While such a program can be used for general orientation, and is very worth while, only your club can provide a club history and club specific orientation. Consider putting together a written history with information about some of your on going projects.**

➤ ***Here's a new idea!* Check out the Optimist Mentoring Program available at optimist.org This is an idea that was developed in the Gresham Optimist Club in Oregon and has worked for that club. You can find all of the information and the links for the program forms. It is a structured, one on one, mentoring program that takes eight weeks.**

In the end, the time you invest in your new members at the beginning will come back to the club ten fold. The new member who you induct and give an orientation to just may be a future leader, or perhaps even an International President.

Maintenance

The fourth link in the circle of growth is the maintenance of your current members. Good Optimists are valuable assets for an Optimist club. No reasonable organization wastes it's valuable assets nor does a reasonable person not maintain the assets that he or she has. Our homes require maintenance as do most of the other things in our daily lives that we seem to take for granted. Club members require maintenance as well.

Members who fall behind in their dues are in danger of dropping from the club. Your Secretary/Treasurer must keep all members up to date with current dues billings so that this does not become a problem. There will be circumstances when a member has gotten behind where the club can assist the member in becoming current by lessening the debt to that of the club's actual cost per member. Don't be afraid to work with members in this area. Generally they will appreciate the thought and will respond positively.

Other thoughts on maintaining your members are listed below. This is by no means a complete list, and your ideas can fit in here as well. Remember that what you want to do is to make the members feel that each one of them is important and is wanted.

CLUB BULLETIN: This is the best way to keep your members informed about what the club is doing. It costs about 50 cents a week to print and mail a bulletin to each club member. Through the bulletin, you can keep all members advised of up coming activities, speakers for up coming meetings and items of interest that happen at meetings. It is an investment in maintaining your assets.

RECOGNITION: People like to be thanked for what they do. You may want to consider an Optimist of the Month award. This can be simple such as a plaque copy of the Creed, a coffee mug, a club shirt, something that will add value to a member's participation. Besides it is a way to add some fun to the day to day grind.

MISSING IN ACTION: We know that not all members can make 100% of our club meetings, life is just too busy. But ... when a member is missing for four or more meetings in a row it is time to check up on them. A phone call can do wonders in letting a member know that they are missed. Send a card. Drop by the members business for a visit. What ever you do, don't let the member be absent for long without making a contact. Lack of contact will tell them that they are not an important asset and you know that this is not true.

YEAR-END AWARDS: Your club's Installation function can be used to recognize members for their participation during the year. In this setting it is a formal yet family way to say "Thanks". Any funds spent on this type of recognition is an investment in the clubs future, and the future of the youth you serve.

In the end, maintenance of your membership goes directly back to those important words for your year. "Please and "Thank you". If a member feels that they are needed, and are important to the club they will be the asset you need.

Attendance

The final link in the circle of growth is attendance of members at club meetings. You should realize that 100% attendance is not a reasonable goal. There are just too many things going on in the lives of your members to expect this. You can however set a reasonable goal of 60% attendance and expect to be able to meet this. Each of us has to have a reason to take time out of our day to attend our Optimist club meeting. We do it because we enjoy the company of other members, it gets us away from business or family concerns, it is fun, and it is educational. It provides an opportunity to network. Absent any reason to attend a meeting, we won't.

The singular key to increasing or maintaining a good attendance is to make the meetings a pleasant experience, one that is fun. Ideas for doing this *could* include some of the following ideas.

✳ Establish a "Fellowship" committee to greet members, pass out name badges, and encourage interaction between members before and after the meeting. This is simple, but it goes a long way in making people feel welcome.

✳ Schedule guest speakers at each meeting. There is a lot going on in any community and people who are anxious to tell about it. And ... there really are speakers who will come to a meeting of a small club. Speakers should be folks with information and not always someone looking for a donation.

✳ Begin and end your meetings on schedule.

✳ Always have your Club banner on display - along with a Purposes banner and Creed banner, perhaps an Awards banners and an American flag.

✳ Always, regardless of the number of members present, begin and end your meetings with the Pledge, a prayer, and the Creed. Absent this, you are just a group of people in a room.

✳ Consider running an attendance contest, or combining it with a membership contest

✳ Look for a few reasons to promote a 100% attendance day such as:

The club's charter birthday
The day a Vice-President will be running the meeting
The first or last day of an administration
When you know another club will be with you for a visitation
See the list in the Membership Handbook

✳ Have a special meal every once in a while

✳ Establish a business lead board. Encourage the exchange of work related items at the beginning of your meeting. Promote advertising of member's businesses. This is different from what you are use to, but you are looking for fresh ideas here. *To attract the young - "Me" generation - prospects to your club, this area of networking is critical!! You need to explore this carefully!*

✳ Just plain use your imagination

The secret is to give your members a reason to want to come to a club meeting. Once they start attending regularly, they will get involved in activities and your club will gain from the increase.

PRIMA Circle of Growth

The five critical links in a comprehensive growth plan thus include: Participation; Recruitment; Induction and orientation; Maintenance; and Attendance. These five links can be summarized in the first letter of each link: PRIMA. If you follow the logic of this approach, it is easy to see that all five links are closely interrelated. One leads to or supports another. The links thus create a continuing circle; the PRIMA Circle. If any link is neglected, the entire program will collapse much as a circle will collapse if any part of it is suddenly removed. If all the links are attended to, the PRIMA approach will prove to be a strong and effective growth plan much as an intact circle is the strongest geometric structure known to man.

