

Life Cycle of a Club with Key Strategies for Gaining and Retaining Members

Most Toastmasters clubs experience a life cycle. The club's level of educational productivity generally follows a bell-shaped curve.

The first phase in a club's life is just after it is organized. The club's educational program, prepared speeches, evaluations, table topics, etc., is expanding and improving. The members are motivated, and their enthusiasm generally makes up for their lack of experience. As the educational program improves, productivity increases, and the club moves toward the peak of the curve.

As the club matures into the second phase, the educational program reaches a high level of productivity and successfully meets its member's needs. The original members of the club are now relatively experienced Toastmasters. New members join the club, and quickly become assimilated into the club's culture. The length of time spent at the top of the curve varies from club to club.

At the beginning of the third phase, members become content with the status quo and resist change and new influences. Guests are greeted, but the club's internal cliques are difficult to break into. New members have a hard time fitting in, and don't stay too long. Productivity declines and the club slips from the top of the curve and begins a downward slide. Attendance drops, the educational program falls apart and guests do not join the club. Members may be more concerned with socializing than learning.

How do you gain and retain members if you are at the third phase or beyond? I have developed a list for you. It not only contains suggestions on how to gain and retain members, but contains KEY reasons for employing one, a combination, or all suggestions into your club's game plan.

Take a hard look at this list, even if you are in the first phase of your club's life cycle. The more options you develop for your club, the more chances that you will move between the first and second phases in a club's life cycle and never experience the downward slide that destroys Clubs.

Key Strategies for Gaining and Retaining Members

- Attitude: Everyone's responsibility: Members will gain more benefits from an active, healthy club.
 - **Key:** Membership understanding and buy-in
- Make it personal: give a short 1–2-minute verbal testimony to a prospective member about how Toastmasters has changed your life:
 - **Key:** Keep it short, to the point, and personal.
- Fliers: See the Toastmasters website for a wide selection in Brand Central.
 - **Key:** Post them
- Club Newsletters-use them to circulate to all club members, guests, and prospective members. Newsletters can be in many forms: print, electronic, one page or multiple... simpler is better. Highlights of current meetings, meeting location, dates, and time, contact info...possibly a map for the ones you deliver outside the club.
 - **Key:** Hit the Highlights!!! Showcase your member's successes, extol the benefits of membership in Toastmasters.
- Club website linked with District and International websites.
 - **Key:** Relevancy, current and accurate information.
- Know in advance how to treat visitors. Be prepared. Have new member kits handy. Assign a mentor if they join right away. Have a copy of the schedule so that the new member can

immediately be part of the program. Send thank-you cards. Recognize guests; ask for their comments and feedback.

- **Key:** Have a plan and be consistent!
- “Toastmasters Meets Here” signs are available in the TI catalog or make your own using Brand Central Guidelines.
 - **Key:** Post them
- Local access TV: Community happenings.
 - **Key:** FREE
- Open Houses.
 - **Key:** Free! Proven results! Value to current membership too!
- Volunteer to evaluate or coach city hall meetings that are televised locally.
 - **Key:** Speakers usually could use help to improve. A good showcase for your club.
- Volunteer to judge local school and community debates or speech programs.
 - **Key:** Provides community exposure to Toastmasters.
- Quality meeting location: is it big enough for expansion, good parking, easy access, and noise level? Is there storage for equipment, beverage or food service, restroom facilities, wheelchair access, multi-media capabilities.
 - **Key:** Quality location = pride in club, more inviting to prospective members.
- Perform a club health checkup: Moments of Truth, Club Supplies, Club “look” (TM meets Here signs, banner, name badges, agendas, guest book, etc.) Do you know how you look to non-Toastmasters?
 - **Key:** Take a good long look at your image.
- Club dues structure: Purchase new member kits, awards, ribbons, stationary, other promo items.
 - **Key:** Progressive and Professionalism attracts.
- Membership: Create fun and innovative contests designed with fun and good sportsmanship in mind.
 - **Key:** Just Do It!
- Invite guests for special occasions: speech contests, club fund-raisers, Speaker’s Showcase meetings, Combined meetings with clubs in another Area or Division.
 - **Key:** People want to be asked - ASK THEM.
- Conduct dynamic meetings: The meeting is a club’s best sales tool...plan great meetings...they don’t just happen...have an agenda for every meeting.
 - **Key:** If you do nothing else, DO THIS!
- Host a booth at local events: farmer’s markets, art fairs, summer concerts, county and state fairs, local “Bites” and street fairs.
 - **Key:** Plan! Lots of competition for same space! (Why? They are productive!)
- Host a local business Open House to show benefits of TM in the workplace.
 - **Key:** Membership is cost effective, high return on investment.
 - Convenience: Typically meets for 1 hour once a week = small time commitment.
 - Quality: over 300,000 members in 149 countries, in 15,800+ clubs, founded in 1924, with educational materials and products continually upgraded.