

July 2003

# MEMBERSHIP:

## Avoiding Common Recruiting Mistakes

**Y**our club appointed a membership chair. You have set a goal (e.g. increase regular membership by five new members) and made a plan for how to meet that goal. The members seem excited about the plan and committed to seeing the club grow. But you find at the end of the club year that you are no further along than the year before. What happened? Let's take a look at 10 key factors that may be keeping you from successfully meeting your goals.

**WHO** Who are you trying to recruit? Look at your current membership and honestly assess the skills and interests of the group. Is your club actively involved in hands-on service projects or do you spend more time fundraising? Each has a different appeal for prospective members. What kind of expertise and abilities do you need to add to the membership to enhance your service goals? Be daring and look beyond the circle of current members' friends and colleagues. See if you can't involve women in your community who are tops in their field and can offer just the skill you need to accomplish a club project. You are representing an admirable organization in Soroptimist and it is always flattering to be asked to share one's talent. Remember that busy women have learned how to manage multiple demands on their time, so don't be afraid to ask.

Don't forget to take a look a good look at the age group of your membership. Ideally you'll find women of all ages, but if you are skewed to the retired or retiring side, you are unlikely to recruit a group of much younger women right away. Try asking women five years

younger than the average age first. Then work your way down and attempt to balance the ages as a long-term goal, not one that you can resolve within a year.

Diversify the occupations represented in the club as well. This introduces entire new networks of potential members. Eligibility for Soroptimist members now includes recruiting those embarking on their career as well as those who have already retired or may be unemployed. Such members may add the spark you need to reinvigorate the club and get out of your routine.

**WHAT** What kind of impression do you want to make with your membership event? Don't tie your recruiting event to a regular business meeting. Be creative. Make it special! It should be appealing, enticing and so much fun that prospective members know they just have to be part of this group. Clubs have had imaginary "cruises," champagne and chocolates, "chick flick" movie nights, pool parties and cocktail receptions. You want to get in five to 10 minutes about what Soroptimist is really all about, and send them home with some literature to read, but don't be afraid to have fun!

**WHERE** Where should you hold your recruitment event? Where you hold your event sends a message, whether you intend it to or not. Economic expectations may be assumed if your event is held at a pancake house or a fancy restaurant. An event held in a place of

worship may discourage women of a different faith from participating. Think carefully about subtle messages. Clubs are most successful when they choose well-known, neutral and prestigious locations such as private dining rooms in good restaurants, historic houses, museums, or the board rooms of large corporations. Inviting people to places that they may not normally go to on their own is a real plus and adds a certain cachet to your invitation. This holds true for where you hold your regular club meetings too.

**WHEN** When should you hold your recruitment event? Consider the same time of day and day of the week as your club meetings. Again, you need to give some thought to who you are trying to recruit because their availability for mornings, lunch-time or evenings may differ depending on their occupation, child care arrangements, commute or other factors.

If you find that prospective members can't come at a certain time of day, consider varying your meeting time to accommodate them, or even changing it altogether. The same thing goes for frequency of club meetings. Few clubs meet weekly any more. Conversely, some that meet weekly wouldn't dream of changing this schedule. Do take a look at any rules that you may have about attendance and make sure they are still realistic in today's world. Most clubs have

**SI/Burlington, Washington, recruited 12 new members by holding a special champagne and chocolate event.**



dropped attendance requirements in favor of more flexible levels of participation depending on career and family demands. (Read the cover story about working moms beginning on page 12.) What's key is that each club may determine for themselves what works best. The club is in charge of time, frequency and place. Remember that SIA requires only that clubs meet at least once per month, except for regularly scheduled vacation periods for the club. Don't be a "Soropti-saurus" and say "But we have always met every Wednesday at noon." If this meeting time doesn't work any longer, change it!

**WHY** Why do you want more members? If you really want the club to grow and be able to have more impact with your projects—act like it! Don't just recruit for the minimum numbers (15 regular members) required by Soroptimist. Prospective members can feel your desperation when they are told they have to join by a certain date or the club will lose its charter. Remember that success breeds success, and a healthy, thriving club attracts members with less effort.

**HOW** How do you do all this? Use the resources available to you from SIA. Use the *Recruitment & Retention Guide*, which contains sample letters of invitation, a club orientation and other useful information. Also available are attractive recruitment brochures, which can be customized with club specific information.

**FOLLOW-UP** Did you get prospective people to your event but then no one followed up with a phone call or subsequent invitation for the woman to participate in a club project? This is an important step in the recruitment process.

**CLOSE THE DEAL** Did you actually extend an invitation to the prospective members to join the club? You may think that the invitation to join is assumed. Make sure you

actually articulated the question, "Would you like to join our club?" Be prepared with responses for the multiple answers that you may get to that question.

**ORIENTATION** Have you shared with prospective members the club's expectations of membership? Be clear about time, money and attendance requirements. Inform them of the Soroptimist mission and the international nature of our organization. Share the SIA Strategic Plan and encourage them to visit <[www.soroptimist.org](http://www.soroptimist.org)>. Don't bore them with too much detailed information about Soroptimist's history and structure. They are more interested, especially in the beginning, about how the club works and what opportunities for participation are available.

**REPORT** Did you remit the required dues and 5008 form to headquarters and the region? This needs to be done promptly so that the new member receives the SIA magazine and access to the members-only section of the website. We don't look very professional as an organization when we send greetings and information to a "new" member that has actually been a member for many months!

By taking all these factors into consideration, your club will have avoided the common pitfalls of member recruitment. Clubs can report a successful recruitment event for others to emulate by entering the event in the membership recruitment category of the Soroptimists Celebrating Success! awards program. Good luck! ☺

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**For more information on membership, visit the Club/Member Resources folder in the members-only website: <[www.soroptimist.org](http://www.soroptimist.org)>.**

## **MEMBER RECRUITMENT**

### **First Place**

#### **SI/Jackson, Wyoming, USA**

In an effort to attract younger members, SI/Jackson, Wyoming, held a casual recruitment event at a local resort and focused on recruiting women between the ages of 25 and 35. The club provided prospective members with guest packets, which included Make a Connection and Soroptimist International brochures. Stations were placed around the room with information about various aspects of Soroptimist and its programs. After the event, members then followed up with attendees, and as a result, 90 percent of those who attended joined SI/Jackson in the next two months. The club has increased its membership by 40 people and more than doubled its size.

### **Second Place**

#### **SI/Pasco-Kennewick, Washington, USA**

SI/Pasco-Kennewick, Washington, held "Take Me Out to Soroptimist," a baseball-themed recruitment barbecue. Members spoke to attendees about the club's local service projects and fundraising efforts. As a result of the event, six women joined the club. A month after the event, SI/Pasco-Kennewick held a welcome orientation for its new members. At the orientation, new members learned more about the club and connected with other club members. The club looks forward to holding a similar recruitment event next year.

### **Third Place**

#### **SI/Burlington, Washington, USA**

In response to dwindling membership, SI/Burlington, Washington, held a champagne and chocolates recruitment event. The club invited 30 perspective members to enjoy an evening of champagne, chocolates and informational presentations on Soroptimist programs and activities. As a result of the event, 12 new members joined the club.

For a complete list of 2003 winners, visit the Soroptimists Celebrating Success! folder (under "Other Programs") in the members-only website: <[www.soroptimist.org](http://www.soroptimist.org)>.