

A new approach to Rotary



Katie Ischkin, president and founder of the Rotary Club of South Metro Minneapolis Evenings, Minnesota, USA, talks about attracting younger members to Rotary. *Rotary Images* [Rotary International](#) on Facebook

Katie Ischkin, president and founder of the Rotary Club of South Metro Minneapolis Evenings, Minnesota, USA, believes in a new approach to Rotary.

Her Rotary club, chartered in June, has already grown to 25 members, including 12 new Rotarians who were recruited in a three-month period. The club has signed up for its first Matching Grant and international service project and has participated in more than 10 community service or hands-on volunteer efforts.

Ischkin shared her ideas on how to attract young professionals to Rotary during the International Assembly, an annual training event in San Diego, California. As a "proud, young, female Rotarian," she is among only 2 percent of club members worldwide under the age of 30, and only 11 percent under 40.

"We need to focus on generating interest in young people for the future success of Rotary," she said. "We are faced today with the need to grow not just for the sake of numbers but to create strong, young, global leaders who are going to help continue the success of the Rotary organization."

Ischkin advocates a new outlook on membership and a different approach to club structure. As a change management consultant, she said she understands people's fear of change. But she stressed that her approach doesn't mean altering the core pieces of the organization or losing what Rotarians hold dear.

"What does change are what I call surface-level elements," she said. "The pieces that individual clubs have the power to shift and redesign, such as meeting times and locations, program structures, club member involvement, and committee formats."

Manage expectations

Ischkin's club meets in the evening and lowers costs by not having meals. And it doesn't hold a traditional meeting every week: The third meeting of the month is a happy hour/networking event at different locations in the city, and the fourth meeting is a hands-on volunteering opportunity.

Ischkin added that it's important to understand the mindset of the new generation and manage expectations accordingly. Younger people are "always on the go and truly connected," she explained, whether it's through social networking, text messaging, or other means. They face a lot of pressure to be involved in multiple endeavors and to balance work and personal life. As a result, they may be "on call" with their careers, but they are no less dedicated to service.

"When you're trying to recruit younger members or even sponsor and start a New Generations Rotary club, take time with your club and committee to outline what your expectations are and whether they will align with the younger generation you are trying to attract and work with," she said. "Not every Rotary club can quickly shift gears to attract younger members; it takes time and baby steps."

But for many clubs, she said, "all it takes is opening up your minds and starting to think differently about the future of your club's membership."