



Spring 2018 – Online Supplement

The Exceptional Member Experience

By Nicole Simmons, Membership & Leadership Development Manager

How do you define an exceptional membership experience? Is it feeling welcomed in your club? Having your ideas heard? Working on fulfilling programs? Attending productive meetings? Forming meaningful friendships? A combination of these and more? Probably!

Who do you think is responsible for creating these extraordinary feelings and events? We all are! Working together at all levels of Soroptimist—members, club leaders, regions, and headquarters staff—we can enhance each other’s member experience so our clubs remain healthy, members are happy (and keep coming back for more), and prospects are excited about joining us.

Though we’ve improved our membership performance (last year our membership decline slowed from a 3 percent to a 1 percent loss rate) we know that the member experience is a something that constantly needs attention. To gain a better understanding about how to improve the member experience, we needed to look in the mirror. We surveyed former members for insights about what went wrong and why they decided not to renew.

The top reasons former members left Soroptimist fell into the following categories:

1. Club personality reasons (personality conflicts, did not feel welcome/included)
2. Club functioning (club was locked in tradition and unwilling to change, never received adequate orientation about expectations, pressure to accept a leadership role)
3. Unfulfilling club activities (asked to give too much of their time for what they received in return, unfulfilling or unrewarding club projects).

Now that we know where we can improve, we can take steps to do so. The good news about our findings is that we already have resources available to help address them—making it quicker and easier to take immediate action to make improvements.

Club Personality Reasons

Examples of Survey Comments:

“The personal conflicts were about members taking too much ownership of the club, the club became about them not the mission statement or what was best for all.” “There was an undercurrent of hostility toward new members from old guard leaders’ egos.”

Resources:

[Club Assessment Tools](#)—Conduct a health check-up of your club to help evaluate the membership experience. Use these tools to identify strengths, weaknesses, and start establishing priorities today.

[Handling Conflict](#)—Conflicts happen—at home, at work, and even in our very own Soroptimist clubs. See how you can respond in a positive manner and strive to reach a solution within your club.

[Team Building](#)—Enhance the Soroptimist spirit in your club by reviewing these tips on how clubs and members can use a team approach to reach our goals.

[Welcoming New Members](#)—Tips for creating a hospitable environment and engaging new members in your club.

Club Functioning

Examples of Survey Comments:

“Members were set up to take (leadership) positions that they didn’t want.” “Long time members need to (be) open to change and welcome new members and new ideas.” “New members need to be mentored!”

Resources:

[Developing Your Leadership Skills](#)—A dedicated webpage resources for leadership development categorized by general leadership topics, conflict resolution, meetings, and creating a healthy club atmosphere.

[Being Open To Change](#)—If we take a look at ourselves, we may find there are habits holding us back and it’s time to try something different. Simply changing or modifying a custom or routine could drastically improve your club’s atmosphere.

[Retaining and Engaging Younger Members](#)—Takeaways from a focus group conversation and panel discussion with several Soroptimists under the age of 40 who discussed their experiences as younger members.

[Orientations](#)—Don't skip this critical step to inspire new members to become active, long-term members! Learn more about orientations and hear what new members had to say about them.

Unfulfilling Club Activities

Example of Survey Comments:

"I felt the leaders were more interested in getting recognition at the region level than serving the needs of the women and girls in the community." "Way too many structured meetings that did not accomplish the goal. Waste of time and waste of money."

Resources:

[Our Impact](#) and our [Annual Report](#)—Two documents that demonstrate how we are making a difference. The impact infographic and report shows the power of our brand-unifying Dream Programs and highlights the local work of our clubs from around the world.

[Being Flexible](#)—Consider how your club can be more accommodating of members' time. Think about offering flexible ways to be involved in your club, which may be the key to keeping members who are on the fence about renewing their membership.

[The Value of Soroptimist Membership](#)—Values are what's important to us. Members' top five values related to why they join and stay are revealed in this document.

These are just a sample of the resources available on our website to help create an exceptional environment for members. Visit the membership section of www.soroptimist.org and connect with us on [social media](#) to explore other materials and engage with other members around the globe.

In reading these comments above, we've been given insights from former members. They have provided us an opportunity to reevaluate what we are doing in our clubs and see if any of these areas require closer attention. Members will decide to continue their membership only if they feel their Soroptimist experience is meeting their expectations for helping to improve the lives of women and girls, and they are receiving value for their time and money.

With club leaders and members on the front line of the membership experience, consider making these three main areas listed above a priority by using our resources in your club. More importantly, we encourage you to take the initiative to strategize and implement your own creative means to improve these areas!

Lastly, while former members used the survey as a chance to share why they left us, we also heard some wonderful comments that speak to the member experience as well:

“I believe in the mission of this organization and the wonderful people I was lucky enough to meet.”

“I thoroughly enjoyed being a Soroptimist and value my years of serving.”

“Even though my health is very bad and I cannot attend meetings, they have found a way for me to be involved, so I am rejoining.”

“Loved the time I was a member and being able to give back by helping co-chair our major fundraiser. Met many new people and some have become forever friends.”

Because it's easier to retain a member than to recruit a new one, statements like these should inspire us all to focus on the member experience to improve retention and have productive clubs with happy members!