



Ramsay's rules for cooking up a vibrant club experience

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I'VE always enjoyed watching *Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares*. That's the show where celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay visits a struggling restaurant and acts as a troubleshooter to help improve the restaurant in just a week.

Each episode showcases a different restaurant with its own set of challenges, including: an "Italian restaurant" that doesn't offer any Italian meals; a fine-dining menu that has no appeal to local customers; a head chef that lacks vision; and overworked staff no longer able to deliver the goods.

The owners and employees are heavily invested – emotionally and financially. They want to see their restaurant do well. Most realise changes are needed, even though it might be difficult to pinpoint or accept.

Each episode sees Ramsay dishing out his brand of "tough love", a lot of soul-searching from the restaurant,

and changes being implemented. Ramsay then revisits the restaurant a few months later to see how the business has fared. Sometimes the restaurants have prospered, while others find it hard to adapt.

I'm in no way suggesting that our Rotary clubs are "nightmare kitchens", but there are some similarities in the narrative. More importantly, the show has some great takeaways for being a vibrant club.

Look objectively

In *Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares*, each restaurant ends up learning what they do well and how they can improve.

Taking an objective look at your club – from the perspective of current members, prospective members and your community – is crucial to keeping your current members engaged, while making it attractive to prospective members.

Find out what your members like and don't like about your club. What is it that makes them stay? Why do members leave? What does your club look like to a non-member?

Gathering member and non-member feedback on a regular basis is vital to ensuring your club remains fresh and relevant.

There are plenty of ways to do this: take the Rotary Club Health Check, ask members to complete online or paper surveys, hold informal discussion groups, or ask a trusted person outside the club to facilitate a club assessment for candid feedback.

Be innovative and flexible

Ramsay encourages the restaurants to try things differently. Based on your research, think about what you can do to ensure you are providing a valuable membership experience.

Since the 2016 Council on Legislation, clubs have the ability to be flexible and creative in terms of meetings, attendance and membership types. Recent RI research shows that in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific



Islands, members need to feel that they're contributing and making a difference, and that meetings and programs meet their interests.

Consider changing things up: perhaps meet at a member's house instead of your regular venue every now and again; offer a corporate membership to a local business; or relax your attendance rules. Check out rotary.org/flexibility for ideas.

Have a plan and stick to it

Ramsay helps plot out a course of action and, when he returns, he finds the restaurants that haven't stuck to the plan are the ones that continue to struggle.

After taking an objective look at where your club is, you need to create a vision for your club. What do you want it to be like in the immediate future and in three to five years' time? What achievable and measurable steps can you take to address the toughest challenges and capitalise on the biggest opportunities?

Develop your club's strategic plan and build a membership plan that aligns with it. Check in regularly on your goals. Use the *Strengthening Your Membership* booklet to help.

Team effort

Just like a successful restaurant, a vibrant club is a team effort.

Appoint a membership chair and committee to help with devising a plan to attract and engage members, as well as keeping you on track.

During club meetings, talk to members about the steps you're taking to strengthen membership and encourage them to get involved.

Report your membership goals in Rotary Club Central so all members can view them and take ownership. •

Playmeet for Purpose

Acknowledging that the demands of work, family and service commitments can be one of the greatest barriers to people in their 30s and 40s getting involved in Rotary, one mum-to-be devised a playful plan to help attract young families into the Rotary fold.



ABOVE: Kate McKenzie, with sons Michael and Matthew, at E-WA Rotary's swim fundraiser to support its Love of Reading project.

KATE McKenzie, of the Rotary e-Club of Western Australia, came up with the idea of "Playmeet for Purpose" while visiting the Rotaract Pre-Convention in Sydney.

"At the time, I didn't have children," Kate explained. "In fact, the day after the convention finished, I had an operation to check for endometriosis before starting our fourth round of IVF."

Kate did have hope, however, and knew that if she was lucky enough to have children, she wanted Rotary to be part of their lives.

"Looking around the room of Rotaractors, I felt that the biggest interruption to their transition to Rotary wouldn't be whether or not the clubs near them would adapt some of their traditions, it would be the demands of juggling careers and parenthood." >>