

OPENING NEW KIWANIS CLUB

by Don Canaday

Tips for opening a successful new club:

Start the conversation right.

How you open the conversation with a prospective member is very important. I suggest that after introducing yourself and stating that you are a member of Kiwanis, you ask, "Are you familiar with Kiwanis?" You will get many different answers, such as:

1. "Yes." (Followed-up with, "How are you familiar with Kiwanis?")
2. "I was a member of Key Club."
3. "I was a member of Kiwanis when I lived in Indiana."
4. "My father (or grandfather) was a Kiwanian."
5. "You are the guys who do the glasses!"
6. "I see the signs as I drive through towns."

The answer can give you some perspective and lead your conversation. Typically, I say, "Our focus is on filling the needs of children." And I share our defining statement: Kiwanis is a global organization of volunteers dedicated to changing the world one child and one community at a time.

You may then state, "We have some great programs in support of high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools; however, the children of your community have been denied the benefits of these programs because there has not been a Kiwanis club to support them and we are fixing that. We are organizing a new Kiwanis club and you have been identified as a community-minded person and we congratulate you for that."

Network in the community.

As part of the site survey, it is always best to identify a few key people in the community. You can ask the mayor, chief of police, executive director of the chamber of commerce, or other significant community official, "Who in the community, if they were convinced that organizing a Kiwanis club in the community is a good idea, and if they joined, would, merely by their membership, attract others and greatly enhance a successful effort?"

Ask for referrals.

Each time you sign up a new member, it is important to ask for referrals. The best way is to ask the question, "Who do you know that you believe to be quality enough that you

would recommend them for charter membership in your Kiwanis club?" These referrals are 80 percent to 90 percent successful. They normally would not recommend someone they do not know or have some kind of positive relationship with. Having this name for a referral will, in most cases, get you past a "gatekeeper" and give you the opportunity to sign them up as a charter member.

After introducing yourself and the fact that you are a Kiwanian and in the process of organizing a new Kiwanis club in their town, tell them the person who referred you to him or her has joined and is a charter member. Say that you asked that person, "Who do you know that you believe to be quality enough that they would recommend them for charter membership in his or her Kiwanis club?" and he or she immediately gave me your name. After signing up this person you ask them the same question. In some cases, you may make an appointment to return to pick up a list. Referrals are the best and easiest way to organize a new club. You may now return to the person who referred this new member to inform him or her of your success, thank this person, and ask for more referrals.

Showcase your membership.

Letting prospective members see a list of who has signed up is usually a positive thing. People join Kiwanis for different reasons; however, they stay members for the same reasons: the Kiwanis experience is worth their time and money, especially their time. We value our time more than the small amount of money it cost us to be members of Kiwanis. People who get "warm and fuzzies" because they are part of an organization that makes a difference in their community, especially in the lives of children, usually retain their membership in Kiwanis.

Emphasize benefits.

During the recruiting process, I inform them of benefits they receive from membership in Kiwanis.

1. Friends. You're going to make new friends—friends that will last a lifetime.
2. Fun. You're going to have fun. Kiwanians make a huge difference in our communities, and we have fun doing it.
3. Fellowship. You are going to experience good fellowship; Kiwanians care about each other.
4. Information. You're going to be a better-informed citizen due to the speakers this club has each week.
5. Networking. If you operate in the business world, you are going to have the opportunity to do some networking. You should not join Kiwanis just for that reason, but it does happen. Kiwanians like to do business with fellow Kiwanians.

6. Smiles. The most important thing you will get out of your membership is the opportunity to see a smile on the face of a child and realize that without you and your Kiwanis club, that smile would not be there. That's what really makes membership in Kiwanis worthwhile.

The benefit that initially appeals to many is the opportunity to network and that's OK, but the last benefit is what gets them to stay members.

Target top professions.

Some professions are easier to recruit because of their desire to meet others and network.

Some include:

- Insurance
- Real estate
- Bankers
- Investment agencies
- Postmasters
- Librarians
- Police chief
- Fire chief
- Chamber of commerce
- City or town officials
- Agencies that serve children
- School principals, assistant principals, counselors, and coaches (You want to get a representative from each school.)
- Funeral homes
- Young attorneys
- Nursing home/retirement centers
- Ministers
- YMCA
- Boys & Girls Clubs

Start with schools.

I believe that any town or city that has schools is a prime location to organize a Kiwanis club. I like to talk to the superintendent of schools during the site survey or the first stop when the recruiting effort begins. I explain all of the programs Kiwanis has in support of schools: Key Club, Builders Club, K-Kids, Terrific Kids, and Bring Up Grades.

Bring Up Grades is the easiest to sell. Here is a program that helps elementary schools fulfill the federal mandate of "Leave No Child Behind," and it doesn't cost the school district anything. This program motivates hundreds of children to study, do their homework, bring up grades, and be recognized and rewarded. It helps them develop study habits that take them all the way through college. After receiving approval, and hopefully a membership application, you can call upon the school principals. I start with the elementary schools and get the principals to say they want the BUG program in their schools. Then, as we go out and recruit, we have already identified a need this new club can fill. It is not expensive and not labor intensive, yet it has a positive impact on many children.

Communicate with chains.

A lucrative way of recruiting members for a new or existing club is a national chain business like Wal-mart, Menard's, Office Depot, Lowe's, Kroger, etc. The approach I use is to tell them about Kiwanis and then inform them that I am aware of their corporate

philosophy of wanting their managers involved in the community where their business is located. I inform them that their company will pay their dues. I state that their business has a big investment in the community, and the community has a big investment in them and we believe it is essential that they be represented in the Kiwanis club. We would like to have them as a member, but if that doesn't work for them, we would welcome their designated representative.

Choose the right words.

When recruiting a business owner/manager or a professional who is not a referral, I use this wording: "When we organize a Kiwanis club we want to have a cross section of businesses and professions and we do not have a (insurance agent or veterinarian, etc.) and you have been selected."

When recruiting a minister, I add, "We always want to have a minister because you have a different feel for the pulse of the community and its needs and can help the club identify opportunities to be of service."

When you attempt to recruit someone and they inform you that they belong to another civic organization, compliment them for being involved in community service and tell them that we do not recruit other organizations' members, even though it is permitted for them to be a member of Kiwanis as well as another civic organization/company. Then ask who in their organization they would recommend we talk to as we think it is important that their business/organization be represented in the new Kiwanis club.

Say you'll be back.

When recruiting, be prepared to make an appointment to come back. These are busy people and they cannot always be available. Respect their situation and make an appointment.

Close the sale.

Always "close the sale" by asking them to assist the community by completing the application (you should have already given them a copy of "Changing Tomorrows, Today," which has a membership application in the back). To join this new club, they only need to complete the application down to their signature (takes only two minutes). Also, ask for a check for the first year's cost of \$100. You may have to come back to pick up the check, as they may have to get a corporate check. Make an appointment to come back and pick up the check. I tell them the check will not be cashed until the club is organized and they have elected a treasurer to open a bank account.

Focus on funds.

A problem that new clubs usually experience is that initially they have no or limited funds available for community service. There are several ways to solve this and allow them to get involved in projects immediately. Ask the sponsoring club or clubs to provide a gift to the new club's community service account. This gift can come from the sponsoring club's service account. Suggest \$200–\$500. The lieutenant governor is charged with requesting all other clubs in the division to provide the new club with a gift of \$50–\$100 on charter night. Additionally, all new clubs should be encouraged to conduct a silent auction in conjunction with their charter night celebration. Complete details are available in Kiwanis International's brochure on this subject. Typically, a new club when first organized meets, eats, and listens to speakers, but is not conducting community service. This is discouraging to their members since they joined to make a difference in their community. Getting the entire club involved in arranging for silent auction items, even before they are officially organized, will assist the club and ultimately assist the community. It also gives them an immediate opportunity to feel good about their membership and their club. My experience with the past six clubs I have organized is a low of \$1,970 and a high of \$5,700 net proceeds from their silent auction. Encourage the club to have a silent auction each year in conjunction with its annual "Installation Banquet." This gives the club its first and an annual fundraiser.

Make time for training.

Training of the new club is essential. Kiwanis has designed a training program for new clubs. Encourage all officers and all members of the board of directors to attend this training. I prefer the training take place within two weeks after organization. A good place to hold the training is in a classroom at a local church.

Spread the word.

Publicity is a must. Prepare a news release using the sample in the Kiwanis Membership Growth Manual. Include dates and location of meetings and the name and phone number of a contact person. It is not unusual for former Kiwanians who become aware of the new club through the media to show up at a pre-organization meeting and join.

Be smart about letters.

Sending out letters is important, but be selective. Don't send any letters out that you don't or can't personally follow up on. It's hard to visit someone at a PO Box! The letter should be signed by locals such as the mayor, superintendent of schools, or prominent citizen /official. They do not have to join the new club to sign the letter.

Check in with the chamber.

Chamber of commerce lists are the best lists available. When calling on prospects, be prepared to give them another copy of the letter. The copy you mailed them may have disappeared.

Make charter night special.

The charter night celebration should be a memorable affair. A printed program with the names of all charter members listed should be provided. The lieutenant governor should strive to have representation (inter-clubs) from every club in the division with each of these clubs presenting a gift (check) to the new club. The silent auction should also contribute to good attendance, as there will be some good bargains available. Be generous with the presentation of new club building certificates. Some may have earned a Ruby K. I prefer the charter member certificates and charter member pins be presented at the charter celebration by the district governor. It is appropriate to invite the mayor and the superintendent of schools as a guest to this function if they have not become charter members.

When the pre-organization meetings are scheduled, it is essential that a letter be mailed to all charter members and potential members reminding them of the meeting time and location. In addition, phone calls the day before to remind everyone are an absolute must. Good attendance at these initial meetings is extremely important.