



# Seal Beach Lions Club

1198 Pacific Coast Highway – D305 – Seal Beach, CA 90740

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## Seal Beach Lions Five Year Membership Plan

### **“If you build it, they will come”**

By Lion Scott Newton    Updated: July 2016

In June, 2010 our club implemented a 5-year plan designed to attract more members. Rather than continuing to have single year plans that tended to last for 6 months or so, we wanted a comprehensive program for sustained growth and retention.

Our goal was to be one of the top 3 clubs in Southern California within 5 years. That meant that we would need to grow by 50+ members.

We started with our own version of a community needs assessment that focused inwardly on who we were and what we did. Rather than taking the traditional approach to membership growth (ask, ask, ask), we went with the philosophy of **‘if you build it, they will come’**.

#### **Phase I: Increased Exposure:**

- 1) Change our face in the community by dramatically increasing our presence with ‘hands-on’ and highly visible projects. ‘Serve Local’ was our motto so projects like *Lions Against Graffiti*, *Park Bench Renovation* and *Tree Planting* became very visible projects for the club. We strategically picked visible locations for projects to maximize exposure.
- 2) Lionizing the Community: Become the go-to club when other organizations need help. We made a point of ‘proactively’ offering up Lion and Leo help to just about every organization in town including the City and Chamber of Commerce. We wanted to become the organization that everyone could count on.
- 3) Promote our efforts! We expanded our publicity base to include neighboring publications and we made sure that Lions or Leos were featured in some publication nearly every week of the year. *With meaningful hands-on local projects, it was hard not to get published.*
- 4) Include Leos in nearly everything we do. Knowing that our Leos and their parents were potential future Lions, we wanted to be sure that we gave them a meaningful experience

so that they would someday want to grow up to be Lions. We also knew the value in publicity by having youth involved.

- 5) Core Values vs. Traditions: We took a hard look at our values and traditions to ensure they were aligned with today's more active and demanding people. We confirmed our values and changed some of the traditions to fit the times. We also knew that there were additional traditions that would need to be challenged if we acquired younger members.
- 6) Keep it economical: Keep dues and other costs as low as possible. Make the club affordable for everyone. Offer special dues incentives for former Leos, Students & Spouses.

The fundamental image change was designed to attract 'service minded' people to a dynamic, engaged and relevant service organization. We knew that by collaborating with other groups we would be introduced to numerous potential new members. More hands-on projects; more collaboration with the City, Chamber and other organizations; more exposure physically and in the news meant we would project ourselves as being the powerhouse service club for the Seal Beach Area.

We began seeing results from our 'exposure' efforts much earlier than expected. New members came from projects and other groups we were working with and from exposure in the newspapers, cable TV and other publications.

## **Phase II – Target Groups**

We developed a plan that would target specific groups of potential members. This phase was to take effect after we had the necessary momentum and exposure in the community.

- 1) Go after members we lost over the past few years. With a much enhanced 'service' image we were hoping that our new position of prominence would attract some lost members back into the pride.
- 2) Exploit the LCI Leo-to-Lion membership program. If we did our job right during the Leo years, young adults who were back from college and now out on their own should be great candidates for membership.
  - a. Recognizing that for younger people to be comfortable, we would need to bring in as many as possible quickly. There needed to be a critical mass of young, like minded new members for this group to be relevant
  - b. We also knew that there would be economic issues with younger members so we developed a low entry fee for former Leos and adjusted some other costs of Lionism.
  - c. We knew that for this target market to be a viable part of our club, we would need to continually adjust our traditions to ensure relevancy.
  - d. We also wanted to encourage former Leos to bring non-Leo friends as potential members.

*Note: We have always maintained a solid data base of Leo email addresses, home addresses and phone numbers. This data would become invaluable in reaching out to former members during this phase.*

- 3) Promote membership within the various other organizations and entities that we would now be supporting. Our involvement with the City, Chamber, Run Seal Beach and other organizations would be great targets for membership.
- 4) Develop an 'assimilation' and 'mentoring' program to ensure our new members had meaningful opportunities to serve and were appropriately oriented. The Board set project money aside for service projects that involved new members.
- 5) Hold every other month Orientation meetings for new and prospective members with a focus of getting feedback about their Lion experience and expectations. (Numerous projects came out of the orientation brainstorming meetings)

Both Phase I and Phase II strategies produced much greater results than anticipated with the Leo-to-Lion program and membership growth of younger and more mature members.

### **Phase III – Retention & More**

#### **Retention:**

As we all know, the hardest thing is getting people to join for the first time. Almost as difficult is to 'retain' them. Our retention program isn't really a program at all but rather our philosophy of Lionism. We also recognize that the culture of the club will not fit everyone, but we certainly don't want anyone slipping out the back door for the wrong reasons. Our best chance for retention is really embodied in how we operate:

- 1) Create an overall Lions environment that is positive, uplifting, professional, meaningful and exciting. This includes producing GREAT meetings
- 2) Create a wide variety of opportunities for members to serve
- 3) Make a specific effort to involve our new members as soon as possible. Give them meaningful ways to participate will help move them from 'Lions members' to 'Real Lions'
- 4) Ensure that we have a strong social element to the organization creating natural opportunities for development of friendships that extended beyond club activities.

Some specific goals to maximize involvement, retention and social interaction included:

- Emphasis on the Proud Lion Program.
- Get new members to take on chairmanships, co-chairmanships, and committee assignments
- Place an emphasis on recognizing our newer members for bringing in new members and chairing events.
- Pair up new members with mentor Lions if their sponsors are not effective and active.
- Hold quarterly 'Lions Happy Hours' as a social event to increase friendships and networking.
- Plan and budget for social events: Beach Party, Chili Cook-Off, Christmas Party, Camping Trip, Installation PARTY, Etc.
- Ensure that 'hands on' projects would have a 'social element' (BBQ, drinks, etc)

Communication: With growth comes a need for better and more effective communication. We invested in creating a new and more robust website; we began using *constant contact* for weekly communications and event signups; and created a very robust and popular *Facebook* Page for both the Lions and Leos.

Breakthrough in Leisure World:

One of our new Lions expanded our eyeglass collection program by 1000+% and was able to get a very large yellow Lions Eyeglass Recycle Box into the Leisure World Health Center. This coup enabled us to get a foothold in this gated community of 8,500 seniors and allowed us to publicize our efforts and thus get more than a dozen new members inside of a year..

Changing Traditions:

Challenging the traditions of the past is not an easy thing to do. Stepping back to review our practices and traditions made us realize just how 'out of touch' some of them are. Singing songs, wearing vests, multiple prayers and more have all been reviewed and modified to meet the needs of today's membership. Changing with the times is healthy but often difficult for legacy members.

Even Younger Lions:

When we first started the Leo-to-Lion push, we had an unwritten rule that we would not solicit any former Leos who were under 21 years of age. Most of the initial batch of new Leo-Lion members were in their mid-twenties which seemed like a good age. Because this group of twenty-something's has grown so large, even younger candidates from 18-21 were showing serious interest in joining. Having a core group of younger members is driving the interest level to Leos who are graduating from the Leo program.

We now have members joining on their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. We expect this trend to continue.

Expansion of Youth Programs:

We consciously expanded our Youth outreach and started two additional 'specialty' Leo clubs. This effort has brought in new Lions who are parents of Leos. This expansion of the Leo program will hopefully create more future membership opportunities.

Knights of the Blind

We live in a community without a population of real needy people. Most of our local efforts have been mainly to 'improve the community'. In Phase III we are getting back to our roots by taking a more active role in Sight related projects. Getting involved with California Friends in Sight is a way for our members to be Knights of the Blind and personally help needy people on a regular basis. We continue to expand eyeglass collection, sorting and cleaning eyeglasses, reading prescriptions and regularly working at CLFIS Sight screenings throughout Southern California. We first set the stage with heavy community involvement and now we can expand our reach to outlying areas and give new and prospective members significant opportunities to serve.

#### **Phase IV – Now what?**

Continuous involvement in community activities, numerous signature projects that span the entire year, opportunities to serve outside the community and networking with the movers and the shakers of the town keep a steady stream of member prospects coming our way.

**We have more hands than ever to serve; we help more needy people than ever; we provide more community support than ever; and we give more than ever.**

The club grew to be the Number #1 club in all of California in 3 years. We are very well balanced with a nearly 50/50 male-female population, we have a large group of seniors and a large group of young Lions, a high percentage of family members, and the largest population of Leo-Lion members in the continental USA.

The **“If you build it, they will come”** plan continues to draw new members every month. The results of the 5-year plan greatly exceeded expectations and now we must look towards the next 5 years.

(July 2016) With 300+ members, we have administrative and infrastructure issues that we have never had to deal with before. The club needs to look at ways to manage a club of this size and develop a go forward plan into the future.