



Reasons Young People Should Join Rotary

I have a message for all you young people out there who may never have heard about Rotary. Or if you have, it was from a parent or grandparent who spent more time talking about the lunch menu or how great the salad bar is. If that's all you've heard about Rotary, then you're missing a lot. And let me tell you why, in the middle of this pandemic, Rotary is more relevant than ever. It's definitely something you want to know about.

Rotary is kind of a big deal. With over 1.2 million members worldwide, it's the biggest service organization on the planet. If you're a fan of the planet, that's just what Rotary wants to preserve. Our members are working on helping save mothers and children, supporting basic education for children, and fighting diseases. Many of those members are now using their connections and resources to help combat COVID-19.

Rotary has no religious or national affiliation. We don't care what you believe or who you voted for. The way Rotary sees it, the most important thing is that we come together to accomplish some much-needed tasks for a group we like to call humanity.

Rotary efforts have already helped [eradicate 99.9 percent of global cases of polio](#). If you've never heard of polio, you can thank a Rotarian for that. Armed with a massive investment and partnership with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Rotary has taken on the incredible task of ridding the world of this crippling disease so no child need get it ever again.

In addition to these large-scale, international projects, Rotary clubs are always working to improve their own communities. Just check out the list of [activities Rotarians are involved in to help their communities get through this pandemic](#).

I would never pressure you to do something that will improve your life in every conceivable way. But let me tell you the benefits I've personally seen from being involved in Rotary for seven years.

- 1. You'll make local connections.** During the pandemic, Rotary clubs have been staying connected through virtual meetings, which you can join conveniently from the safety of your home. Even in these unusual times, Rotary is keeping people connected. We all need that sense of connection. You will meet wonderfully diverse people from many walks of life. For many of us, this is the main appeal: local friends, local colleagues, clients and contacts. It's actually why a group of young professionals in Chicago started Rotary back in 1905. When it comes to networking and advancing your business, Rotary membership isn't like the fickle, transactional networking and "referral" groups you've likely been encouraged to join. It's authentic and real.
- 2. You'll make a global impact.** Bill and Melinda Gates saw the efficiency and effectiveness of Rotary, and have partnered with us to commit \$450 million to eradicate polio. Once we crush polio, we'll move on to other important challenges facing our world.
- 3. You'll see your work pay off locally.** Sure, the whole "saving the world" thing is cool, but if you're wanting to make a difference a little closer to home, don't worry, Rotary does that. We are leaders in our communities. We are a funding source (through a grant program), a volunteer source (because we're awesome like that) and we even come up with our own initiatives, like in 2018 when we planted over 1.2 million trees.
- 4. You can inspire the next generation.** We have amazing youth programs that involve students in service and leadership. Rotary Youth Leadership Awards weekends fuel and shape the potential for greatness that's already inside these students. They get fired up about making the world a more peaceful, loving place — and have the contacts, plans, and direction to make it happen.

5. You can spend time with the Greatest Generation.

Rotary includes members of all ages. Sure, Rotary has a reputation for having a lot of members over the age of 50. But there is also a ton you can learn from the Greatest and Baby Boomer generations. If you're looking for mentoring, or just great stories, look no further.

6. You'll get inspired. No matter what your motive is in considering Rotary, you will be inspired by guest speakers or performances, online or otherwise. I've seen amazing singers, legitimately awesome circus clowns, environmentalists, coaches — you name it. And virtual meetings make it easier for clubs to line up dynamic speakers from even further away.

7. You'll put your energy where it's really needed.

Here's (perhaps) the best part of getting involved in

Rotary: These clubs need you like crazy! We need leaders from every community in the world to join Rotary and amplify our impact. Feel helpless during the coronavirus outbreak? Consider the impact you could have joining a family of volunteers committed to doing whatever is needed to help the community.



Ryan Bell explains what Rotary has to offer young people, including exciting service opportunities that will connect you to others in your community.

About the author: Ryan Bell has been a Rotary member for seven years. He is the owner of Locals Love Us Iowa City. His great passions include community-building, Pearl Jam and Iowa whiskey.