

QUESTION of the MONTH: 'How do you attract and support youth in your district?'

The best way to attract young people to the district is to give them plenty of support and encouragement. Most young adults hear only negative comments from their parents, teachers, etc. It is extremely important to always treat our children as we want to be treated and never speak to them in a condescending way. If we do this, these future leaders of our society will grow by leaps and bounds, and our districts will also grow and prosper.

— NORM VALDES, Las Vegas

We involve young people in our district through life-to-life dialogue with individuals. We ask them what they want to see happen and how they want to participate in meetings. One young lady wants "more fun," so that concern shaped our meeting plan. One young man wants to "see what young people are doing in their lives." He's into photography, so we're thinking about an exhibit of his work at our meeting. We plan to visit children and other young members to find out how they are doing and to make life-to-life connections with them.

— CARVEL GRAY, Brooklyn, N.Y.

The most important action is daimoku — sincere prayer to the Gohonzon for the young people's happiness. We do the usual things like encouraging them to participate in the district meetings, but also have pizza parties and picnics. We are having study meetings just for the junior high and high school division members. We use material from the Entrance Examination and try to make it fun, and have a men's or women's division member help.

I think it is very important to just simply give younger people your attention. Say hi, ask what they have been up to. Call them up and get to know them as you would anyone. And my favorite thing is going to a Seattle Mariners game with a young men's division member.

— DIXON HAMBY, Bellevue, Wash.

The key is creativity. Just asking helps. It's surprising then how many people will join in a project. All we have to do is ask. We have developed several projects where we work with our young people and non-members in the community.

I think a number of young people want to participate in activities. It's a matter of asking them if this is something that interests them. We are also more creative and innovative in the projects that we are promoting within the district for our youth division members.

— DENISE MERCHERSON, Chicago

Hello from Beijing! When I was young all I wanted was to make a difference in the world. Young people want to find out who they are, to do meaningful work and to be real. They want to feel the universe in their dance. So create the right dance floor and turn on that music!

— STEPHANIE TANSEY, Beijing, China

Leaders need to discern what encourages and interests the youth and restrain their own egos. We need to be ready to discard old routines that become meaningless to youth.

— NICOLETTE SWEENEY, New York

We have been getting young people's opinions. Giving them a voice is very important. Young people are attracted by things they find enjoyable and that will attract their peers who are not (yet) Buddhists. We sat down with them and helped figure out how to

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implement their ideas — a Buddhist trivia game, sharing their talents of dancing, singing, or reading poetry of their own. They express how they are experiencing life. And it quite naturally reflects Buddhism. They begin to realize they are truly contributing to the growth of the district.

— JIMMIE and YOUNG CHA RACHAL, Jonesboro, Ga.

Looking back on when I was a young women's division member, I realize that every activity was praised by my leaders. With constant warmth and encouragement, my district leader treated me as though I was a queen. We were taught to believe that we were fantastic. These leaders put their egos aside and lives on the back burner for us. Because they put out so much effort in doing activities with us, we developed a trusting relationship with them.

— GIA PRESTON, Overland Park, Kans.

[We attract and support youth] by having interesting activities and studying SGI President Ikeda's guidance, putting his words into action. I've been practicing this Buddhism since I was 7 years old and I have learned that by continuing my faith I can overcome any obstacle, that I can become stronger and more courageous about working toward my goals. By seeing what other youth are interested in and helping it surface, and by bringing them into the SGI experience, we help them realize they are not alone — and that we as young women are here to support one another.

— CHANDRA REEVES, Atlanta

We chant for youth division members to participate and we work to create an environment where young people will be happy. Most important is the attitude of the men's and women's division members. They have to be willing to accept the youth and their opinions as equal to their own. Otherwise, when youth division members or guests speak up, older members start acting like parents. This doesn't work for young people who have responsible positions in society, where they are treated like adults and equals in their work environments.

— THOMAS A. DUNN, Brooklyn, N.Y.

Youth division members have hopes and dreams, and when struggling to accomplish them I listen to them with an open mind and try to understand their perspective on life. It's important for them to develop confidence in the Gohonzon and themselves. Encouraging words, such as to “never give up” in the midst of obstacles, can help them to move forward in their lives.

— CHERYL UTLEY, Prairie Village, Kans.

The cause to attract vibrant young people to be active in our districts begins with deeply appreciating their presence. There are four basic points we have employed: 1) Chant daimoku for youth to appear, stand up and take action; 2) One of General Director Zaitzu's six challenges says, “boldly entrust youth.” This cannot be just a slogan. It means we actually have to trust them; 3) Have mutual communication with the youth. This means to not dump on them, just let them do whatever they want or just tell them what to do. It is give and take; and 4) Create an environment where they can be inspired. Make it a family-type atmosphere where it is fun and enjoyable to do activities.

— JEFF McDANIEL, San Francisco

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