

Rotary and Leadership

I was quite lucky with the drawing, I picked Rotary and leadership.

Therefore, I am going to do my best to show how well our organization fulfills its leadership role and how this role can be expanded in the future.

There are several reasons for Rotary's success – our projects, ideas, and purpose – but the one I would like to stress is our organization's ability to remain relevant and maintain its service to others while the world changes.

At its inception, Rotary reacted against the professional standards and practices of the day. Our founders' primary goal was fellowship, but this soon changed. The club became a place for personal development and transcending oneself. This approach to society from within, just like a magic mirror, changed the lives of millions of Rotarians.

Then, between the two World Wars and until the '60s, Rotary became international and promoted mutual understanding.

During those years, Rotarians realized that they could make a difference in the destiny of mankind by getting directly involved in education and culture and disseminating its message.

It is also during that time that, with the help of governments, Rotarians actively participated in the creation of new institutions capable of ensuring peace and basing their hopes on the promotion of human values.

Finally, during the past 50 years and with the growth of its Foundation, Rotary International, faithful to its motto *Service Above Self*, has widely expanded its educational, humanitarian, and vocational programs to benefit youth and populations throughout the world.

At this juncture, we cannot say that the road to happiness is unobstructed. In face of society's constant evolution, mankind's destiny remains a vital concern for Rotarians.

We are convinced that the values that have guided us for over a century through the "philosophy of business and of life, with happiness as its goal" dear to Paul Harris are more than ever at the core of our identity and culture.

This is why we should enhance and exemplify:

- the ethical requirement of our social approach;
- the cultural roots of our dream of peace;

- leadership in serving others.

The RI Board of Directors' decision of last June, acting upon a recommendation of the Strategic Planning Committee, reminded us that:

"The mission of Rotary International, a worldwide association of Rotary clubs, is to provide service to others, promote high ethical standards, and advance world understanding, goodwill, and peace through its fellowship of business, professional, and community leader."

Let's start with ethical requirements and a definition of ethics.

The closest definition is from the philosopher Nietzsche:

"The determination of what society views as fair."

His colleague Alain said about the same thing:

"Ethics is a matter of personal responsibility, which motivates our behavior and our decisions to give a consistent vision of what is fair."

To define the obligations of a social approach, we will refer to Paul Ricoeur and what he called his "little ethics" with its three components: I, You, and He.

- I to hold on to our actions and opinions in a hostile environment
- You to give to others what they long for: love
- He to ask to have the same rights.

If there is a word that clearly defines the ethical aspect of a behavior, it is fairness.

I am not going to expand on the notion of fairness, but we should know that exercising fairness leads to the balance that we seek.

I would like to talk about a project that districts in Zone 11 have been carrying out in the past three years. It is a professional ethics contest in which participate business, military, and law schools.

This project is gaining in popularity, which proves that it answers a need. It is now organized under the patronage of UNESCO. Last year, 400 students representing 101 schools took part in the contest.

I am sure that our respected founders would be proud of such a project.

Next is our ideal of peace.

Its cultural roots can be found in the various schools of thought that promote tolerance, justice, and the quest of Good, and characterize each century.

Cicero's definition of peace suits us perfectly: "Peace is freedom in tranquility."

Rotary International is strongly associated to the ideal of peace because of members famous for their promotion of peace and later its participation in the founding of intergovernmental organizations: the United Nations and its agencies.

At about the same time were created the Inter-Country Committees of Rotary International, which operate like an embassy and have a priority: to bring nations together. The first committee to see the light was between France and Germany.

Like 400 or 500 other organizations, we now enjoy a representation to these international agencies.

However, considering our shared history and concerns, our influence should be even greater and we should enter cooperative agreement with:

- The UN because we share not only the Millennium Goals, but also a stance on societal issues such as child labor, girls' education, and sustainable development;
- The FAO to fight hunger;
- The Council of Europe because we promote democracy and human rights;
- UNESCO because we are both active in water management, the fight against illiteracy, and also ethics;
- WHO with whom we work to fight AIDS and malaria not to mention polio eradication.

There is an area where we can be leaders thanks to the Rotary Peace Centers for International Studies on Peace and Conflict Resolution in partnership with six universities in the world and, perhaps, a new one in Paris at Panthéon-Sorbonne.

When talking about peace, I cannot miss this opportunity to talk to you about Rotary's International Conference "Peace is Possible" – a great title – that be held in Cannes, France from March 28-29, 2008 under the patronage of Wilfrid Wilkinson and with the participation of past RI Presidents Carlo Ravizza and

Carl-Wilhelm Stenhammar. The conference will feature excellent speakers such as Dr. David Heymann, Director-General's Representative for Polio Eradication, Professor Alain Bentolila, and the representative of Director-General of the UNESCO at Geneva, Mrs Ann Belinda Preis as well as many prestigious Rotarians who are experts on peace.

I should also mention a wonderful interfaith service at Monastère St Honorat des Iles de Lérins in the Bay of Cannes with 7 speeches about peace by catholic, Reformed church, Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism.

We are now talking about leadership in service.

Like any good business owner, we should strengthen the activities for which we are leaders: Ambassadorial Scholarships, Youth Exchange, and Rotary Peace Centers.

We should do it while asking the clubs to support the Millennium Goals which have also been the priorities of our presidents: water management, literacy, health, and fight against hunger.

We should consider the creation of a 3-H grants department focusing on these areas. Our visibility would be much greater.

Generations of Rotarians and Rotary leaders have contributed to make Rotary one of the premier service organizations in the world. We should do our utmost to keep it that way!

- We should give more gravitation to the concentric circles that are the clubs, the districts, and world headquarters;
- We should get wider recognition and communicate our ideas and successes in a language that everyone can understand;
- We should continue to invest in training, and primarily for club presidents elect;
- Clubs' success depends on them and Rotary's success depends on clubs' success.

Isn't our responsibility to provide them with the tools to succeed during their term ?

To conclude, I would like to refer to the key eras of our history that I mentioned earlier. In fact, I believe that we are already in the fourth era:

- An era where economies and nations are redefined;
- An era during which the Western way of thinking will cease to dominate in the next few decades.

Obviously, Rotarians will have to play a role in regards to that last point. They will be mediators as ways of thinking and cultures change.

In any case, we should adopt the idea of leadership developed by a President of the United States at the beginning of the last century:

“If I could plant Rotary in every community throughout the world, I would do it, and then I would guarantee the tranquility and the forward march of the world.”

It is our idea because we believe in it!

Thank you.

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