

INTERVIEW
Samuel F. Owori

CONTINUITY

1. How important is continuity to you in setting direction and policy for Rotary?

Rotary's Values, Vision and Mission will remain relevant for generations to come and therefore continuity is critically important.

Without continuity, our cherished time-tested values begin to lose meaning, niche, direction and relevance to the chagrin of members who may drop off.

Sadly, Rotary has suffered from "stop-go" disconnect as a result of "My Year" syndrome of some strong leaders.

Continuity is important because it demands good succession planning along with close collaboration by successive leaders on common Vision, Strategic Planning and evaluations which are important elements of good governance. As these are routinely done by leaders, Boards and COLs, the benefit is a re-validation of policies, direction and values which ensure continued smooth operation.

Continuity reduces shocks and disruption and I applaud recent RI Presidents for embracing close collaboration for continuity. In time this practice should become a culture for the good of Rotary.

2. What would your approach be to ensure such continuity going forward?

My approach is to champion continuity from the top and push it to lower levels.

I am not omniscient and must have the humility to listen to others because I need followers and more ideas.

I also recognize that organizations work through teams and collaboration, and therefore these must be cultivated for the incumbent, elect and nominee leaders to continue an agreed direction which will be monitored, evaluated, rolled over or adjusted annually

Rotary has a culture of 3 leaders at any given time, but I would institutionalize collaboration on important things among these successive leaders. I would review the succession process to ensure that it is robust to guarantee approved plans and smooth continuity.

In addition, I would pursue enterprise-wide support for continuity by sensitizing all staff and other key stakeholders for trust and commitment through transparent communication and 360° accountability.

RELATIONSHIPS AND COLLABORATION

3. How would you build relationships between the Board, the Trustees, the general secretary and staff?

RI owns TRF under the "owner" and subsidiary relationship, but strains have sometimes occurred because of personality and perception differences.

I would encourage close collaboration on how and when new policies and projects are initiated and announced by the boards.

I support more of the recent experience of the joint Boards and similar Committees meeting together to discuss issues of common interest, while keeping their separate legal identities.

The relationship between the two Boards and General Secretary would improve by redefining roles to reduce conflicts between the President and Volunteers and the GS who is the CEO.

Sadly, a study 5 years ago revealed that volunteers were abusive to staff. This is unacceptable and must be checked. Mutual respect and team work must define our leadership and relationship, and our staff is professional and should be assured that they constitute Rotary's greatest asset.

LEADERSHIP

4. What are the top three characteristics of an effective leader and what makes you uniquely qualified to serve as RI president?

Leadership characteristics are like a tool kit and no one tool will solve all problems. But some tools are more important than others.

1. An effective leader is an orchestra conductor with humility and care to be a servant leader because to lead is not to rule, but to promote acceptability and team building. This is because volunteer followers have a choice to follow or do otherwise. This characteristic involves listening, participation, motivation and remaining close to the group so as to radiate confidence and win respect to direct followers even as s/he learns from them.
2. The second characteristics is that of vision and knowledge of destination and how to get there, hence strategic planning, goals, road maps and milestones with capacity to monitor, evaluate and adjust.
3. The third characteristic is building trust by being exemplary, transparent, accountable, equitable and reducing speculation and grapevine.

5. What is one thing you would change about Rotary if you could?

My passion is membership and extension. But for Rotary with enviable values in a world of 7 billion to exist for 111 years and boast of 1.3 million members is pathetic. Besides, women stand at about 25%, while the average age in many countries hovers around 70 years.

There are many places which need Rotary and numerous potential members who have never been invited. The problem is Rotarians who got in and closed the doors.

Accordingly, I would review the method of recruitment and open it up to applications rather than invitation, but institute effective vetting of applicants.

I would consider admitting spouses, Rotaractors and RCCs who implement our programmes at the grassroots, if need be under different categories.

I would oblige every club over 5 years old to form one new club to double number of clubs, membership and impact globally over-night.