



LEADERSHIP

John Hewko
General Secretary
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Good morning.

Bom dia.

Buenos días.

Namaskar.

Buongiorno.

Guten Morgen.

Nǐ hǎo.

Bonjour.

Dobrý den.

Dobryjden'.

Ohayo-gozaimasu.

Ahn-yeong Ha Seyo.

Good morning again, everyone.

Now, today I've been asked to talk about leadership and change at Rotary. These are important subjects for this audience, as over the past 112 years, the great leadership of district governors before you and the work of millions of Rotarians have made our world a truly better place.

But as any great institution with a long and glorious trajectory, I believe that our organization is at an inflection point, at a crossroads.

We are living in a time when technology and the means of communication are radically, and at an unprecedented rate, changing the ways humans interact.

We are living in a time when there are myriad competing options for people to network professionally and to give back to their communities.

We are living in a time when, in many countries, young professionals barely have time for their work and families, let alone time to engage in outside activities such as Rotary.

And as a result, we are living in a time when Rotary, on a global level, is facing some serious challenges, as we see worldwide membership stagnating at 1.2 million over the past 15 years.

However, we are also living in a time when our great organization has an incredible opportunity to adapt and to grow. But to take advantage of this opportunity will require leadership from you and from many others in the Rotary world.

So if our future depends on strong leadership to drive change, we need to ask a simple question: What makes a great leader?

In the 19th century, shortly before the Rotary story begins, leadership was defined by what was called the “great man” theory. Leadership was seen as an innate quality, which you did or did not have. Those who had it determined the course of history.

We often hear definitions of great leaders through this paradigm. Great leaders, so the theory goes, were born, not made — were often a function of title or position.

But does this definition of leadership apply to the history of Rotary itself?

Does it still apply in the 21st century? Does it apply to your experience as leaders in Rotary?

Let me answer these questions with a story.

Towards the end of the 19th century, a young man was expelled from school after only a short time. Known for playing practical jokes, his mischievous streak got him into trouble again when he was expelled from the University of Vermont.

He then attended the prestigious Princeton University but never completed his studies there. He did eventually graduate from another leading university, but by his own admission, the best part of his academic experience came from the friendships he formed with other students.

Now, this short biography doesn’t sound like the preface to a great life, but the man it describes is none other than Paul Harris, Rotary’s founder.

If Paul had focused solely on his studies, he may never have thought of bringing three friends together for the first meeting of what became Rotary.

When explaining his motivation for that first meeting, he said, “I was sure that there must be many other young men who had come ... to establish themselves in Chicago ... Why not bring them together? If others were longing for fellowship as I was, something would come of it.”

Something indeed did come of that idea, and by the time of his death in 1947, Rotary

had grown from one group of four people to 6,000 clubs in over 70 countries with 300,000 members.

Paul Harris was not blessed with the talents you might find only once in a lifetime. He wasn't the first to feel lonely after moving to a strange, new, overwhelming metropolis. He wasn't even the best community organizer in Chicago.

But he was able to articulate a vision that inspired others. He was able to act on his need to form an extraordinary new social network well before anyone ever heard of Facebook or LinkedIn. And he was able to recognize the opportunity to transform what began as a social club into an organization with a greater purpose.

In short, leadership in Rotary is about taking decisive actions for the future.

And the history of Rotary tells us that leadership is not necessarily something you are born with, something reserved for those with special gifts or elite status and privileges.

It is not about rank or having a position of power.

So, in fact, the great man theory rarely applies to the type of leadership we need in Rotary. Leadership today is about making choices that will have the greatest possible impact in the future. And those choices are rarely made by one person.

Look at the way Rotary approached the scourge of polio in the late 20th century.

Health experts weren't convinced that they should support mass vaccination campaigns against a single disease.

So Rotary's members — and I emphasize our members in the plural here, as it wasn't the work of a single mythical leader — took the initiative to advocate for polio eradication.

Their plan convinced the doubters, and you are all familiar with the rest of the story, which has brought us to the cusp of eradicating a human disease for only the second time in history.

This is the essence of leadership in Rotary — the audacity of a nonprofit organization — not a government ministry or multilateral institution like the UN — to believe it could take on a huge challenge and eradicate polio.

And in my opinion, this success embodies a different type of leadership, because leaders and managers are made, not born.

It's not about titles. It's about actions, such as the day when each one of you made a choice to be a district governor. It's about knowing when to lead for the future and when to manage the present.

Why? Because in 1988 we had to defy the logic that said volunteers could never lead a major public health initiative. We had to decide when to lead, using our strengths in advocacy and mobilizing communities. We also had to decide when to manage or when

to delegate the more technical aspects of the eradication effort to health experts such as the WHO.

If we hadn't made those bold decisions and instead accepted the authority of experts who said it couldn't be done, we might never have kick-started the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, and the course of history could look very different today.

When I began I said I would talk about the importance of leadership and change, because they are so interconnected.

But what does leadership mean to Rotary today?

Put simply, leadership is focused on the future, and the future of Rotary is our primary concern.

As I mentioned earlier, Rotary is at a crossroads. And if we are to successfully manage this fork in the road, we must take up the challenge passed down by Paul Harris, when he wrote, "If Rotary is to realize its proper destiny, it must be evolutionary at all times, revolutionary on occasions."

And so today, we can't fall into the trap of addressing 21st-century challenges with 20th-century solutions. We need to lead by innovating, not by managing the status quo.

Last night, President-elect Barry asked us to live up to our new vision statement — to unite and take action to create lasting change across the globe and in our communities.

Inspired by this new vision statement, we are thinking long-term and developing a new strategic plan, which will redefine our work in the 21st century. In short, we're asking a simple question, the same question Paul Harris would ask if he were here: How will Rotary serve humanity, not only today, but over the coming decades? And for this process to be a success, for us to define what Rotary will look like in the future, we will need your participation, and the participation of the clubs in your district.

But, in the meantime, in his citation, President-elect Barry has given you the road map to lead for the next Rotary year, and continue to take us along the path of transformative change and impact.

He has asked each of you during your year as governor to give priority to three actions — supporting and strengthening our clubs, focusing and increasing humanitarian service, and enhancing public image and awareness.

First, to support and strengthen our clubs, the 2016 Council on Legislation has given those clubs that want it the flexibility to decide their model of meetings, attendance, and membership.

We have also given Rotaractors the ability to be dual members of Rotaract and Rotary clubs, with the hope that we can increase the number of Rotaractors who become

Rotarians. In fact, imagine what we could do with another 300,000 members who are already committed to the values and mission of Rotary.

And so your challenge is to be bold and innovative and to urge the clubs in your district to experiment with new club operating models. Because at the end of the day we are offering a product to the marketplace. And that product is the club experience — the experience that a member gets in return for their time or money when they join a Rotary club.

In short, we need to unleash the creativity of our 35,000 clubs. Because every club is a potential beta tester for different club models and models of service.

Some will work and many will fail. But the important point is to think differently. Because it is through this creative process that we are almost certain to find those new and innovative club models — driven from the bottom up — that will take us into the future.

And to help in this process, every month, The Rotarian magazine will be highlighting a different Rotary club that is reinventing itself through innovation. So I challenge each of you to have at least one innovative club model in your district. And who knows, it might even be chosen to feature in The Rotarian magazine, inspiring thousands of your fellow Rotarians.

As President-elect Barry said yesterday, truly sustainable service has to mean looking at everything we do as part of a larger system, building communities that are stronger and more resilient to the changes ahead.

And because the future demands sustainable projects of scale that produce results, we developed the global grant model.

So, for the second priority action, focusing and increasing humanitarian service, please urge the clubs in your district to utilize The Rotary Foundation's global grants model to do bigger, better, more sustainable projects.

In my view, our global grant model — that was rolled out to all of our districts in 2013 — represents the most important initiative that our organization has undertaken over the past 30 years, after polio eradication. And I say this for three reasons: the global grant model offers enhanced sustainability in our projects, improves our public relations when these projects are implemented, and expands opportunities to partner with other organizations. So please encourage your clubs to embrace the possibilities of our grant model.

Finally, President-elect Barry has asked you to focus on enhancing our public image and awareness of Rotary in our communities.

So take some time to familiarize yourself with the materials of our new global advertising campaign, People of Action, on the Brand Center at Rotary.org. Encourage your clubs to use these resources to build public understanding of what we do.

Ultimately, leading is not a spectator sport. It begins with your choice to lead for our future.

And if you can lead the way, if you can make those decisions on when to lead and when to manage, if you can encourage and inspire your clubs to innovate, if you can do this, then Rotary's second century of service will be even more transformative than our first.

And I, for one, am excited to see you continue to lead by making a difference in the year ahead and *Be the Inspiration* to our members and to the world.

Thank you very much.