



YOUR PARTNERS FOR CHANGE AND STRATEGY

John Hewko
General Secretary
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Good afternoon.

It's great to be here today addressing this class of incoming district governors, who will serve in the first year of our Foundation's second century.

This assembly gives district governors-elect and Secretariat staff the opportunity to learn from, and be mutually inspired by, each other.

We at the Secretariat — in our world headquarters in Evanston and in our seven international offices and service center in Pune, India — are here to support Rotary clubs worldwide in their activities and projects and to help the district governors who represent the clubs.

Members of our professional Secretariat staff speak over 40 languages and hail from more than 40 countries. And as your general secretary I am very proud to lead this truly international and talented team of professionals.

Now, being a Rotarian is very much about connecting for good and connecting for change, and it is in this spirit that I'd like to share with you an anecdote from my time just before I became your general secretary a little over five years ago — just before my wife, Marga, and I embarked on our enriching and rewarding Rotary journey, a journey that never would have happened if it weren't for one personally serendipitous, yet transformative, act.

At the time, I was conducting research at a think tank in Washington, following my service at the Millennium Challenge Corporation, a U.S. government agency established to foster sustainable economic growth in developing countries.

I was about to publish a policy paper on some of the lessons learned, and while reflecting on this paper, I was also trying to figure out what I wanted to do next.

In short, I was clearly at a crossroads in my life.

Then one day out of the blue I get a letter from my dad.

He has been a Rotarian in Clarkston, a town north of Detroit, for over 35 years, and he's an avid reader of The Rotarian magazine.

And in that letter he sent me a page from The Rotarian magazine, advertising that Rotary was looking for a new general secretary; and he wrote across the top, in half-Ukrainian, half-English: “John, you may want to check this out.”

And I still keep his letter framed on the wall in my office in Evanston.

I read the advert.

The opportunity sounded interesting, so I threw my hat in the ring; and, five years later, I’m still grateful for that letter, for it has given me the opportunity to play a small part in an incredible organization that is transforming lives across the world.

Now there are three key lessons that I took away from that experience.

The first is that you should always listen to your father.

The second is that very, very good things happen when you read The Rotarian magazine.

And third, it shows that within the Rotary family, when you are at a crossroads, whether individually or as an organization, you are only one degree of separation away from the next great opportunity to change yourself, change others, or change our organization for the better.

Now, to highlight these opportunities for change, President-elect Ian has asked each of you during your year as governor to give priority to the three pillars of Rotary’s strategic plan:

First, it’s clear that to support and strengthen our clubs, we need to address the fact that worldwide membership has now been flat at around 1.2 million for nearly two decades.

Second, to focus and increase humanitarian service, we need to ensure that Rotary integrates sustainability into all our plans and projects.

Because not only does this strengthen the work we do in each of our six areas of focus, but it also supports President-elect Ian’s emphasis on the sustainability of our planet.

And third, to enhance our public image, we have to channel more of our communications and events to the general public and prospective members.

This helps membership growth and drives more support to our Foundation.

So let me highlight some of the roles of the Secretariat in helping you implement Rotary’s strategic plan.

With respect to the plan’s **first pillar of supporting and strengthening clubs**, we work with clubs to foster innovation and aid in the implementation of new initiatives.

For example, this past April the Council on Legislation passed two enactments that are strategically critical for our organization.

The first encourages the development of innovative club models by giving **those clubs that want it** flexibility with respect to meetings, attendance, and membership.

The second encourages membership growth aimed at our future leaders and standard-bearers.

You know, worldwide only a small percentage of Rotaractors become Rotarians, and the Council has attempted to help address this issue by simplifying the qualifications for membership in a Rotary club and by allowing Rotaractors to become members of Rotary clubs while they are still in Rotaract.

And the role of the Secretariat, in addition to explaining these enactments to clubs, will be to make Rotarians aware of the most successful innovations through our channels of communication.

So please help to educate the clubs on these opportunities; please take advantage of these opportunities for club flexibility and growth; and share your success stories of club innovations that are really making a difference.

The second way we are supporting clubs is by developing a more robust alumni database that includes participants in the many Rotary programs — Youth Exchange, RYLA, Rotaract, Interact, scholarship recipients — so that you can stay connected to the people whose lives have been impacted by our great organization.

And third, we are providing new and improved tools to support and strengthen your clubs, and to assist you in enhancing the club experience — all made possible, in part, because of the dues increase implemented by the 2016 Council on Legislation.

For example, we are completely rebuilding Rotary Club Central, a tool that is designed to help clubs develop goals and a strategic plan. These improvements will be launched by 30 June 2017 and will give you a better user experience, and improved performance.

In addition, we are enhancing the search capability in My Rotary, which means that you will be able to find the information you're looking for quickly and navigate the various resources available with greater ease.

Now, how does the Secretariat help you to pursue the **second strategic pillar** — to focus and increase our humanitarian service?

Recently, we completed the largest grant model evaluation Rotary has ever carried out, reflecting responses from almost 6,000 Rotarians in 154 countries.

The evaluation confirmed that we are heading in the right direction, helped us fine-tune the model, and highlighted the greater level of sustainability and impact being accomplished through global grants.

As a result, we redesigned the global grants online application, which was released last month.

We launched the Showcase tool so that you can explore the work of Rotary clubs locally and globally and share your own Rotary projects with the Rotary community and your Facebook friends. In fact, 40,000 service projects have been shared already.

There's also the Ideas platform, which allows Rotary clubs to find partners and solicit funding and logistical support for their projects.

With the help of all these tools, we are urging clubs and districts to link up with other clubs and districts to do projects that are bigger, bolder, and are sustainable.

And our efforts are paying off.

This year The Rotary Foundation has been ranked No. 3 by CNBC in their rankings of “Top 10 Charities Changing the World in 2016” and has been recognized by our peers as the 2016 World’s Outstanding Foundation by the Association of Fundraising Professionals.

Finally, President-elect Ian has also asked you to focus on the **third pillar of our strategic plan** — promoting Rotary in your communities to boost our public image.

To assist your efforts, we completed a brand strengthening initiative and rolled out stronger messaging and a new visual identity.

We are also working to improve Rotary’s online presence.

This month, we launched a refresh of the public-facing pages of Rotary.org — the first window to our organization — to deliver a faster user experience, with a new design that will tell the Rotary story in a compelling way.

All of the templates and tools you need to prepare your visual and digital materials are now available in one place in the Brand Center.

We are also significantly improving and expanding our worldwide communications efforts.

And as a result, globally, recognition of Rotary’s work is increasing: We have received a tremendous amount of positive media coverage over the past year, ranging from Time Magazine, The New York Times, National Geographic, People, and Forbes to the BBC, Al-Jazeera, and Deutsche Welle.

And our live-stream event in October for World Polio Day literally blew away all of our previous records for engagement, with over 100,000 views, and a potential reach of more than 211 million people via social media. In addition, Rotary clubs put on 1,460 World Polio Day events in more than 90 countries.

In fact, every club should be telling the amazing story of our fight against polio, and how close we are to eradicating a human disease off the face of the earth for only the second time in history.

Because only if every Rotary club tells this great story will we get the recognition that we deserve for this audacious and historic undertaking.

So, as your partners for change and strategy, I and my colleagues in the Secretariat hope that you’re excited about your next year of service and are confident in the knowledge that, with our support, you will have the ability to act strategically and adapt your service to the needs of a rapidly changing world.

Because what is clear is that we cannot be complacent if we are to realize our full potential — in membership, Foundation giving, humanitarian service, public image, and attracting new generations.

We need to ensure that the product we offer — the Rotary experience — is attractive and offers value to current and prospective members.

We must also ensure that Rotary remains relevant and evolves with the times, without compromising our very identity.

So the decision we're facing right now is not what we're *able* to do, but what we're *willing* to do.

Are we willing to make the thoughtful changes that are needed?

And you, the district governors-elect, can answer this question by leading the charge for strategic change and by being at the forefront of President-elect Ian's vision of *Rotary: Making a Difference*.

And we at the Rotary Secretariat will be there for you, in every way that we can.

And I know that I speak for every one of us on the Rotary International staff when I say how proud, how proud we feel to walk through the doors of One Rotary Center and our international offices every morning, knowing that our work supports your work and that your work is changing the world for the better, day by day, community by community.