

What I Would Do...If I Was Club President Again

(Here are some great thoughts from Tino Cacanindin, provided by Eduardo deGuzman (D3800 Philippines) to the ROTI Institute, with thanks. Edited by Douglas Vincent, Institute Chairman).

It was about five years ago that I had the opportunity to be President of my Rotary Club. As I reflect on my term as Club President, recollections of what I did and did not do came rushing by like a whirlwind. To be sure, there were things that I did right and also some that I did not do so well.

While I savored every minute of my term as President, the intervening years have given me a chance to look back on the experience. I asked myself "what would I do if given the rare opportunity to be Club President again?"

Experience is a great teacher and I know that I have learned some lessons from the past.

I must confess that the following ideas are by no means mine alone. They have been culled from my own experiences as Club President and also from my interaction with several other Past Presidents. Since I believe that seven is a perfect number, I would like to share the seven things I would try to do different if I could be Club President again.

1. I would re-orient my membership and emphasize the basics of Rotary.

It is sad to note that many clubs do not seem to operate as Rotary Clubs. Somewhere along the way they mutate into drinking clubs or fraternal associations. They use Rotary as a reason to be associated for purposes other than the ideals of service. If I could be President again, I would try to get those members who have strayed away to come back to the basics of

Rotary. Some need to learn that they are in Rotary imbued with the ideal of service, guided by The Four-Way Test and oriented by the object of Rotary. It is not wrong to have fellowship even over a few drinks, but we should not lose sight of the reasons and purpose for joining Rotary.

I would increase the number of assemblies, fireside meetings and club forums in order to refresh the minds of older members about the original reasons for Rotary membership. For the newer Rotarians, I would hope the process could help lead their Rotary lives in the right direction.

2. I would improve the weekly programs.

Attendance at weekly meetings is a basic requirement of Rotary membership. One of the features of weekly meetings is the program, and interesting presentations can attract better attendance. This is good reason to pay more attention to the club's weekly program.

To do this I would promote an interesting variety in formatting guest speakers to share stimulating ideas with members. I would make the presence of visiting Rotarians meaningful and worthwhile by extending the courtesy and brand of fellowship that club members share. Visiting Rotarians should never feel like a stranger.

A good program includes appropriate Rotary information and takes into account the various events that Rotary celebrates. For instance, programs in September could emphasize youth activities, Rotary Foundation in November or world peace and understanding in February, etc. How impressive it would be for members and guests to witness a program truly reflective of Rotary as a unique organization!



3. I would develop an effective program to reduce the cost of being a Rotarian.

In the Philippines, a major obstacle to growth in membership is the escalating cost of being a Rotarian. I would try to attract more members through an effective program of lowering costs. In some countries clubs have succeeded in doing this. Some clubs in India avoid expensive meals and have afternoon meetings with inexpensive snacks. If Rotary is to be an organization serving the community, financial resources should be directed away from the members' personal benefit and preferably be directed toward the funding of service projects.

While I do not intend to make a public confession of the things I did wrong as President, I would like to cite one example of a poor decision I made. I had wanted a presentable club bulletin and my concept entailed a well-designed, professionally printed bulletin. It is only natural for a President to want their term distinguished by excellence, including the club bulletin. Can you imagine how much more useful the funds would have been if used to finance extra educational scholarships to help enlighten the minds of the young. The total bulletin costs did not come from club funds, due to outside sponsorship I obtained. But it still nags me that the funds could have been put to better use.

If I had another chance, I would have a simpler bulletin. It might be printed, but I would be satisfied if it was only mimeographed as long as the content provided a wide source of information about the club, its members, the district and Rotary. This would avoid taxing the members to make up the amount not covered by sponsors. I am



sure members would not begrudge this bit of tight-fisted economy. Developing a cost reduction program starts with leadership and I have no doubt that such a program would draw the support of everyone.

4. I would venture into projects requiring more membership involvement at lower cost.

Rotary does not encourage grandiose plans. On the contrary, service projects completed within twelve months are preferred. This makes for easier accomplishment and avoids an implied imposition upon the next executive to continue something they may find too costly or burdensome.

A good service project requires the involvement of all members. It is not difficult to conceive such a project. After all, Rotary is a catalyst and as such, Rotarians need only serve as the impetus. A club has a great opportunity by involving the greatest number of members because they know that, more than money, it is their time, effort and energy they are being asked to contribute. Fellowship is also an excellent byproduct.

If President again, I would move away from costly service projects that drain the resources of members. Instead, I would venture into community projects and involve the greatest number of members possible.

5. I would take a new look at the President's role as a club member.

Under the classification system, Rotary membership is drawn from a cross-section of adults in the community who have risen to a top level of their profession or business. One member is the peer of another. But the leadership role of a club President requires a different approach from that of a mere fellowship association of diverse members.

There are leaders who perceive their role is like a dictator or an autocrat. They

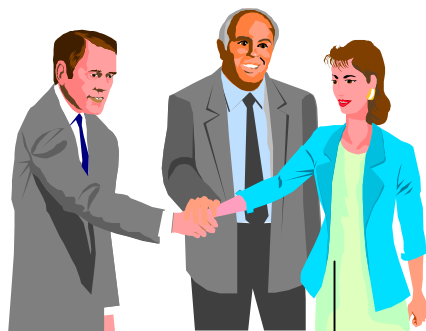
impose upon the membership. Others are more passive in their position and do things as their membership dictates upon them. This kind of a leader accepts the terrorism of his members.

Both leadership styles are far from the concept of an effective leader in Rotary. If I could do things better, I would try to set and attain objectives faster, and administer the affairs of the club more efficiently by inspiring to achieve. As a motivator and leader, I would not ignore individual aspirations for fellowship, service or involvement of every member. I would encourage each member to work toward their specific objectives in relation to the overall objectives and goals of the club.

Apart from being a motivational leader, I would try to serve as coordinator of members. I would not hesitate to monitor their activities and trust they would not consider me pushy for trying to help them along.

6. I would review membership policies with emphasis on young qualified candidates.

The strength of any organization lies in its membership. It is no less true in Rotary and the long existence of my club has resulted in a group of professionals and businessmen who are not getting younger. I would place more emphasis on the club's policies regarding younger members. This is not to say that older, qualified persons should be ignored. It would just add some balance to the age of club members. This would infuse fresh ideas and greater aggressiveness in the pursuit of the Rotary ideals of service. I believe our future lies in youthfulness and having a continuing adventure in service.



7. I would plan earlier in advance of the July 1st, Rotary year beginning.

Twelve months could indeed be too short for a President to do a good job and it may be unfortunate that the general practice is for a President to serve only one year. Within this period one literally has to cram numerous activities, the least of which is the club administration. Incoming Presidents have practically an entire future ahead of them and hopefully it will not be wasted.

The best intentions will not materialize unless there is careful attention to planning a myriad of details that go into the execution of those intentions. If I could be President again, I would not wait a single moment in preparing for my term. Long before July 1st, I would have a brief outline of my plans and objectives. I would finalize the committee chairmen and leadership team early. Of course, I would consider individual talents, expertise and preferences to maximize each member's contribution during my term.

A word of caution is perhaps needed on advance planning. Activities of the incoming President should not create any impression the incumbent President's current program is being prejudiced. Advance planning should be done with the full knowledge and cooperation of the incumbent President, who is likely to support reasonable requests in preparation for the upcoming year.

Summary

These then, are the things I would try to do if I could be President again. To incumbent Presidents - you are lucky, for you still have time to ensure that your plans materialize. Luckier still are incoming Presidents - for you can begin right now in preparing yourself for your term ahead. You have accepted a challenge in leadership so this should not prove too much of a burden. You must have accepted this important position because you are confident that you could do it. Good luck.●