

Our Rotary Values

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Good morning, and *namaskar*.

I am delighted to be here with you this morning, Rotary leaders of the future. And I greet you in the traditional Indian way of folding my palms in front of me. My thumbs point toward my own self, and the rest of my fingers point upwards. And when I greet you this way, what I am saying is that there is divinity in each one of us, and the divinity in me greets the divinity in you.

And I begin with this traditional greeting to underline our diversity, yes, but, at the same time, emphasizing that no matter who you are, and which part of the world you come from, I think we are all a bit awestruck at what we have been experiencing in our five days here.

Indeed, how can we not be awestruck? Because what we have in this hall is nothing short of amazing: 530 men and women, and our partners, coming from every corner of the world, from more than 200 countries. And as we all squeeze into the hotel elevators here, we are seeing dresses we have never seen before and hearing languages we have never heard. And doesn't this incredibly amazing experience make us all stop and wonder at the miracle of Rotary? Because we are all here for the same reasons. We are here simply because we love Rotary. We are here because of what we can *do* because of Rotary, and because we are ready to do more.

Indeed, perhaps more than anything else, what really strikes us most is something we don't always think about in our own club or in our own district, and that is the incredible diversity of Rotary and the opportunity to make friends and be friendly ourselves, starting from right down there, at our own club and district levels, from where each one of us comes.

You know, I have often wondered at the genius of our founder, Paul Harris — at this incredibly simple idea of good people, honest people, getting together in friendship, bonhomie, and goodwill. And when these people come from different backgrounds and have lived their lives doing different jobs, would not the effect and the impact of their coming together be more exciting and more vibrant and help get all of them closer together because of the very excitement of the diversity?

I remember that, as a rookie director on the RI Board in 1995, when I would look at agenda items of the Board meeting, I would often tend to decide in advance on my views, even before the meeting. But then, hearing the other views around the table, the cogent discussions and the different perspectives, we would finally arrive at completely different, but very valid and usually correct, decisions. How's that for diversity?

But then, it was clear that while coming together was a great beginning, the point of getting together had to be the work we do together, the service we perform, the difference we make in our communities. Indeed, fellowship in our clubs often creates the environment in which we serve better and more. And this I have seen: You always get a club with lively fellowship when you have a mix of experienced and newer members. And then they all get together to do more.

Indeed, when someone asks what Rotary is, and we are not always sure about our answer, I believe we need to tell them simply about those things that have kept Rotary strong even after more than 100 years. Tell them about our core strengths: about service, fellowship, diversity, integrity, and an obvious offshoot, leadership.

In Rotary, we have always lived by our core values, the roots of the Rotary tree that make our branches spread far and wide and strong, through its more than 34,000 clubs. It is a big tree and growing, and we have to see: How can we make it grow bigger?

But while fellowship and diversity are our strengths, what really characterizes Rotarians is our focus on integrity, our commitment to high standards of ethics in our businesses and professions, and the morals and the values we uphold in our daily lives. I believe we do this better than any other organization in the world, through our Avenue of Vocational Service. And I believe it is important that Rotarians serve as role models in our communities, and that it must start with each one of us here in this room this morning. The high standards we set — and the level to which we follow them — determine our credibility.

A story is told of one proud father who was taking his two excited little boys to the circus. At the ticket counter, he was told of the entrance charges: “\$3 for you and \$3 for any kid older than six.”

The father said, “The younger one is three and the other is seven, so I guess I owe you \$6, including me.”

The man at the counter exclaimed, “Hey, mister, did you just win a lottery or something? You could have saved yourself three bucks telling me that the older one was six; I would not have known the difference.”

The father replied, “Yes, that may be true, but the kids would have known the difference, and would have always carried it with them.”

Let me tell you another.

In the 2006 Winter Olympics in Turin, Italy, Canadian Sara Renner was leading her team in the grueling cross-country ski race when her left ski pole snapped. She pushed on, but it was hopeless. Then, something extraordinary happened. A man stepped forward from the side of the course and handed Renner another pole. She got back in the race and made up some of the lost time. In the end, her team captured the silver medal.

Later, Renner learned that her benefactor was the coach of the Norwegian team. He became an instant hero in Canada, but he did not understand all the attention. “The Olympic spirit is the way we try to go,” the coach said, “and if you win and don’t help somebody when you should have, what win is that?”

Vocational ethics at its best. Ethics becoming proactive in this world of free market competition. Something for Rotarians to practice.

Integrity in life and in business is what started us off in the first place, in Chicago in 1905. And fellowship and diversity are what cement us all together. But the main thing, the point of why we are here, why we all stay together in our clubs and in Rotary, has to be the work. It has to be the service we render and the difference we make, whether we are working locally in our own communities or are engaged in bringing the whole world together — clubs and districts and governments and non-governmental organizations and UN agencies and everyone else — to eradicate a disease from the earth, for example.

Over the past few minutes, I have been talking about our core values and about service, because everything we do in Rotary as Rotarians and as the leaders that you are has to be based on these, and has to be based on trust. If you take all the qualities of a great leader and you sum them up in one word, that’s what that word would be: trust.

We all know that whatever happens, great leaders are not going to take more than their share of the credit or less than their share of the blame. If you go to them with a problem, they’ll be ready to

help. They're not there to judge or criticize; they're there to help you to clearly understand the situation, so that you can manage it better.

A great leader is someone you can trust not necessarily to have all the answers, but to be able to help you find them. And it's someone who will listen, who will take the time to take you seriously.

What's the gold standard of great leadership? In Rotary, I think it's very simple: It's being the kind of leader about whom every Rotarian in your district says, "You know, if I am ever a district governor, I'd want to be a district governor just like him, or just like her."

That's because, in Rotary, part of leadership is being a role model. Leading in Rotary isn't like leading anywhere else. You are leading equals — even your betters. And you are not there to give orders. You are there to lend support.

And let us not forget, it's only for a year, so there's not much time to get a big head — but also not much time to get things done. So you've got to keep going. And, of course, once you've finished being the leader, which happens ever so quickly, the only place you are going is right back to your own club, as someone else takes up the seat you've just left.

Though our office is only for one year — just one — it's but natural that each of us wants to make our mark. But I can tell you right now that if you try to start from scratch and achieve something monumental with your name on it in just one year, you are going to fail. To really succeed, you have to look beyond yourself, beyond your year, and into the long term, at the health of your clubs, their communities, and our organization.

So when you start the 2014-15 Rotary year, remember that the best thing you can do for your district is to leave it stronger than you found it. The question is not, "What can you do in just one year?" but "How far can you take your district in one year?" — what can you build on, what can you begin, what can you do for your clubs that will still be going, still be changing lives, long after you've left office?

And we each have to remember that, in the end, it doesn't matter who thought of it or who gets the credit. I am so fond of quoting Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the late prime minister of India, who once said there are two kinds of people in our world: those who do the work and those who take the credit. Try always to belong to the first group. There is much less competition there.

My brothers and sisters, it is not about you and me. It's not even about the things we do. It's about the work that gets done.

And so, let's go *Light Up Rotary*. Good luck. God bless.