



## Selected Proceedings from the 2001 annual conference of the International Leadership Association, November 1-4, Miami, Florida USA

### Growing Leadership Circles for Rotary's Emergent Future By John Jacob Gardiner

#### **The Context**

The District Leadership Plan (DLP) has been adopted by the Rotary International Board as the best response to the question of how the goals of districts and their clubs would be best achieved in the 21st century. In RI's "Guidelines for the District Leadership Plan" (245-EN-1199), two major concerns related to the district were described: "the accelerating costs associated with the significant increase in new clubs added each year had put the effectiveness of district organization at risk" and "a growing need to reduce the demands of time and direct supervision expected of volunteer district governors in order to ensure that the office would be filled annually by the best qualified persons." The Strategic Planning Committee that proposed the reorganization plan to the RI Board challenged Rotary to "achieve maximum efficiency, effectiveness, and cost containment" by revising the internal district organization. The resulting RI Board policy was called the DLP.

The DLP in essence called for the reorganization of the way districts operate "by appointing several assistant governors in each district and redistributing much of the governor's administrative overload among these assistants." The assistant governors were the key to the success of the plan and their development as trainers of leaders would make or break the DLP as an organizational model for Rotary's future. The person who would develop the assistant governors as district leaders was designated as the district trainer. While the DLP did not address team-building as a priority need at first, it would soon become apparent to the RI Board that the district trainer would also need to help the new governor develop a leadership team for her or his year at the helm of the Rotary district. In fact, in the February 2001 issue of *Rotary World*, General Secretary's Memo, entitled "Improved Leadership Training," Ed Futa noted that Rotary's "increased emphasis on team-building" will apply to both clubs and

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districts in the future. The R.I. Board, it was announced in the memo, had recently implemented two new district training meetings beginning in 2001-2002: the District Leadership Seminar open to all Rotarians interested in serving as district leaders and the District Team Training Meeting which will bring assistant governors and district committee chairpersons together to plan for the coming year with the district governor. The January 2001 issue of *The Rotarian* (p.68) reported about the development of a Club Leadership Plan which will be 'test-marketed' with selective clubs in 2001-2002. The model of shared governance with a district governor as leader of a team of assistant governors and district committee chairpersons would be transferred to the club level as RI committed itself to a future of leadership circles at the district and club levels.

Why propose to change the language from "leadership teams" to "leadership circles"? Leadership teams model the old competitive frame in a world of scarcity. New metaphors are needed by the world and by Rotary International to emphasize the reality of relational contexts. Teams focus on scarcity, circles on abundance. Circles remind us that we are all leaders. Circles promote life, discipline and sacrifice for the common good. In dysfunctional organizations, circles help people to heal themselves. Circles promote standing up to structures that are oppressing people. Circles remind us of the great energy that comes from our common stories together. (In the writer's enthusiasm for leadership circles, let him not forget to mention that much good research on leadership teams can be applied to the emergent metaphor, but with care regarding the removal of old assumptions and ways of thinking.)

#### **The Four Pillars of the New Rotary Club**

The four elements of effective clubs under the new RI Board reorganizational plan (DLP) follow. Effective clubs are able 1) to sustain and grow membership; 2) to implement successful service projects; 3) to support The Rotary Foundation; and 4) to develop club leaders for beyond club-level.

These four pillars may at first seem familiar, but the renewed club emphasis on developing leaders for the district level is a responsibility that is now on the same level as membership, The Rotary Foundation, and service projects. This is essential for the new governance model. In fact, more and better prepared volunteer leaders will be needed for the DLP to work. More people will be required in each district to assume assistant governor positions with increased administrative work and multiple (at least 4) visits to each club under their charge. District committee chairs will assume more serious responsibilities as part of the Governor's leadership circle. The new District Governor will need to become more proficient as a circle or team leader. The district trainer, a new position created by the DLP, will need to be a volunteer who trains presidents and assistant governors as well as one who conducts training for district leadership teams and the district governor in her or his new role as team builder/ circle convener.

This brave new world, it must be understood, is initially fraught with many challenges including the following: no official RI status for Assistant Governors who are not officers of RI (though they will function in evaluative roles with clubs); inadequate funding for Assistant Governor expenses (though RI is providing some support for their training); and an additional bureaucratic layer distancing RI from the individual Rotarian who -- in the radical thinking of the author-- is the true organizational unit of the Rotary enterprise. Rotary International's Board of Directors is committed to this bold journey ...and it is the job of loyal Rotarians to do all we can to make the bold experiment succeed.

#### **The Individual Rotarian: True Heart of the Enterprise**

The individual Rotarian is the true organizational unit of Rotary. While that thought may give some people working at One Rotary in Evanston a vision of chaos, along with their traditional counterparts throughout the Rotary world, it remains a fact. The individual Rotarian is the

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heart of Rotary. While the rhetoric of Rotary concedes that districts serve clubs, it stops short of asserting that clubs should serve the many dreams and hopes of individual Rotarians. In fact, a Rotary club exists to serve individual Rotarians in manifesting their dreams for local and international service. The club should serve its members -- not the other way around... and that radical thought will profoundly challenge any movement toward increased centralization that dares to suggest otherwise. Rotary is here to help serve and focus the energies of individual Rotarians. Until this thought is accepted within the Rotary community worldwide, the organization will serve itself more and the multiple goals of humankind less. The more global and interconnected the world becomes, the more power and energy reside within each individual player. Any great human enterprise which forgets the individual member whose hopes and dreams it serves, will not rise to its greatest potential. As global needs grow, solutions will increasingly lie in the hands, hearts, minds, and might of individual Rotarians who will gain commitment and support from their clubs and districts to implement varied responses to human needs and wants on a local, then global, basis. Rotary's future lies in the hands of *individual* Rotarians.

### **Growing Rotary Leaders: The District Trainer's Role in the Future of RI**

As described in the *Guidelines for the DLP*, the role of the district trainer will be to "coordinate efforts with appropriate past district leadership in the training of assistant governors in addition to his/her training duties at PETS and the district assembly." The most important responsibility of this new district volunteer leader will be the development and implementation of a program to train assistant governors. In response to the new governance understandings, the district trainer is being also asked to develop a workshop for building district leadership teams. The early ideas developed in *Guidelines for training assistant district governors* offer an outline of possible objectives and methodologies. Problems anticipated include the unique nature of the position of assistant governor within each district and the nature of responsibilities and governance perspectives as interpreted by each new district governor. This concern also makes it more difficult to develop one set of PowerPoint presentations that will work across all districts of Rotary International. The need for assistance is apparent, however, if Rotary's new model of a district leadership team consisting of governor as leader, assistant governors and district committee chairs as members is to succeed. Ultimately, RI guidelines for the structure will be modified and more universally accepted, but until then there is a need to accept broad variation in materials and methods of leadership development.

### **Growing Leaders**

Increasingly, the fourth column of an effective Rotary club will need to be emphasized in the RI world: developing club leaders for beyond club-level. Clubs will increasingly need to provide district leadership on an expanding basis as the district leadership plan will work only if clubs commit to such development activities. One of Rotary's early responses to that call is the District Leadership Seminar that will on an annual basis introduce Rotarians to RI at the district and beyond levels. The seminar might be attached to the end of the district conference--a workshop for new district leaders --thus making the governor's call for attendance at the District Conference more and more important to the overall growth and development of Rotary International.

Another initiative that should be considered throughout the Rotary world is one that we are experimenting with in District 5030: The Rotary Leadership Academy. This initiative serves to develop knowledgeable Rotarians more and more grounded in Rotary understanding and thus better prepared for Rotary leadership. Past District 5030 Governors Dick Clarke and Jim Hathaway developed a ten session seminar which should be considered throughout the Rotary world as a process for developing knowledgeable leaders beyond the club level.

### **Growing Leadership Circles: The District Governor's New Role**

"Groups can serve as hierarchical leaders of other groups" (Leavitt, 75). Leadership tasks can

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be shared by several individuals who are part of a group, or they can be handled by a single person. In fact, as John W. Gardner noted,

*Attention to leadership alone is sterile- and inappropriate. The larger topic of which leadership is a subtopic is the accomplishment of group purpose (xii).*

Robert K. Greenleaf added that "to be a lone chief atop a pyramid is abnormal and corrupting. None of us is perfect by ourselves, and all of us need the help and correcting influence of close colleagues (63). Leadership circles offer institutions better information integration, more useful interaction, and more responsive decision-making. If Rotary has indeed chosen wisely in its district leadership team model (which I believe it has), then the future will include leadership groups with the district governor and club president as servant leaders. If district and club leadership circles are the future of Rotary (which I believe they will be) then the district governor and club president as servant leaders will emerge as the leadership model of Rotary International.

Leadership by example sustains trust. The sublimation of ego and the goal of service often elude us, but it is possible to strive to reach beyond oneself. Team leadership requires listening, patience, and accepting rather than fearing criticism. It empowers leaders to nurture the development of others, to see that leadership is dispersed, and that there is new talent in the making. Commitment, not authority, will produce the best results in an information society. Leadership by example and persuasion will increasingly point the way. In fact, pursuing a model of team leadership, the district governor or club president, in Rotary's future, will be viewed as servant first. This change in orientation will strengthen the governance of Rotary at all levels of the enterprise.

#### **Strategies for the Great Transformation**

Effective team building (circle growing) depends on the communications, human relations, and consensus-building skills of district governors and club presidents. If an organization has the concepts and criteria to analyze its effectiveness, it will find ways to improve itself. It becomes the job of RI through district governors and assistant governors to constantly assess and communicate district and club effectiveness.

The model works on the assumption that the individual Rotarian, whether member, officer, president, assistant governor, governor will strive to improve his situation. It works on an assumption that people are basically good and interested in improving themselves. District governors, assistant governors, and presidents will need to be on the lookout for a lack of shared vision, unnecessary duplication of effort, competition, low morale, and poor communication. These symptoms will signal the need to regroup, to refocus attention on the fundamentals of team/circle development.

The fundamentals of team/circle development include goal setting and problem-solving consultations, assistance in improving interpersonal relationships among members, role definition and negotiation, and more integrated consultative approaches (Hackman, 13). Programs include development of challenging goals and objectives, exercises in human relations, listening, consent-building, role clarification, and problem solving, as well as consideration of alternative reward strategies based on group productivity.

One important strategy that should be implemented at the district and club levels in Rotary's future is a two or three day retreat using an agenda generated earlier by participants. The district and club retreat is an essential component of a comprehensive team/circle building plan. The district governor and club president will be tested as servant leaders in this new ongoing format of sharing leadership in Rotary. The governor or president will be viewed as servant first; she or he will increasingly embody Rotary's motto of "Service above Self."

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### **Service above Self: Renewing the Vision of Rotary for the New Millennium**

Wholeness is our natural state. Transcending the sense of separation is the key to the most important of human transformations. This, I believe, is the metaphysical message of Rotary's "Service Above Self." Rotary International offers humanity a chance to transcend self through service to others. In that transformation lies the hope of humanity to live at peace. Through service to others, Rotary International creates a path to world peace and understanding, one person at a time, one person helped, one person helping, one Rotarian changing the world one action at a time. Growing leadership circles at the club and district levels points the way to Rotary International's emergent future of servant leadership around the world.

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### **Biography**

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