

**RID Monty Audenart**

in

# Conversation

with

**RID Ashok Mahajan**

**Is the classification principle still relevant today for admitting members into clubs?**

I'd like to think that our classification principle is as important today as yesterday. Each of us come to the table of Rotary bringing the diversity of skills and knowledge of our business, professional and community lives. We represent all that is good in our vocations, and should hold that classification with integrity and trust. Imagine the peace that would abound in our world if all men and women everywhere, in and out of Rotary, were to do just that. Our classification principle is unique to Rotary and prevents any one business or profession from becoming a monopoly in a club.

**Will poverty alleviation be the next focus of RI to usher in world peace?**

While it is true that there can be no peace when people are hungry, RI's global focus must continue to be the eradication of Polio until the great war against it is over. Some would have us divide our focus with a new corporate project now or a suggested one when Polio is over, but a divided focus always works against you. A runner in the race of his life with just a few feet to the finish line, does not walk off into the stands. Having said that, I commend Rotary clubs everywhere who carry out projects in their community and in the world to alleviate hunger. Today, I visited some two hundred children in the Philippines who smile and look radiantly because a local Rotary club cares enough to ensure they get one square meal a day.

**What, in your opinion, needs to be done to expedite the growth in membership?**

President Wilf says it best when he notes that it is the responsibility of every Rotarian to invite another to join Rotary, every year, and then to do everything needed to keep that person in Rotary as an effective member.

I envision the day when Rotarians will share Rotary not because they have to, but because they want to. I fear that too many Rotarians do not believe enough in Rotary. The good news about Rotary is that as we reach out and serve others, our own lives change. We become better fathers and mothers, better sons and daughters, better neighbours, and better citizens in our community. When Rotary makes that change in our own lives, sharing Rotary with others, indeed inviting others to come and participate in the adventure of Rotary, becomes as easy as a conversation with a close friend.

**What should be done to promote Rotary in countries which have still not opened the doors for us?**

Do not think for a moment that in countries where Rotary once was, we will not ignite the flame of Rotary again. Those sparks may lie hidden under the grey ashes, but they need only a breath of tolerance and understanding to give rise to the Rotary flame in due time. RI has several extension committees that are very diligent in observing when conditions are right for extension. Obviously we cannot have Rotary in a country that does not allow a club to meet freely, or associate with other Rotary clubs. And they must have the wherewithal to pay dues. Never under-

estimate the power that individuals can have to move a nation.

**Are clubs spending too much time and money on club service and fellowship activities that don't seem to have the desired impact on growth and retention?**

Club Service and Fellowship are cornerstones of both growth and retention in Rotary. Fellowship is the founding principle on which this organisation was founded. I can guarantee you that if a new Rotarian comes to a Rotary Club and fails to find new friends, then he or she will go and find them elsewhere. Club service, or the building of an effective club within, allows us to effectively recruit new members and to conduct meaningful meetings, carry out successful projects, support Foundation participation and giving and develop leaders at both the club level and beyond. It is worth every minute and every cent we spend to achieve just that. If you want people to join your club, make it a club that people want to join.

**Why are we not able to convert the alumni into Rotary members?**

Through the good efforts of the last COL, we have made it much more easier for Foundation Alumni to join Rotary clubs. Now it is up to Rotary clubs to invite them in. There are approximately 1,00,000 alumni who have been touched by Rotary. They are more likely to join Rotary than anyone else. Today I travelled with a one-time GSE member. She has since served as Club President, District Governor, and now is completing her

role as an RRIMC. She will be a President's Representative to a conference next week. Was she worth recruiting? Absolutely! And she in turn has touched many lives. I am of a mind that many more alumni would join if Rotary clubs would take the time to invite, orient and educate these people to Rotary. And that process needs to be carried out both before and after their Foundation Alumni adventure. To see many of them so eager to share their experiences and want to belong when they return home, only to be relegated to a small portion of a club meeting or a District Conference, and then to be forgotten, is simply not doing our best.



**Can Rotary be described as an art of living?**

Rotary is not a weekly meeting. It is a way of living. The values we profess of integrity, friendliness, and service, and then embracing diversity and leadership by helping others, ought to encompass every aspect of our individual, family, business, professional and community life.

**Should RI allocate more funds for public relations activities in the press?**

The good news is that Rotary International has not only supported clubs and districts with PR grants, but has developed a wealth of materials and resources, easily accessible allowing individual Rotary clubs and Districts to enhance their image within their own community. This should continue to be a team effort in every respect. We demonstrate our willingness to partner together when some of our own Club's and District's budgets are allocated to improving our image in the community. New members will want to join the club when they see what Rotary is doing through us and to us.

**Why should we not allow campaigning in elections?**

This is a service organisation. It has

everything to do about the service we render and little to do about getting ahead of another individual. We serve Rotary best when we approach each task with integrity, doing our very best, not for show or personal gain, but to serve others. Paul Harris founded Rotary but did not serve as its' first President. He set the example and we ought to follow.

**Some districts seem to be content with the nominating committee procedure for elections. Isn't it time that a radical change is needed in the election process?**

Most districts are very pleased with the nominating committee procedure for elections. The COL has even endorsed the nominating Committee for selecting the COL Representative. Others may choose to elect individuals by a vote of delegates at the District Conference or on special occasions a ballot-by-mail. All of the above procedures will work for us, but only if we carry out the elections with honesty and integrity. We do not need another election process. What we do need is Rotarians whose principles cannot be compromised throughout the entire election process.

**Most litigations about elections centre around procedural lapses in the present system. Should the COL in 2010 take up**

**this as an important agenda?**

My observation as the Liaison Director to the Election Review Committee is that most litigations occur when electioneering and campaigning takes root within a Club or a District. While the right to challenge a candidate is part of the recognised voting procedures, there are a few districts where challenging a candidate is the yearly norm! This is often followed by a lawsuit to local courts when one or the other candidate is not selected, and at times, even naming Rotary International in the lawsuit. What is it telling us, when Rotary International has to defend itself from Rotarians or Clubs in the election process that is meant to determine those who will serve best, within the club or the District?

**Why are top leaders in business and community not joining Rotary?**

This week I met a Congressmen, an Executive Financial Officer to a Prime Minister, the CEO of Nokia phones for a country, the CEO of a worldwide Air-conditioning firm, the top automobile dealer in the country, the manager of the International Airport, and the individual named as one of Asia's top 10 CEOs. And the good news is that all of them are Rotarians, each telling me that they are giving back to Rotary

what they can never repay. Busy people make time for Rotary. Let us continue to seek for a quantity of quality Rotarians.

**Many past RI Presidents have given their views on the future of Rotary. What in your opinion will be the future of Rotary?**

A vision statement tells us where we are going and what we will be doing when we get there. I am sure you know that Rotary International has a new Vision Statement. 'The vision of Rotary International is to be universally recognised for its commitment to service, to advance world understanding, goodwill and peace.'

In my mind this vision for the future includes the hopes and dreams of everyone who has, or ever will live Rotary.

**How can Rotary work with the Governments for bringing in world peace?**

We would never be where we are today, in wiping out Polio without the support of many of our nations' Governments. It has taught us the value of partnerships, with the idea that working together we can accomplish so much more than we can by ourselves. The path to peace is not Rota-

ry's alone. The great asset of Rotary is that when things need to get done in a country, in most cases Rotary is already there with Rotarians on the ground to get the job done. But we may only be considered effective if we are seen by Governments to have the number and required strength of Rotarians to meet the ever-increasing needs of our world. We have to pro

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actively engage governments with us to ensure that all of us are rowing in the same direction. Indeed because we are a non-political organisation

we can accomplish things and be in places where governments may not. In doing so we actually lay foundations for the path of peace. And we need to actively as individuals support and participate in good government. My Member of Parliament is a Rotarian!

**Your message to Rotarians?**

I think Paul Harris said it best when he said, "The greatness of Rotary is due to the thousands upon thousands of contributions by its individual members, who like many rivulets and small streams, jump eagerly into the mighty River of Rotary." It would be my hope that none of us will be content to walk along the shore of Rotary, but that we will live Rotary in our day, as those who went before us, lived Rotary in their day. We have barely scratched the surface of what this organisation can become.

I want to personally thank RI Director Ashok for his ability to lead others. He is a great asset to Rotary. This is so apparent in his passion for membership and his drive to make us commit to the end of Polio. But above all he is a Rotary friend, and we just never have enough of them.