

The Club Leadership Plan: Adapt or Perish

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Change! It's a word we are hearing more and more because we truly do live in a time of change. For a good portion of my career, I have been involved with efforts to introduce rapid change into large organizations. And through that experience, I came to see that organizations that embrace change are likely to thrive — and organizations that avoid change, and fail to adapt, often slide into obscurity.

As a reminder of this reality, a well-known international school of business leadership awards its graduates with a bronze dinosaur paperweight inscribed with “Adapt or Perish.” This is to remind them that their organization must continuously evolve to remain relevant.

For Rotary, our challenge is: Will we adapt to the rapid changes taking place in society, or will we become another dinosaur?

As the motto suggests, it's all about adaptation and developing new approaches. In other words, innovate or die. It was Winston Churchill who said “change is the price of survival.”

Much has been written about the rapid rate of change that now characterizes our society at the beginning of the 21st century. Nations around the world are experiencing dramatic shifts in their political, economic, and social structures. In our daily lives, we are inundated with information. From the news media, advertising, and the Internet, the amount of information available to individuals today is staggering. We are moving from the Information Age into the Knowledge Age. The defining characteristic of the Knowledge Age is perpetual change. The Knowledge Age will bring a flood of continuous change on an accelerating time cycle. Consider these facts:

- Every two or three years, the knowledge base doubles.
- Every day, 7,000 scientific and technical articles are published.
- High school graduates have been exposed to more information than their grandparents were in a lifetime.
- There will be as much change in the next three decades as there was in the last three centuries.
- Rotary is affected by this societal change, and we must respond.

To this end, Rotary International initiated the development of a vision and strategic plan to guide our organization through its second century of service.

To provide support at the club level, the Club Leadership Plan was launched. It's an extension of the District Leadership Plan, and it's vital to the stability, growth, and success of our organization. It provides clubs with leadership techniques and an administrative structure to guide their activities.

Sadly, I often hear the Club Leadership Plan described as a new club committee structure that replaces the four Avenues of Service. That is not the intent. The four Avenues of Service con-

tinue to be the philosophical cornerstone of Rotary. The Club Leadership Plan is so much more than just a new club committee structure. If clubs wish, they may leave their structure as it is while implementing the plan.

The essence of the Club Leadership Plan is found in its nine critical processes. They strengthen Rotary at the club level by providing

- Continuity in projects and decision making
- Consensus for decision making and goal setting
- A balance between service and fellowship activities
- A larger supply of well-trained leaders in the club
- An expectation that every member is active
- Ongoing education opportunities for all members
- Succession planning for club leadership

The Club Leadership Plan provides the basis on which each club builds its own identity. The nine steps for implementation are critical leadership processes that all Rotary clubs need to be effective. I'm sure that each of you relentlessly focuses on these same key leadership processes in your business life. A club may address these functions in any way it chooses. This flexibility allows the Club Leadership Plan to be implemented throughout the Rotary world. The plan is based on the best practices that highly successful clubs have used since Rotary was founded.

We are at an interesting point in the adoption of the Club Leadership Plan. Many clubs are aware of the plan and many have implemented it, but many still haven't even considered using it. Those that are using it should revisit and review it every year; it's an ongoing journey.

I often hear of clubs that are experiencing a net loss of one or two members per year and are quietly slipping away. Many of their leaders are successful in the business community — because of their skills and acumen. If their businesses were shrinking at this rate, would they not revisit their vision and key processes and ensure they are still relevant? It's ironic that we seek competent business men and women for membership but we don't always encourage them to use their business skills when leading our clubs. Many clubs take a "that's the way we have always done it" approach.

During the past 12 years, Rotary has put considerable effort into attracting and retaining members. We have successfully brought in large numbers of new members; however, we also lose many within the first year. Why are we not able to retain these new members? I believe the quality of club leadership has a significant effect. Effective leaders influence the atmosphere at club meetings; they set direction, set stretch goals, and celebrate successes.

Here's an example. A bright and personable young man — I'd say he is in his early 30s — recently joined Rotary. He told me he is not satisfied with his membership. He's looking for opportunities to learn leadership skills, do some networking, receive some mentoring and, yes, be involved with projects that will do some good in the world. We're not fulfilling his expectations. Will he stay around? I hope so, because he has the qualities and energy to one day become an outstanding leader in Rotary! But if we don't provide something he values, in exchange for his time and commitment, he will decide to leave.

The future of our great organization is in the hands of those who lead our clubs: your presidents-elect. The required leadership skills are available within our membership. We must implement processes that ensure those skills are utilized and focused on the development of our clubs. This is why the Club Leadership Plan was developed.

As district leaders, it is your role to effectively lead your clubs during the coming year. President-elect D.K. Lee's theme is *Make Dreams Real*. One sure way to support D.K.'s theme is to encourage the clubs in your district to implement this plan.

As governors-elect, it is your responsibility to communicate and support leadership best practices. We have the tools. We now need your help to support implementation. I ask that you rise to the challenge and make the Club Leadership Plan a key topic at your PETS and personally foster the use of the plan with the leaders of the clubs in your district. Your leadership on this issue could result in a legacy of strong and effective clubs with membership growth and improved retention.

Organizational change is not easy. It requires patience and perseverance, but it is essential to our survival. Let's never forget the experience of the dinosaur — adapt or perish.