

Final Essay: Will you be here next year?

Submitted by Sylvia Ho, member of Rotary Club of Valley Isle Sunset, June 2010

Every year veteran Rotarians look around and ask themselves, "Will I be here next year?" For some, there is an emerging theme, "Has Rotary become more trouble than it's worth? Is there something better I could be doing with my time?" While many would say these are likely the words of a Rotarian that is old enough to pretty much retire from everything; all too often we are seeing this becoming the refrain of Rotarians departing in the prime of their functional lives. Rotary has in some way become a burden to them, sapping their moral and their vitality. Though there are many senior citizens that are active Rotarians, these questions are not based upon the age of any particular member but more on whether the environment within their local club is nurturing, rewarding and providing the fulfillment that is the essence of life.

Rotary's core values (Service, Fellowship, Diversity, Integrity and Leadership) represent the guiding principles of the organization's culture. Ideally, these qualities should guide every member's actions every day, even when acting outside of Rotary sponsored events. The personal task we give ourselves of living up to Rotary's values is an increasingly important component of Rotary's success. Club member interaction should be based on a consistent platform of mutually complementary behavior emphasized by the organization's leadership.

Over the years, I have met lots of sincere and dedicated Rotarian leaders, who always want to promote the mission of Rotary to everyone, Rotarian and "infidel" alike. However, if we only talk about Service, but pay little or no attention to the other four core values of Fellowship, Diversity, Integrity and Leadership, then Rotary becomes a heavy burden for members, sapping their strengths and providing few rewards that give a sustaining sense of satisfaction. Any club that fails to emphasize all of Rotary's core values to its members will not be able hold the membership together.

Year after year, I too have asked myself, "Is it worth the effort to continue to be a member." While RI strives to do so much around the world, there is often a tendency for many Rotarians to be blindsiding the purpose of Rotary at the local club level. Are we focusing so much on the big picture of Rotary's world wide mission that we are not applying the basic concepts of Rotary to ourselves and our daily interactions with friends, associates, and our fellow club members? Is the service component of club membership becoming a source of member burn out? Are we seeing cliques forming within clubs that are projecting an

“exclusive” rather than “inclusive” leadership pattern? Have we done all we can do to foster genuine fellowship, diversity, integrity and leadership within our own clubs?

Through the Leadership Academy I have the opportunity to learn about Rotary in depth, and it has given me the opportunity to truly understand Rotary International’s structure and programs. But for all the high caliber training, organization and ambition, we need to take home with us the fundamental good will and brotherhood that is the glue that keeps club membership strong and individuals making a difference for themselves and others.

As Rotarians we are, “Seeing to the needs of mankind” but most importantly, we need to see to the needs of our own club members. Whether we are curing polio half a world away or changing the nature of how we live and treat others, we can not fail our fellow club members by neglecting to emphasize the transformation that is entailed in living the four way test.