

Why Do I Have To Go To This PETS?

Recently, a friend named Bill, who was then president-elect of his Rotary club, asked me an intriguing question. He said, "You know, Dave I'm very active in my community. I sit on many boards of community organizations, I'm the head of a successful business, and now that I'm a president-elect of my Rotary club, they tell me I have to go to a training program called PETS. None of the other community organizations in which I'm active have training programs like that-maybe an orientation-so why do I have to go to this PETS? Can't I be a competent club president without all this training?"

I was a little taken aback because we leaders of Rotary (high-class governor types!) just assume that training is necessary for club, district and other Rotary leaders, but I don't recall much discussion about why we need this training. **What is it about Rotary that values education and leadership development so much as compared to other groups of civic activists?**

Well, I thought about it and realized I had better come up with a good answer for my friend Bill and others who think the same. Making what I thought was a brilliant decision, I told him I would get back to him later. I needed some time to really think about it. Here's what I finally thought:

Rotary is different from most community-based organizations, partly because the other civic organizations often have professional executives who work for or with the board members. That gives the organization continuity, which is often lacking in a Rotary club.

Rotary is different because it is not only community-based but worldwide and has developed ser-

vice projects of great scope. If you don't know about these worldwide projects and activities, you can't very well participate in them.

Rotary is different because the leadership is purely voluntary on the club level, and it's clear that good voluntary leadership usually means a good club and vice versa. Annual turnover means that clubs need a constant influx of good leaders to keep the momentum going.

Rotary is different from many other civic organizations that are often single-issue oriented. Rotary's strength is that it is not a single-issue organization but meets the needs of society as they arise. That flexibility of service requires considerable skill and knowledge in so many areas.

Rotary is different from business organizations because Rotary leaders do not have the leverage that business has to motivate its employees. Successful service to others requires creativity, organization skills, the ability to influence and motivate members in important and often complex projects, and to convince members of the value of helping others.

So where does education and training come in for Rotary? The focus is on Rotary knowledge and leadership skills. Rotary knowledge is necessary to avoid constantly reinventing the wheel, to participate in projects with others around the world, to obtain ideas from others, to learn how projects and activities work, to understand the philosophy and principles of Rotary, to learn from the greatest variety of peoples ever assembled in one organization, and to become part of a team.

Leadership skills are necessary to be able to harness the energies and talents of outstanding members who would probably not really participate in community and international service were it not for the power of the group. Some people may think that leaders are born that way, but experts tell us that everyone can improve his/her leadership skills. John C. Maxwell, in his leading book, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, speaks of the leverage business leaders have over their employees. A great business leader may not necessarily become a great Rotary leader because that leverage he uses in business does not exist in Rotary. Says Maxwell, **"But in voluntary organizations...the only thing that works is leadership in its purest form.** Leaders have only their influence to aid them. If you are a businessperson and you really want to find out whether your people are capable of leading, send them out to volunteer their time in the community. If they can get people to follow them while they're serving at the Red Cross... then you know that they really do have influence and leadership ability."

Bill, you can be a competent club president if you work at it, but if you really want to be a great Rotary leader, get some good Rotary education.

By Dave Linett, former General Chairman, RI Education and Training Task Force