

Club Assembly Speech

Mr Assistant District Governor, Mr President, fellow Rotarians

It is a little less than two years since Annie Olejnik asked me if I was interested in joining Rotary. I suppose I was a little disappointed that no-one had ever approached me before. But perhaps now you have got to know me better you can understand why that was. Certainly it had never occurred to me that I could actually approach a local club and express an interest. I did know a little about Rotary since my father was a Rotarian for several decades and was very proud to have been made a Paul Harris Fellow by his club not that long before he died. I had attended the odd meeting with him in Richmond, Yorkshire, where I grew up. The club there was typical of a small town. Most of the older local business and professional men belonged. It was of course men only. They met on a Tuesday in the Black Lion in the centre of the town at lunchtime. I thought of it as a social club much like the masons or the Fellmongers Guild and was not really aware of the club's charitable functions. I know that they had close contacts with a club in Norway and that my father got to know a Norwegian lawyer with the wonderful name of Oddbjorn, with whom he got on very well.

So, in short, I regarded Rotary as a positive and pleasurable part of my father's life, and looked forward very much to becoming a member in my turn. I started attending meetings in the Autumn of 2006 shortly after my retirement from teaching. I have to say that the more formal aspects of Rotary remained a closed book for quite a while. I was aware that people had responsibilities for things like Foundation or Community and Vocational, but wasn't really aware of what that involved. In the Spring of 2007 Amal told me I would be responsible for Youth Services and for setting up a website during the following year. Having just ended forty years spent with young people, not all of it unalloyed pleasure, this came as a bit of a shock though I could understand his reasoning. I was a little surprised when I was asked to be Vice-President as well but this put the Presidency two years away and gave me a bit of time to find my feet and discover what was really going on. I was at the time taking on far too much consultancy work and there was little time for much else.

Then suddenly Thea decided that she would not be able to take on the Presidency after all, at least not immediately, so I was put in the position of taking it on myself or letting you all down. I don't frighten easily so I gritted my teeth and here I am.

Let me say straight away that you made me very welcome in the club and I was soon aware that you were a pretty special bunch. The meetings have a pleasant informality and warmth. We all seem to get on together very well and although many of you have been part of the club for over fifteen years, I was quickly made to feel one of the gang. I was amazed at the energy you put into both fund-raising activities and into the social activities which form such

an important part of the club. Meeting at breakfast time was a bit of a shock to the system but this is a really attractive venue and on a spring morning it's a lovely place to be.

I'm sorry this has been a fairly long preamble but there is a point. The club works and is important to all of you so as president I don't want to do anything that interferes with that in any way. However, all organisations, if they are to survive must move forward and change. One of the jobs of the club's president is to try and identify what change is needed and to develop a strategy to implement that change, preferably without throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

I recently set out my aims for the year in an E-Mail to Joe who was very useful in helping me to clarify my ideas. So here is the final list.

1. To devote our main fund-raising activities to reducing pre-natal and neo-natal mortality both here and in the Third World as requested by our incoming International President D.K.Lee. In this country it will be by supporting the research at University College Hospital led by Professor John Wyatt. I am in correspondence with him and hope to meet with him soon. If I can arrange it, I will get him to come and talk to us and to other local clubs about what he is doing. Our funds will be funnelled through the Touching Tiny Lives campaign organised by Action Medical Research. Each year in the UK 70,000 newborn babies need special care. Sadly, 50,000 babies are born prematurely. Tragically, more than 25 premature babies die every week because they were born too soon. I hope that what we do can help to improve this situation.

I propose to share our funds with a similar project in Cape Town to help health workers in poor communities to monitor the health of babies both before and after birth. A variety of devices have been and are being developed which are independent of a regular electricity supply. I would like us to help get these where they are needed most.

The first event to raise funds for Touching Tiny Lives will be a Hallowe'en Party in the Gothic splendour of the Great Hall at Forest School, who are kindly letting us have the venue at no cost. The date is Saturday, October 25 – please make sure it's in your diaries. I can guarantee you a splendid evening.

2. To work as closely as possible with other clubs in our area to ensure that our activities do not conflict or overlap, and that as far as possible we work together towards some common aims. Pru Chaudhury, the President Elect of Chigwell Club is herself a gynaecologist and she has already expressed an interest in our chosen charities, particularly if we can link it to similar work in India. I hope Jeremy here can help us to make this work.

3. To work with Thea, who follows me as President, and I hope with our Vice-President when we elect one, to establish long-term goals for the club. Thea has expressed a wish to shadow me this year so that she understands the job fully when she takes over. I am sure Amal will help us both with his experience this year as will the other past presidents on the Club Council.
4. To streamline the Club Council so that it becomes more effective in managing what we do. Before and while I wrote this speech, I had the Objects of Rotary sitting alongside the keyboard. What struck me was that the first object embodies the other three, which do little more than elaborate it. And this first aim falls into two parts:
 - to develop acquaintance
 - to use that acquaintance as an opportunity for service

I find it very helpful to separate these when planning for next year.

When I attended the training sessions for President Elects (or should that be Presidents Elect), as well as helping to put everything into the context of London District and beyond that of Rotary International as a whole, I was introduced by Jeremy here to the Club Leadership Plan. I wasn't immediately aware that this was something I didn't need to implement straight away. However, I did immediately see that the structure suggested for small clubs like ours actually fitted us rather well. There are many aspects to Rotary and a small club can't possibly throw its full energies into all of them. It needs a bit of simplification or we may all start running around like headless chickens. The amazing thing is that you have managed to get involved in so much but I think the strain is beginning to tell.

The Club Leadership Plan suggests that for a club like ours there should be a council of seven or eight members. The Immediate Past President, President Elect and Vice-President each take on a subsidiary role. Amal is taking on Membership and Thea The Rotary Foundation. However, two key players in this scheme are the Club Service Chair and the Club Administration Chair. These match well the two sides of the Rotary coin which I just highlighted. Angela and Christine are two of our most dedicated members and as such are vital to the successful future of the club. They have both worked tirelessly in the past to support our activities. They know precisely how much is involved in what we do and will I hope prevent me from being too ambitious in my plans. What I would like each of them to do is to lead a team concentrating on one of the two aspects of the club, Angela the fund-raising side and Christine to social and administrative side. Each will have a team to which they can delegate responsibility for particular activities. This may correspond to one of the former roles such as Youth Services which Genevieve has agreed to look after, or Protection Officer which Roger will continue to do. But it may also be the responsibility for planning and overseeing a particular event. I have made a list of

what has fallen into place so far and I hope we can quickly fill in the rest of the detail. What is important is that each of you has a part to play and that Angela and Christine can rely on all of you, as I will rely on the Club Council.

5. My fifth aim is to raise the profile of the club locally. Janice has kindly agreed to continue to handle our Public Relations and I know she will have lots of ideas. Yesterday I launched our club website www.rodinrotary.org.uk which will I hope become the best club website in London. I will act as site manager but I would like you all to contribute ideas, photographs, videos, advertisements. The website will be your main source of information about club activities. It takes a few minutes at most to add a new page so please bombard me with material.
6. I'm sure you all know what my sixth aim is – it is to increase our membership by at least three. Amal and I will be brainstorming ideas on what to do about this and presenting our ideas first to Club Council and then to the whole club. We can't allow ourselves to fail at this. The future of the club depends on it.
7. My final aim is for us all to have a good time so there will be lots of social activities. I hope to start my year with a party at our house. Ideally this will be in the garden if summer ever returns. But there are lots of other ideas. In the Spring I would like to take you down to Cornwall to show you some of the glories of a county I have got to know well since I went to teach there thirty years ago.

Thank you for listening and thank you for the marvellous support I know you will give me over the next twelve months. Amal is a hard act to follow but I am determined not to let you down.