

The Power of One

Editor's note: the following address was given at the 2010-2011 District 5550 Conference on June 11, 2011 in Dauphin, Manitoba.

by Peter Peters

It is a special honour to speak at your District Conference Governor Harvey and I am humbled by the invitation. What few people know about our District Governor is that he is a skilled carpenter and takes particularly pride in the work he does as a finish carpenter. Crucial to being in his trade is the ability to measure and cut with great accuracy. Now it matters not how skilled the carpenter, mistakes are made and on rare occasions cuts do not match or the angle is not quite right, and so in the carpenter's "tool kit" is a tube of wood filler. Well, something happened in the program planning and I can hear the breakfast conversation at the Hanson house when this is discovered.

"Oh my, oh my, what will we do?"

"Is there a problem?"

"Yes, Saturday keynote speaker just cancelled."

"Is that a problem?"

"Well of course it is how will we fill in the time?"

"What time slot do we have to fill?"

"Well, it is just after lunch and just before the Exchange Students make their spectacular presentation – it's like a 45 minute slot. Who do you think we could get as a filler? "

"You say, right after lunch and before the Students. Well, Rotarians have a tendency to check the inside of their eyelids right after they have eaten. So, why don't we invite Peter Peters, at least they won't miss anything and he sure won't disturb their sleep."

And so it came to pass.

This from the Unknown Poet:

I watched them tear a building down;

A gang of men in a busy town.

With a mighty heave and lusty yell,

They swung a beam and a side wall fell.

I asked the foremen, "Are these men as skilled

The kind of men you'd hire to build?"

He gave a laugh and said, "No indeed!

Just a common laborer is all I need.

For I can wreck in a day of two

What it took the builder a year to do.”

And I thought to myself as I went my way,

“Just which of these roles have I tried to play?

Am I a builder who works with care

Building others up by the rule and square,

Or am I a wrecker who walks the town

Content with the labor of tearing down?”

The power of one!

I recently viewed the trailer for the movie, *The Power of One*, which tells the intriguing story of the young English boy named Peekay and his passion for changing the world. It is the story of a boy with a dream.

“Oh,” shrug the aging, mature adults, “Changing the world is the dream of the youthful innocent.” Or is it?

Johnny Reid, the Scottish Country music singer has a popular ballad getting rave reviews on the Country music charts –

Today I’m Going to Try to Change the World.

I’m going to say hello to my neighbour, greet him with a smile.

Shake hands with a stranger, sit and talk with him awhile.

Tell someone I love them from the bottom of my heart

Today I’m going to try and change the world.

Over my life time I have claimed many person’s as my hero’s. Growing up in north western Saskatchewan I selected people like the Lone Ranger and Tonto and the Cisco Kid and Poncho, my mom and dad and my Aunt Helen, who helped me understand the importance of doing what is just and right and the importance of helping our neighbour. I have also claimed Dag Hammarskjold, Nelson Mandela, Steven Lewis, Martin Luther King, and Canada’s greatest Terry Fox. I have chosen Romeo Dallaire, Wanda Kraybell, Ron Noseworthy and Gord and Deb LeMaistre and my family as heroes. Heroes are ordinary people who go about life doing extra ordinary things.

I want to tell you the story of Leigh Lyons of Penoka, Alberta....

The power of one, did it change the world? Did it make a difference? It did to Leigh Lyons, it did to Leigh's family, and if there is a God, as I believe there is, it made a difference to God. The stranger made a difference that can not be measured.

We know the story of the young man throwing starfish back into the ocean after being washed on to the shore and how he responds to the old gentleman's wondering if throwing star fish back in the ocean makes a difference. The young man utters those fateful words as he picks up and throws another starfish back into the ocean, "It made a difference to that one!"

Mother Teresa said, "If you can't feed 100 people, feed one."

The world's Rotarians, and I suggest their families, share a common commitment to the Object of Rotary. We are in the business of fostering the ideal of service (service above self) by standing on the four components of the Object of Rotary. We know the importance of developing acquaintance as an opportunity of service. This is why the people involved in our District's Ripple Effect program in Guatemala spend significant effort developing a relationship with Rotarians in Guatemala and people in the communities where projects take place. Rotarians are advocates of "high ethical standards in our business and professions", so the term "business ethics" is not an oxymoron. We are a people who apply the ideal of service to our personal, professional and community lives, to ensure there is a consistency in all aspects of our being. And finally we stand together in our commitment to world understanding and peace. Those 4 pillars serve as "footings" in our international organization.

When we consider Rotary's standard of membership practice, The Four Way Test, we understand the foundation for Rotary. These four simple questions govern the very essence of the lives of Rotarians in over 33, 900 clubs in more than 200 countries and geographical regions around the world. These core values are accepted and practiced by a membership comprised of people of every faith and religious belief and those not without a faith connection. It is here that the power of one is multiplied by 1.2 million.

Our Rotary history, as most things in life, are a credit to some one, an individual demonstrating the power of one. Ideas, rarely if ever, are hatched in a committee, or at the AGM, or a political party or a special "think tank". They most often come as the result of a single person's thought. Rotary began because the lonely Chicago lawyer, Paul Harris gathered together 3 friends to see what they could do about starting a club rooted in down home fellowship while boosting business, all this in a thriving city – 1905. PAC McIntyre thought this Rotary club thing he learned about in Chicago was a good thing and so Rotary crossed an international border – Rotary came to Winnipeg – 1910. TRF came about because Arch Klumpf thought establishing an endowment fund "to do good in the world" was consistent with Rotary's commitment to peace – 1917.

Because of the peace position advocated by Rotarians over 4 decades, 49 Rotarians were invited to participate in the chartering of the United Nations – 1945.

W. Jack Davis, who one year later became the President of Rotary International, was instrumental in introducing the first 3H grant which saw the eradication of Polio in the Philippines, and served as the precursor for the PolioPlus program – 1976.

9 years later President of Rotary International, Carlos Canseco, announced a commitment to immunize the children of the world against polio. He advised Rotarians would raise \$125 million as our partnership commitment. We over shot

the target and raised \$246 million (the 48 clubs in the district at that time raised \$947,723.43 in that initial call for resources). Yesterday we hear the current statistics about this greatest of all time public health initiative.

Rotary's commitment to world understanding and peace has been enhanced by thousands of individual exchange, RYLA and Adventure students, Ambassadorial Scholars, Peace Scholars, Group Study Exchange members, University Teachers and Volunteers serving as "powers of one".

This power of one will become more real in a few moments when those 19 Exchange Students come into this room. You must multiply these 19 by 2 as there are an equal number of students out there some where in this world representing this district. But Youth Exchange is bigger than these 38 students for there are families in sponsor and host districts around the world who became part of this experience. Clubs, school communities and the communities themselves are caught up and so the world becomes smaller and better understood. This is a program touches the lives of thousands, no millions of people, year after year. Because someone had an idea the world is changed. Is all this making a difference in the world?

I believe W. Jack Davis President of Rotary International 1977-78 had it right when he suggested at the 1977 Rotary international Convention, "We would do well to remember that much of the trouble in the world today is not so much the noise of the bad as it is the silence of the good."

Through the focused work of our public relations effort we are making inroads to breaking the silence.

The "power of one" exists in each of us and it is liberated when we adopt what I suggest are the 4 "C" pillars of life.

The first one is Consistency. Consistency is about being the same, where ever life finds me – whether at home, at work, in my social time or during my worshipful time if I set such aside. How do I go about my town – building up folks or tearing them down? Do you think this is the stranger with the red Ferrari's first good deed? Or do you think Stephen Lewis is only passionate about the HIV/Aids in Africa when there is a media camera in his face? Or that Ron Noseworthy is only thinking about addressing disasters when he is in a room full of Rotarians? Or that our daughter is only compassionate when she is in a room with a cancer patient? The dictionary speaks of consistency as a "consistency of behavior".

The second "C" is Credibility. Rotarians know about credibility because this is the challenge presented by the 4 – Way Test. It is the business of saying what we will do and doing what we say.

Is it the TRUTH?

Is it FAIR to all concerned?

Will it BUILD good will and better FRIENDSHIPS

Is it BENEFICIAL to all concerned?

I submit these four simple statements, when practised by an ever larger segment of the population, will change the world. Should the legislatures and houses of Parliament of nations, including our own, choose to live by the dictates of The Four Way Test the result would see intelligent debate and appreciated action; it would bring about an air of respect, tolerance, and orderly conduct; and, it would make visits to these institutions an experience for positive learning.

The third "C" is Continuity – follows closely behind consistency, but is uniquely different. It has been said that the world can be divided into 2 kinds of people – the "I have to" and the "I chose to". There is only one thing we have to do and that is to die. No one can skip that part – everything else is a choice.

The power of choices is best demonstrated by the story of Viktor Frankl, the Austrian Psychologist and Psychiatrist, who survived the death camps of Nazi Germany by making a life saving discovery. Frankl's parents, his brother and his wife died in the camp. Viktor wondered what made it possible for some to survive while most died – was it health, vitality, family structure, intelligence or was it some other survival skill. He determined that while some of these factors played into one's survival none were the primary reason. The single most significant factor was the sense of future vision. The driving conviction that there was still something that needed to be accomplished.

One day cold and alone he came to the realization there was one thing his captors could not take from him – he alone could decide how all the things that were impacting his life were going to affect him.

With this realization he pictured himself lecturing to large bodies of students about his experiences. As this small seed of survival took hold and grew he realized that while he was confined by his captors, he in fact had more freedom than anyone because he had the ability to choose his response.

Continuity is the business of choosing to hold firm to principle and value. As things in the world change and as we change adapting to the new environment, we must hold on to our values for therein lies our sanity.

The fourth “C” is Courage – On the topic of courage, Mark Twain once observed: “It is curious – curious that physical courage should be so common in the world and moral courage so rare.”

We need the courage to challenge alterations to what is good and useful and productive. To have the courage to set aside my own bias and change my mind while holding to my values. The Honourable Dr. Lynda Haverstock, Saskatchewan's 19th LG and now the President and CEO of Tourism Saskatchewan, spoke to the Rotary Club of Regina Eastview 10 days ago, made an observation which has application here. She was speaking about how Canada is perceived by other nations and in response to this question a Canadian Diplomat to India suggested that Canada had become “irrelevant”. Dr Haverstock challenged us if we did not wish to become irrelevant then we must move away from “being satisfied with our opinions and happy with our level of knowledge.” This means that if we want to keep connected with our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, then we better be ready to get on the technological band wagon.

We have to have the courage to clean out the closets of our mind, much the same as we do those in our homes and pitch away the useless, unused and no longer applicable stuff.

These 4 “C” pillars are the foundation for taking responsibility for our lives and what we do with the skills and talents with which we have been blessed. Rabbi Harold Kushner in his book “When all You've Ever Wanted is not Enough” tells the story of a Mediaeval Spanish monk who wrote in his journal:

“I am confident that after my death I will go to heaven, because I have never made a decision on my own. I have always followed the orders of my superiors, and therefore if I have erred the sin is theirs and not mine”.

As with the medieval Spanish monk, there are many for whom responsibility is a detachable burden, easily shifted to the shoulder of God, fortune, luck or one's neighbor. For those in Astrology and the readers of horoscopes, it is even customary to hang it on a star. Responsibility is not detachable. For us in this land of opportunity and freedom it is a privilege we carry.

Let me take you back to my story of the stranger with the red Ferrari. While we may be caught up by this man's actions, in this Rotary audience it is a story that gets repeated in different ways hundreds of times a day. While you may not get your story on the front page of your local paper, never forget that metaphorically we all drive red Ferrari's and on behave of all the people in need thank you for stopping picking them up and giving them a ride. For you are the “power of one”.