

# What Makes a Great Leader? Rotary Program Hears from Our Own Leaders

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By Jeanne McKnight

What is this quality called “Leadership”? Is leadership a quality that can be taught? Learned?

As President-elect **Cindy Runger** called the August 16 meeting to order, she pointed out that, as one of the world’s largest Rotary clubs, Seattle #4 is privileged to have many world-class leaders in its membership roster—four of whom would be featured in the main program.

In his Invocation, **Tom Mesaros** asked for divine guidance for leaders: “Guide their voices,” he said, and “let us speak with love and concern for others.”

Following the Invocation, banjo-playing **Trish Bostrom**, accompanied by **David Woodward**, led us in singing “Blowin’ in the Wind,” an apt choice of song for a meeting that would be focused on the theme of the role of great leaders to listen (“...how many ears does it take?”) and inspire.

**Cindy** introduced guests and visiting Rotarians, followed by **Rob Lobosco** presenting prospective members. Among the guests: Cindy’s son, Thor.

**Jayne Pryor** and **John Steckler** then presented our newest and very accomplished members, **Lacey Clark** and **Mark Dyce-Ryan**.

**Corinne Cavanaugh** encouraged members to take the brief time required to fill out a short Membership Survey; **Daron Vchulek** mentioned a membership opportunity, to paint the Spruce Street Dorm. **Brandon Hank** invited Rotarians to a Seattle Sounders game—a fundraising event for Seattle City Rotaract.

President-elect **Cindy** then introduced Past-president **Dorothy Bullitt**, “now in her sixth career”, who set the stage for three subsequent—and very brief—leadership talks by Past-presidents **Bill Center** and



**Paul Ishii**, as well as **Diankha Linear**.

In her talk, [Leadership: It's All About Respect](#), **Dorothy** asked, “What does it take to be a leader? Does it require positional authority? Does it require a certain voice? A certain look? A powerful physical presence?” She noted that “it’s easy to recognize” the leadership qualities in President **Mark Wright**, adding that Admiral **Tom Hayward** also comes across as a natural leader: “A decorated war veteran (who as Chief of Naval Operations ran the U.S. Navy day-to-day), **Tom** once had tremendous positional authority.” She drew a few laughs when she added, “Like **Mark**, he has the appearance of a rugged matinee idol and he exudes charisma.”

And while both President **Mark Wright** and Admiral **Tom Hayward** can command a room, “there are indeed, aspects of **Mark** and Admiral **Tom** that are NOT immediately obvious—yet have been critical to their success”: “Authenticity, Practice, and Respect.”

In looking at this trait called AUTHENTICITY, **Dorothy** encouraged everyone to “Look around you,” and ask, “Who seems comfortable in his or her own skin?” She encouraged everyone to think about “who we are,” then “identify and build on our strengths,” as well as “recognize and compensate for our weaknesses.”



Incorporating examples of fellow Rotarians into her talk, **Dorothy** suggested that “leaders can function in many ways and still be effective.” Some are highly analytical, she noted, while others are task-oriented. Still other effective leaders focus on relationships and harmony; some instead “are more creative and spontaneous.” The key, said **Dorothy**, is to “know who we are” and be “aware of our strengths and conscious of our weaknesses.” Only then, she said, can we “communicate with a power that will cause others to take note.” Finally, “When we are comfortable in our own skin, those around us can relax, and become more willing to follow our lead.”

For her second key point, **Dorothy** mentioned PRACTICE—the process of refining the skills of leadership such as public speaking, persuasive writing, critical thinking, active listening, and effective team building.

**Dorothy** suggested ways that she has used in her career to build effective teams—a vital skill set in any leader, she noted. She emphasized the importance of conversations and of establishing metrics for success, and then aligning members’ responsibilities with sufficient authority and resources.

In mentioning the third leadership trait, RESPECT, **Dorothy** asked “Why is respect a tenet of leadership?” In answering her own question, Dorothy said, “In the public, private, and non-profit sectors, and in life outside the workplace, the best leaders exhibit certain behaviors that signal and engender respect”:

- Turning up on time
- Following through on commitments, however small

- Treating others with courtesy, regardless of position, and
- Living by the four-way test.

Respect, she added, also “requires us to recognize one another’s humanity.”

Before opening the discussion with other Rotary leaders, **Dorothy** asserted that “Everyone has the potential to become an effective leader in some realm.” While not everyone possesses the charisma, presence, and compelling voice of a **Mark Wright** or Admiral **Tom Hayward**, “all of us can get there by”:

- Discovering our authentic selves and our natural communication styles
- Cultivating our strengths
- Recognizing, then mitigating our weaknesses
- Practicing the SKILLS of leadership; and
- Treating others with respect by recognizing their humanity.

**Dorothy** next invited Past President, Admiral **Bill Center** to the stage to give his brief take on leadership.



“You’ve probably never given it much thought, but in the same sense we’d say the core expertise of a doctor is ‘medicine’ or that of a lawyer is ‘the law,’ the core expertise of a military officer is ‘leadership,’” noted **Bill**. He pointed out the “foundational leadership principles” that he was taught, as set forth by military historian, Douglas Southall Freeman. The best leaders, according to Freeman, have three characteristics in common:

1. They “know their stuff”;
2. They demonstrate “high character”; and
3. They “take care of their people.”

In recounting these three, **Bill** asserted that “character comes first!” Character and trust, noted **Bill**, is “the bedrock of leadership,” adding that “we don’t follow people we don’t trust.”

He also defined what it means to “take care of your people”: “As the Marines like to say – *Officers eat last!*” For leaders in the business world, this means taking care of your people, “being every bit as committed to their advancement as they are to your mission.”

Past President **Paul Ishii** took to the podium next for his four-minutes of leadership observations. He talked about “intuitive leadership” – “based on what one feels to be true even without conscious reasoning.”

**Paul** suggested some reading/viewing for those interested in intuitive leadership:

*Blink: The Power of Thinking without Thinking*, by Malcolm Gladwell;

*An Ordinary Man*, by Paul Rusesabagina;

*Sully*, the film, with Sully played by Tom Hanks, as an illustration of how a seasoned pilot does the right thing at the right time and, at the last moment, intuitively—noting that “that is making decisions ‘on the fly!’”



**Paul** added some observations of his leadership as a hotelier, working for an independent, family-owned hotel where he had to compete with the Hiltons, Marriotts, and Hyatts: “It was like the movie ‘Home Alone’ and I enjoyed the independence!”

**Paul Ishii’s List of 13 Suggestions for Leaders:**

1. Do not lose touch with the LCDs (Lowest Common Denominators) of your business. Keep in touch with your product.
2. Copy others, and refine it. Don’t be proud.
3. Don’t panic! Count to 10, OK—now panic!
4. Find good mentors, role models, and be a good role model yourself.
5. Practice diversity in the workplace. “Combo pizzas are better than just plain cheese...Are you faking diversity or doing it?”
6. Say when you do not know. You will save a lot of time, and big mistakes!
7. Provide lots of chances.
8. The Open-Door policy is critical. Many employees do not have this gift in their daily lives. Knowing that you can be heard and be respected is powerful and healing.
9. Confirmation is fine, too. Discovery is not the only thing.
10. Have a sense of humor...laugh.
11. Know when to retreat or even give up.
12. Practice saying sorry and thank you.
13. Practice hospitality, civility, and community—the basics of a Rotarian.

Finally, **Diankha Linear** discussed what in her mind makes a good leader:

- They continuously improve
- They develop people
- They earn respect.

In her past career as a military officer and now a leader in the legal department at Nordstrom, Diankha talked about a way to communicate from Dr. Gary Chapman, known as “The Five Love Languages”:

1. Words of affirmation
2. Quality time and quality conversation
3. Receiving gifts
4. Acts of service
5. Physical touch



A short question and answer period followed, and the program closed with President-elect **Cindy** asking each panelist to reveal *their* “language.”