

# Hanna Paul

Customer Success Director, Ideawake

Member since December 2022

Hanna Paul has a North Star: “To do whatever I can to ease the suffering of people in the world.”

An old soul, Hanna adopted this guiding principle at an early age, and it has steered her throughout her education, career and in the development of her interests, including her decision to join the Rotary Club.

Hanna is serious and pragmatic in pursuing her North Star. She’s also the radiant free spirit you want to dance with under a full moon at Bradford Beach. This delightful dichotomy is part of what makes Hanna an outstanding Rotarian. She’s here for the work. And the fun.



Born the youngest of three to a tight-knit family in Appleton, Wisconsin, Hanna has always had a fire inside. “Spicy,” she replies instantly when asked how her family would describe her. “My mother always said my sister was black pepper, my brother was salt and I was cayenne pepper.”

Hanna credits her mother and aunt for inspiring her drive. Her mother worked in strategic public policy in Government Relations for Humana, while her aunt worked in nursing as a chief nurse officer.

“They were innovators in their fields and had executive level positions,” she said. “They showed me I could do anything. I just never questioned a world where a woman could be on top.”

Hanna’s father was a middle school teacher and coach of various sports. He provided steadfast support while coaching her in soccer, basketball and softball.



Born from her family’s unconditional love, Hanna’s compassion for others is second nature.

“My parents loved me so well. I feel I have a duty to give back. I believe love is the most powerful thing,” she says. An avid music lover, one of Hanna’s favorite quotes is “Love is the loudest sound” from Lane 8’s song “Brightest Lights.”

Sometimes the brightest lights are burnished through hardship. Losing many family members in childhood and navigating a serious misdiagnosis (her doctors believed she had fibromyalgia for several years) attuned Hanna to how precious life is. She also developed a unique perspective through her work as an occupational therapist. Hanna graduated Summa Cum Laude from UW-Milwaukee, where she earned a bachelor’s degree in occupational science and later a master’s degree in occupational therapy.

“When I was in my 20s, I was working with patients recovering from a stroke, helping them relearn how to pick up a glass of water to drink. I was in a different place from others my age.”

Through her work as an occupational therapist (OT), Hanna realized she had a knack for patient care.

“I was able to connect with people right away. I’m very proud that I could meet them where they were—often a very vulnerable place—and give them hope.”

At a friend’s urging, she embarked on a two-year travel therapy program to the San Francisco Bay Area. There she discovered a job post for a startup company looking to hire OTs to treat chronic pain using virtual reality. Intrigued, Hanna stepped one foot into startup land and became hooked. She witnessed patients with severe pain and limited movement move comfortably and freely with the use of a virtual reality headset. She also enjoyed the fast pace of Silicon Valley.

“There was no red tape. You just got things done.”

After Hanna resettled in Milwaukee, she was recruited by another startup (and her current employer), Ideawake, which designs company’s programs based on employee feedback.

“We give a voice to employees to be part of the innovation process. We’re like an online suggestion box on steroids.” Hanna also found new joy exploring Milwaukee’s art scene.

“It changed everything. Great art brings me to the present moment. I realized I love to dance and now I dance everywhere—my living room, my kitchen...I just let Spotify play and dance.” Hanna also recommends MKE Gallery Night, WMSE Art and Music and the Joy Engine events.

After the murder of George Floyd in 2020, Hanna experienced a personal reckoning.

“I asked myself, ‘How am I contributing to the world? I realized I wasn’t doing enough. I didn’t want to reinvent the wheel, so I starting looking for who was already doing the work.’”

Following her North Star again, Hanna discovered Forward 48, a premier leadership development program in Southeastern Wisconsin that provides a six-week curriculum in civic engagement for 48 emerging leaders.

Current Rotary President Saj Thachenkary addressed Hanna’s cohort at their graduation, and Hanna attended a Rotary lunch as Saj’s guest soon after. Hanna joined Rotary in 2022 and is an enthusiastic advocate for the club. She recently began her term as Sergeant at Arms on the Rotary Board. She also co-chairs the Art Connector program and is on the Member Engagement Committee.

Of all that Hanna loves about Rotary, she values its people the most.

“Finding a community of thought leaders through Rotary has made a huge difference in my life. Their openness to help inspires me.”.



**Editor’s Note:** *Rotary People of Action* is a bi-monthly series written by a group of Rotarians. This feature was written by Elizabeth Evans Draper.