



Education
and training
are crucial
components
of club
fellowship
and service.

Leading the Way

by Matthew C. Brown

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– Leigh Higinbotham,
Rotary trainer

When asked about the importance of RI’s Leadership Education and Training Program, Leigh Higinbotham invokes a well-worn but apt metaphor. “What you see the president do at your weekly club meeting is just the tip of the iceberg,” he says, emphasizing that the majority of an effective president’s duties take place out of sight – below the surface, if you will.

A member of the Rotary Education and Training Executive Steering Committee and past governor of District 5040 (British Columbia, Canada), Higinbotham, who is widely regarded as one of Rotary's top trainers, recalls attending his first presidents-elect training seminar (PETS) in the winter of 1989. "I thought I already understood what a president's responsibilities were," he says. But as he drove home from the seminar, Higinbotham reflected on his training experience, which he had found edifying. "How could a single weekend have such an impact on me?" he asked himself.

In essence, Higinbotham had learned that while 1 July officially marks the beginning of the Rotary year, by the time that date arrives, the leadership of productive clubs and districts has been preparing for months. He believes that with Rotary's annual turnover of officers, it's imperative that leaders ready themselves for the year ahead. "If they hit 1 July knowing what resources they have available to them, chances are a lot is going to get done," he says. And, of course, the converse is also true: A president who takes office unprepared, expecting just to learn "on the job," is already hamstrung.

Dave Linett, general chairman of the RI Education and Training Task Force, was recently the featured Rotary trainer on the RI Web site (www.rotary.org). "Annual turnover means that clubs need a constant influx of good leaders to keep the momentum going," he says. Training is essential to cultivate these new leaders and to provide the organization – the clubs and districts – with the continuity necessary to carry out the humanitarian mission of Rotary. In effect, with proper preparation, Rotary's turnover is a positive force: New leaders continually reinvigorate their clubs.

At PETS, Higinbotham learned more than just the necessity of preparation. "I also learned how to put a team together, and to plan, set goals, and give club members ownership of those goals." Perhaps most significant, Higinbotham learned that trained leaders are vital in order for club fellowship and service.

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— Leigh Higinbotham



Leigh Higinbotham, one of Rotary's top trainers, talks to Lynn Killinger (left) and Don Zeigler of the Rotary Club of Evanston Lighthouse, Ill., USA.

As chairman of the 10-district Pacific Northwest PETS, Higinbotham oversees the training of about 600 presidents-elect. He says these larger, combined seminars have several advantages over the traditional, single-district PETS. "With a multidistrict PETS," Higinbotham says, "we have the ability to attract top speakers who give insights on leadership and motivation." Other advantages include tighter consistency year to year, more opportunities for networking, and increased efficiency by being able to group presidents-elect by club size, experience level, and other shared characteristics.

But the single-district PETS has its strengths also: increased team-building opportunities for district leaders (governor-elect, assistant governors, and presidents-elect), more direct contact between the presidents-elect and the governor-elect, less bureaucracy, fewer language and cultural differences among participants, and more easily managed logistics.

Regardless of how many districts are involved, PETS is "probably Rotary's most important training session," Higinbotham says. "It's where we learn skills that are applicable to service projects and where we learn how to support the Foundation."

He recounts a story about a project in which another nongovernmental organization donated tractors to a poor community in an African nation. However, the charitable group forgot to take into account the ongoing need for fuel and spare parts – commodities of great scarcity in that area – and the project ultimately failed. But Higinbotham says that with a basic needs-assessment study – a planning tool emphasized at PETS – the project would have had a much better chance of succeeding.

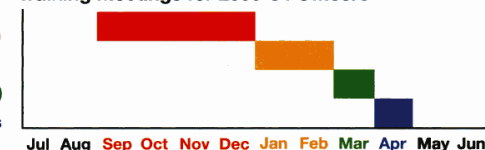
RI recommends a clear leadership-development training cycle (see chart above). It begins with governors-elect training seminars (GETS), which, in conjunction with Rotary zone institutes (for past, current, and incoming governors), take place from September through December. Rotary regional Foundation seminars are also held concurrently with the zone institutes. Sometime before 15 February, governors-elect attend the International Assembly [see "The Anaheim Adventure," April 2002], an intense training meeting convened by the RI president and focused on the coming Rotary year. Following the assembly, each governor-elect leads a district team training seminar for the district's assistant governors, committee chairs, and committee members.

The presidents-elect training seminars, convened by the governors-elect, take place in March, followed by the district assemblies, which are for club leaders and committee chairs. "A district assembly allows an incredible transfer of ideas," Higinbotham says, and inspired leaders carry these ideas back to their clubs.

Two other annual district meetings – the leadership seminar and Rotary Foundation seminar – are convened by the sitting governor. Any interested Rotarian can attend Rotary Foundation seminars, where topics discussed include setting and achieving Foundation goals and the procedure for using District Designated Funds.

GETS (governors-elect)
International Assembly
PETS (presidents-elect)
District assemblies

Training Meetings for 2003-04 Officers



Bill Dimond, past governor of District 6360 (Michigan, USA), says that leadership skills learned through Rotary training are directly applicable to members' vocations. "Service organizations are just like a business," he says, explaining that, at least in his district, most presidents-elect have been Rotarians only four or five years. The challenge, he says, is helping these relatively new Rotarians develop the necessary skills and knowledge to assume Rotary leadership positions. For example, a president-elect who wants to initiate a Matching Grant project must understand what a Matching Grant is, where to find an application, and how to identify – and contact – clubs in other parts of the world to partner with.

"We need to help our club presidents have a wider view of the organization," Dimond says, emphasizing that most Rotarians don't work for companies on the scale of Rotary (1.2 million members in 163 countries). "A lot of small-business people don't have the chance for training. With Rotary, there is a tremendous opportunity to develop organizational and management skills."

Leadership and education materials are developed at and distributed from RI World Headquarters in Evanston, Ill., USA. "It's a work-in-progress," Dimond says of the training manuals, charts, and transparencies assembled that are continually being revised to meet changing audience needs. "But I'm tremendously impressed with what they've done." Although he considers the majority of the training program to be "pretty well on target," Dimond says it's important for clubs and districts to adapt the materials to meet their local needs.

Michele Berg is manager of the RI Leadership Education and Training Department. "Each year we continue to expand the support materials we provide," she says. "For these materials

to be relevant and effective, they must be developed with direct input from the Rotarians who use them."

Berg explains that in creating new training materials and publications, her department works closely with the RI committee charged with leadership development matters. Staff members consult with Rotarians who serve as trainers at Rotary events at the district, zone, and international levels, as well as Rotarians who are professional trainers. They also use surveys to evaluate the effectiveness of the materials and update them as needed.

"Rotary's work is done at the club level," says Higinbotham. "All those [leaders] above and beyond that level are there to support and help the clubs." And if clubs are the foundation of Rotary, training is a means to strengthen that foundation, which also translates to membership development. Only strong clubs with direction and focus will attract – and retain – members.

"Rotary offers people a real opportunity," Higinbotham says, concurring with Dimond. Clearly, leadership training and development are an extension of that opportunity. As Dave Linett says: "Leadership skills are necessary to be able to harness the energies and talents of outstanding members who would probably not participate in community and international service were it not for the power of the group."

"If you really want to be a good Rotary leader, get some good Rotary education." ☺

♦ Matthew C. Brown is an assistant editor of THE ROTARIAN.

To learn more about leadership education and training, visit www.rotary.org/leadership.