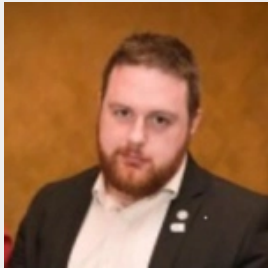


Rotary Voices

Stories of service from around the world

Holding a changeover ceremony virtually

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Stephen Sennett

By Stephen Sennett, secretary-elect, Rotary E-Club of Melbourne, Australia

The end of the Rotary year is fast approaching. And with that, clubs are beginning to think about their traditional changeover ceremonies. Like many things in the world after the COVID-19 pandemic, having these in person isn't an option. Clubs are asking, should we postpone or cancel? I want to pose another question, why not adapt and hold one virtually?

It may seem beyond reach to organize. But my fellow Australians will remember the highly successful re-imagining of ANZAC Day; an entire set of cultural ceremonies typically built around physical proximity. An unlike ANZAC Day, we already have lots of experience in the world of virtual events.

The first thing a club needs to do is ask why a changeover is important to you. "Rotary chicken dinner" aside, this answer varies from club to club. But it is the key to designing a virtual event that will capture all the significance of an in-person one. Typical elements of a changeover include:

- **Celebrating accomplishments.** This involves looking back on a year of hard work. This shouldn't just be a vanity for the president and board, but something all members can take pride in.
- **Acknowledging service.** Honoring those members who stand out among us is still important. Hard work in service and generous giving should be celebrated.
- **Looking forward** to the year ahead. We need to get excited about new opportunities for service, and opportunities to work together for a brighter future. This is what hope is built upon.
- **Sharing fellowship.** Now more than ever we need to stay connected. While it can be difficult to banter over zoom, we need to keep the bonds of friendship strong.

But how do we plan such an event? Here are some tips for each stage.

- **Setting the agenda.** Good news here. Your agenda doesn't have to change! If your club has a program, use it and convert it to work online.



Running the event. Have a good master of ceremonies. You will need this person to keep things moving, keep the audience interested, and keep everything running on time. They should know the platform and what features it offers for hosting an event. Being able to mute some participants can come in handy. It is also useful to have a second person manage the technology while your master of ceremonies handles the people.

- **Handling awards.** Set aside time for the club president to announce award recipients. For those awards that are not a surprise, like Paul Harris Fellow upgrades, mail them early, and have members show off their new award as they're announced. Other awards can be mailed ahead for the recipient to display during the ceremony. If your club has a tradition of passing a gavel or handing over a presidential collar, consider doing it ahead and recording a video.
- **Managing a large audience.** Anyone who has been in a large Zoom call knows that it's hard to spot who is talking, or where a particular person is, even if they're the only ones unmuted. The **Spotlight Video** feature of Zoom allows the host to select a single person to display to everyone. During awards presentations, this can help zero in on the person of the moment. With any large event, it's good to plan early and practice ahead of time.

Why not put it on hold until after the pandemic? You could. Your club's changeover belongs to your club, and the event is run for the benefit of your members. But before you rush to do that, consider that changeovers are moments in time, and we hold them as close as possible to the turn of the Rotary year as a point of significance in transition. The further away from 1 July the event is, the less meaning it may hold. Would a physical changeover in November be more meaningful than a virtual one in June?

COVID-19 is a challenge. Even with all our efforts, members might find it hard to feel as attached as they did. Changeovers are a beautiful occasion to celebrate what we do, and the value of being a part of the club. If we just ignore such a pivotal event, will it be harder for our members to feel excited about paying their dues come July?

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