



ROTARY DISTRICT 5030

in the Seattle area

Rotary Program University

a service of Rotary District 5030

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Introduction

When you're invited to participate in a business meeting, what's the first question you usually ask? "What's the meeting about?" Right? So, why is it so different when we're considering weekly speakers at our Rotary clubs? **IF** Rotary is really about "Service Above Self" and community service (and of course it is), then why don't we use our weekly meetings to talk about the issues that are most important to our local communities and neighborhoods? To talk about the issues that other community leaders are talking about?

We can and we should. But it takes work, and it takes thoughtfulness. Many Rotary clubs approach their weekly speakers program exactly backwards: They first ask "whom can we get to speak" and then, often as an afterthought, ask "oh, by the way, what will s/he speak about"? We call this the "any willing speaker" approach to programming. It virtually guarantees dull, boring, irrelevant speakers from week to week.

So, if that's the wrong way, what's the right way? That's what Rotary Program University (RPU) is about. RPU is a confederation of Rotary club "program activists," mostly Program Chairs in the Seattle area, who work together to help improve the speakers we get at our clubs from week to week by making them more relevant to our service to our communities.

RPU is based on a three-legged stool: 1) This handbook; 2) An active list of recommended speakers and their topics that we e-distribute periodically and on-demand; and 3) Online discussion on www.Linkedin.com about program issues important to us as Rotary club Program activists. Thus, RPU is available to any Rotarian ANYwhere who has access to a computer and broadband. But it does take work and thoughtfulness. Your work (i.e., "service above self") begins now.

What “Programs” Means in Rotary-Speak

Up until just a few months ago, you could go to any Rotary Website (including RI’s) and do a search for “programs,” and what you’d get was a list of projects and activities being done by a club, district or RI. Lots of great information about water projects, international polio progress, tree plantings, support for programs for the homeless and the many other terrific things that Rotarians around the world do.

What you would NOT find, however (and still can’t to the best of our knowledge), is information and guidance about what many of us know as “programs”: the speakers, topics and methods of identifying and selecting them week-by-week by Rotary club Program Committees. We find this slightly more than unusual, because many Rotarians recognize that, after service, it is the weekly programs of speakers that is the glue that holds most Rotary clubs together. It is the set of weekly programs that is the one thing that all Rotary club members do together in most cases during the course of the year. And there’s virtually no information available about how to do “programs” well. We have found that in most cases, someone in the club is identified to be the Program Chair for the year (often without any Program Committee experience at all) and is then thrown into the deep end of the pool. SWIM! ... or sink. More likely, somewhere in-between.

To be absolutely fair, some things have been done in the past. Past District 5030 Governor Stan Dickison has mailed out lists of possible speakers to Rotary clubs in the Seattle area for quite a few years. And others have helped, too.

There’s a further Rotary oddity to weekly “programs.” We all know full well that Rotary has a GREAT service ethic embodied by “Service Above Self.” Yet, the weekly program is the last thing that nearly all Rotary clubs do exclusively for themselves. You have to be either a Rotarian or a Guest, and in the meeting room on the day of the Rotary meeting, in order to benefit from the weekly program. Wouldn’t it be interesting if we defined the “self” in Service Above Self as meaning the club as an individual entity? If interpreted in this way, we could also approach weekly programs as a community service activity, too. Doing “club service” while performing “community service.” There are those of us who think we should!

Therefore, because there’s little discipline, no orientation or training and virtually no sharing of “best practices” among current or past program chairs, and with the enthusiastic encouragement of several past, present and future District 5030 Governors, we have undertaken the development of this “Rotary Program University” as an ongoing effort to offer an orientation to incoming Rotary Club Program Chairs and to continue to work with one another to evaluate and improve the weekly programs we offer our fellow Rotarian Members, their Guests and the communities and neighborhoods in which we live and work.

Programs: The Glue that Holds Our Clubs Together

For several years, Programs (speakers) at Seattle area rotary clubs have been selected because they can do one of three things inside the club: Educate, inform or entertain.

What's the BEST we can do with our Program resource of weekly speakers? Many people want to speak at Rotary clubs. RPU has recently been contacted by two PR people wanting time at our microphones. One for himself and the other for a client. One of our Past District Governors is fond of saying that the Rotary leadership list is the most desirable marketing list in the world, and it's very likely this is true in most of our communities. Should we just sit and wait for ideas to come knocking at our doors, or should we go out and energize speaker opportunities? What is a "GREAT Rotary Program"? How often do we aim too low in our aspirations for Rotary Programs?

Where Program Ideas Come From

There's a tendency for new Program Chairs to think that they're in this alone. After accepting the invitation to become Program Chair and having some time to think about it further, a person might often think, "Oh my god, how am I ever going to find enough speakers to fill a year worth of Programs?" The truth of the matter is that there are always quite a few sources of ideas for Programs. Among them are:

- Your club President (be careful, though, that s/he has Program experience!)
- Your club Program Committee
- Book publishers
- Club members
- PR departments of local/regional companies and other institutions
- Ideas from other Rotary clubs
- Rotary District leaders
- Your own ideas; and finally
- Rotary Program University

The most important take-away from this is that there's rarely any need to hurry into Program scheduling. But start working on it early: A good Program Committee should have at least six months to get started. There's some degree of comfort in thinking that a full Program schedule is a good Program schedule. That may be true; but another value is to allow yourself and your club the flexibility of capturing the last-minute opportunity.

Speaker / Topic Selection: You're going to be jostled by people with "great program" ideas. Some of them actually may be great; many of them will be marginal at best. These ideas may come from newspaper articles, a television program, the Internet and very often from peoples' own employers.

The "Three Plus 1" Approach: As noted previously, the three most common purposes of Rotary club programming are education, information and entertainment. What might happen if a fourth -- "community service" -- was added? Ask yourself this question: **IF** it's true that Rotary is comprised of local indigenous leaders who are dedicated to community service, then shouldn't we be dedicating at least some of our Program effort to discussions

about local issues that other local leaders are talking about? And further, if Rotary clubs are adding value to resolving local issues, won't that make them more attractive meeting places for other non-Rotarian local leaders (think "Membership Development" here)?

What are these important local issues? They're questions about local education, health care, transportation, terrorism, service to veterans, polio, law and justice, human services, energy and a whole host of others. (NOTE: RPU makes available a handy spreadsheet that can help your Rotary club identify these local issues. Just ask for it at David@DavidEndicott.us and we'll gladly e-send it to you.)

The Most Important Skill for a Program Chair

As my term as a Rotary Program Chair began, I quickly learned that lots of people have ideas for prospective speakers. And a few of those ideas are fairly good. What they don't take into account is the whole range of Programs that the club should be covering during the upcoming year. So, I quickly had to learn the importance of saying "No" gracefully. What's your defense? A good defense is a GREAT offense. Know what you want to do. Know what your own "Program for Programs" is. Write it down. The written plan should include flexibility to allow the presentation of Programs covering local, regional, national or international issues that the majority of your membership agrees is important.

Does your President have a theme for his/her year? How are you going to use your Program resource to help him/her implement that theme?

Fairness versus "equal time": Many contemporary issues can be viewed from more than one vantage point. When addressing these issues, will you be consistent with Rotary's Four Way Test? How do you give all sides in any issue the opportunity to make their case to your club? Should you do that? Good questions.

One way is to schedule all sides at the same Rotary meeting. If there are more than three perspectives to any issue, this may be difficult.

Another way is to schedule contrasting issue perspectives in subsequent week's Rotary meetings.

Just so you know, there is a Rotary Programming philosophy that holds that one issue perspective has not been adequately offered to the community and that Rotary Program time should be used to give it equal weight. This is a tough decision to make, but that's part of great Rotary Programming. We'll be discussing this more in the future.

Who REALLY makes the final decision about speakers & topics: In most clubs, the President is the final decision-maker, but s/he usually relies heavily on the Program Chair and Program Committee. The President needs to be careful in frequently overruling Program Committee decisions because they can get the opinion that their work isn't necessary.

Options to small clubs for landing very prominent speakers: A "small club" is a small club, right? Well, maybe not. Some Rotary clubs in District 5030 have discovered that they can attract more prominent speakers by combining for a weekly meeting. In that way, three or

four clubs of 30 people become a club of more than 100. A hundred local decision-makers dedicated to community service becomes a pretty attractive group for many speakers.

We've also become aware of the following Program that's been assembled by Rotary International with the United Nations. To strengthen Rotary's longstanding relationship with the UN, the two organizations have developed a new, specialized speaker's bureau. The United Nations-Rotary Outreach Programme enables Rotary members to receive the latest information on key humanitarian and global issues through UN briefings to Rotary groups on a wide range of topics, including:

- Overview of the United Nations
- UN Millennium Development Goals
- Peacekeeping issues
- Security Council and sanctions issues
- Economic development
- Sustainable development and environmental issues
- The UN and civil society/nongovernmental organizations
- Disarmament issues
- Humanitarian affairs
- Women's issues
- Human trafficking
- Refugee issues
- Human rights

You can get more information about this Rotary/UN program at this site:

http://www.rotary.org/en/MediaAndNews/News/Pages/080310_news_rotaryunpartnership.aspx

Speaker Orientation: Many speakers are motivated by their own self-interest and have no idea about Rotary's "Service Above Self" ethic. It's always a very good idea to tell every one of them such things as: Don't ask for contributions; Don't be self-promotional; etc. We have available a document for the speaker's orientation that some clubs in the Seattle area provide for their speakers. Use it as you wish and adapt it to your own club's needs.

Paying Speakers: Nearly all Program Chairs at one time or another are asked the club's policy on payment of speakers. The Rotary Club of Seattle maintains a firm policy of never paying. Individual members or their employers have paid airfare and arranged lodging for speakers where the payee's own goals were served. RPU recommends a similar policy for your club. After all, it's about "community service," right?

Emergency Contacts: Do you know how to reach your Club President -- NOW?!! How about key members of your Program Committee on whom you can rely for advice? Online tools now available make it easy to keep such contacts.

Speaker evaluations: One of the most frequent questions we've heard in the past few years is "What speakers have you had recently who were really good?" As part of this Rotary Program University program, we do provide lists of recommended speakers for Rotary clubs. They are available on request and are updated frequently.

We all can help one another in this process. How do you evaluate speakers? At Seattle #4, we institutionalized this process in the past few years. We have created the "Council of Past Program Chairs" (affectionately known as "the Program Geezers") who have been polled each week right after our luncheon. They've been asked to grade that day's speaker (on a 1 to 10 basis) and to offer any narrative comments about the speaker that they wish to share with the Program Chair and Program Committee. These evaluations are done anonymously so the Geezers can feel completely free to speak their minds. The person taking the evaluations (we used a Past Program Chair) then compiles the information and ratings and passes them on to the Program Chair and the sitting President, who use them for guidance only.

Another system has also been tried. This one includes more members of the Program Committee or even the entire club in evaluations. Here's one (*abridged*) speaker evaluation we've seen recently.

From: [REDACTED]
Subject: April Rotary Poll Results

Hello Pollsters,

Here are the results of this week's poll. Thank you to the 16 voting members.

1. Main Program: (*speaker name*), (*position*) - AVERAGE SCORE: 8.4

COMMENTS: *Right up there at the quality of what we want in a Rotary speaker. We got a whole education in a complicated subject, boiled down to 20 minutes.

* I appreciated hearing about the "new" (*institution*) from (*speaker*). If what she says is true about their focus and current thinking, then perhaps some action will be taken to move towards (*solving the problem addressed*).

* Within the limited time, she did an excellent job. The (*institution*) is in good hands.

* Excellent presentation, important subject.

* A very polished speaker who prepared well for her audience. Controversial solutions to a very difficult problem. Responded well to the questions from the audience.

* One of the best speakers we have had I think...very informative and moving.

* She did a good job speaking. I appreciate it when a speaker knows their time limit.

More of the same program's evaluation)

2. Short Program: (name) - Violin - AVERAGE SCORE: 9.7 Our Highest Average Score Yet!!

COMMENTS: I would have like to know more about her family background, and it would have been nice for (*the club President*) to interview her for a minute like he did for that young pianist.

* Absolutely incredible talent.

* Fantastic! The best young artist yet!!!

* Holy Schamole!

* WOW! Too bad there was no time for comments from this prodigy!

* These kids just keep getting better. What amazing young talent we have in this area.

* AWE-SOME!!!!

* Absolutely stunning performance from an 11 year old.

* Unbelievable! What an outstanding talent for her age!

Program Committee Development

Developing people within your club who both know the club's values and understand good Rotary "Programs" is essential for the long-term health of your Rotary club. In that sense, any Program Chair's most important job is in "leadership succession." Begin training people who might succeed you, right now.

Varying Ways to Organize Program Responsibility: But on a practical basis, how do clubs organize themselves to implement ongoing Program responsibility? What's the best way for your club?

One Year-Long Program Chair: Most clubs seem to appoint a Program Chair as a kind of principle officer of the club to organize and develop weekly Programs for the entire year. Among other things, this provides continuity for the year and helps a President implement his or her philosophy and approach for the year.

Month-by-Month Program Chairs or Assistant Program Chairs: Many clubs prefer to select up to a dozen members with "Program-savvy" and charge them with this duty with the idea that "Many hands make light work."

Some clubs we know appoint a Program Chair who is assisted by four sub-chairs, each of whom is responsible for one-quarter of the club's Programs.

Another approach is to have an Assistant Program Chair with primary responsibility for short-segment Programming.

Sometimes different Program Committee members accept responsibility for a major area of potential Programs, such as:

- Government & Politics (including elections)
- Technology
- Sports & Recreation
- Authors
- General Business Issues
- Inspiration / Humor

Where do Past Program Chairs go? Heh-heh, that's tempting! Very often, Past Program Chairs are used as advisors to the incoming Club President and Program Chair. His/Her responsibility can be in looking at the big picture for the Club's year of programming. This is usually a front-loaded responsibility, because most of his/her recommendations are acted on in the first half of the Rotary year.

Programs As Support for Rotary Club Membership Development

A well-rounded Membership Development program has two essential components:

1. Recruiting: Bringing in New Member candidates
2. Retention: Keeping members happily busy and you're more likely to keep them in your club.

How can good Rotary club Programs help with Membership Development?

- Recruiting may include inviting other non-Rotarian local community leaders in to hear specific speakers and topics in which they're likely to be interested. The not-so-subtle message to them is that "this is a place where things happen."
- Member retention can be enhanced by Programs that foster better / broader / deeper discussion in the local community about important community issues. Your current members understand that their service in Rotary adds value in their community.

Your Options in Event of a Last-Minute Speaker Cancellation

Plan for it now! It's probably going to happen during your term. And if it doesn't, you've helped next year's Program Chair get ready for his/her year. One of the great ways of doing this is to identify a list of local speakers who can speak about topics important to your club and community and who can be available on a last-minute basis. Sometimes these people are within your club's membership. Sometimes they're other local leaders. If you ask them, in most cases they'll even be willing to go on your list for last-minute purposes.

What would you say if we told you that there's a resource available to you -- right now -- that solves ALL of your speaker cancellation problems? There is. For the past ten years, Seattle Downtown Rotary has been videotaping its most prominent or interesting speakers and making them available online at www.SeattleRotary.org (just click on the "Watch Our Rotary Speakers" tab in the top-middle of the Homepage for a menu list of all of them. They're available to anyone. You don't even have to be a Member of any Rotary club to access these speakers. So, all you have to do in the event of a last-minute speaker cancellation is to bring in a laptop with Internet connectivity at your meeting site, a projector and a screen of some kind (it can even be a white wall) and you can project any of our Seattle #4 speakers for your club. Problem solved!

Creativity vs. Continuity

One of the most brilliant aspects of the "Rotary" model is that it is this world-wide organization that is de-centralized to the Member level. You can do whatever you're inspired to do in Rotary, as long as it's legal, ethical and moral ... AND passes the Four-Way Test.

One of the problems with this model is that every January or February as the incoming President and Program Chair are planning their year, there's an unhealthy tendency to "throw the baby out with the bath water." Many leaders want to reinvent the wheel. In the process, some of the good activities and values of the club are tossed aside. This tendency should be reconsidered carefully.

The current Rotary District Governor can be terrific presenters and most recognize they have a responsibility to communicate their values for the current year to clubs throughout the District. Past Rotary District Governors can be terrific speakers and can aid in the continuity we've discussed above..

Should Author-Speakers Be Allowed to Sell Their Books?

When faced with questions like this, we refer back to “The Granat Test” (named for Larry Granat, a Past Program Chair of the Rotary Club of Seattle), which is “What’s best for Rotary?” While we don’t want to encourage anyone to peddle their wares at our clubs, we do want to be responsive to Members’ interests. If you think that your club’s Members might be interested in purchasing a speaker’s book, then by all means invite the author to make it available to them.

A Process Note for Club Presidents

The more time your club takes for “administrative” information (such as announcements, “Happy Bucks”, etc.), the less time you have for the Main Speaker. No matter what it takes, honor the speaker with their full complement of time to speak. If a topic really MUST be addressed, either start early or put it at the beginning, rather than at the end. In that way, if you have to cut something to get to the main speaker, at least it’s the least important stuff. Remember, your club’s Guests are watching you!

There are at least two suggestions here: 1) Start early & 2) Restructure the announcements from most-to-least important. There are, after all, other ways besides time at the microphone to communicate to the club: The newsletter; e-mail blasts; reports at committee meetings; etc. Not EVERYthing needs to be said at the weekly meetings. Overloading the weekly meetings risks annoying Members and their Guests. Neither is good for Membership development.

RPU has become aware recently of a professor (also formerly a dean) from a prominent university who was booked by the Program Chair to speak at a luncheon and dutifully showed up at the appointed place and time. She was told by a club official that she wasn’t needed and was asked to leave. Subsequently, that club official recognized the error and apologized for it. My point here is not to embarrass anyone, but just to point out the horrendous lack of communication that sometimes can happen between the Program Committee and the club’s other leadership. Follow-through is critical!

Knowing Program-Knowledgeable Friends to Call-on for Help

As a Rotary club Program Chair or Program Committee activist, where do you go to discuss “Rotary Program Best Practices” and get advice or perspective? Please feel free to consider Rotary Program University as your resource of first resort.

We can all help one another. For that purpose, we maintain a closed discussion Group on www.Linkedin.com called “Rotary Program University.” Why a “closed Group” and why on Linked-In.com?

It’s a closed Group because we choose to limit discussion only to Members of Rotary clubs who are knowledgeable about and active in making speaker decisions for their clubs. A Rotary Program activist can apply to our growing membership and, once identified and confirmed as active in making Rotary Program decisions, they can become a participating member of the Group. We currently have participants from as far away as Philadelphia. The reasons for restricting to Rotarians should be fairly obvious. Further selecting Program activists is done because we want to encourage informed discussion. If others want to form a separate Group, they’re welcome to do so.

A cautionary note: Please don’t tell speakers or their representatives to go to Rotary sites to get information about contacting club Program Chairs. We’re all busy people and as volunteers are trying to schedule meaningful speakers for our clubs. None of us needs to have unqualified speakers banging on our doors seeking entry to our clubs and Members.

How To Create Interesting Videos

Several years ago, during the term of President Nancy Lucks, Seattle Rotary began an ongoing program of videotaping and making available online some of our most interesting speakers. That effort continues today and is underwritten by Seattle-based First Choice Health (www.FCHN.com).

Similarly, creating videos for your Rotary Club can be very straightforward, or wonderfully complex. Anyone with a digital camcorder and some interest can shoot and upload basic informational videos that document Programs, show how-to's on club activities, or spotlight interesting aspects of your club.

BASIC DOCUMENTARY

Many videos are just what they are: straightforward stories, simply told. We're grateful to Howard Gutknecht of Rainier Valley Rotary in Seattle for this next section that is intended for clubs with smaller budgets for videotaping. Here are some examples:

Video of a community service project

A simple "How-To" on any simple task, such as how to set-up for a weekly meeting

Our holiday social

Walk-through of a bunch of auction items before a fund-raiser.

These document a story or topic with minimal narration, without titles, visual effects, or other complexities.

The elements can be shot in the order in which they occur, which is also called "edit-in-camera."

RATCHET UP THE CREATIVITY

Want to appeal to a broader audience?

Many people now add a creative dimension by incorporating the style of popular films, cable programs, music videos, ads.

Examples:

Travel Documentary – documents student exchange

Nature Documentary – documents a park clean-up

News Program – mimics or spoofs this popular format

Post-Game Sports Commentary Show

Mini-Drama

Mystery

Horror – what went wrong with this first-time project

Historic Event Documentary- the popular Ken Burns treatment uses still photos

...well you get the picture. The YouTube era is upon us.

The idea is to add something special with a dash of creativity, making an ordinary topic appeal to a wider audience. This can involve including humor, special terminology, wearing costumes, special hard-to-get shots, props, etc.

THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING FUN

The most important thing about creating video with others is to bring out the creativity and team-spirit of everyone involved. We recommend you adopt an attitude we call "EXTEME COURTESY." One of our favorite games is to begin every sentence with either a courteous expression such as "Excuse me..." or "What a great idea, and..." or to praise what you like about someone's idea.

Examples:

- "I like how that takes us out of the box!"
- "You come up with such creative ideas!"
- "Wow, underwater! That's such an amazing way to begin it!"
- "Excuse me, but how do we keep the camcorder from getting wet?"
- "Hmmm. What a wickedly creative mind you have, Sylvia!"

THE IMPORTANCE OF FINISHING THE PROJECT

If there's a deadline, consider appointing a project manager, who's responsible for keeping an eye on the shots list, and the clock. Their task is to make sure the team follows a reasonable schedule. A typical production manager says things like: "Excuse me, but can we get the next 8 shots in 50 minutes before we start to lose this sunlight, OK?"

EDITING

A typical production uses 30 "takes" of 15 "shots" of 15 seconds each to make up one finished three-minute video. These aren't iron-clad boundaries, but count on ½ to one hour in the editing process for each minute of finished video, especially if titles, background music, added dubbed-in narration, or other special effects are used. Modern editing software is a technological miracle, and once you're "up the learning curve" things speed up a lot in the editing process.

The actual editing process can use simple editing applications like Microsoft Video (Free with Windows!) or more robust editing tools. Someone should become proficient with one or more editing programs before the project shooting begins.

TEAMS = SUCCESS

While there are some people who possess all the strengths and skills to pull-off even challenging projects, having a team approach will boost the probability of getting your first project completed successfully. Consider at least having these three roles represented on the team:

- 1) Creative – works out the script, shooting plan, and time schedule in advance.
- 2) Talent – practices any narration that's required. If an interview is called for, they know what questions to ask and how to hold the microphone.
- 3) Production: Who operates the camcorder, tripod, extra lighting if that's called for. Plus editing and uploading. This might be two people with two different skill-sets.

Addenda

The following are the additional documents available to you to help answer your questions and guide you as you set up your GREAT Rotary Programs for the coming year.

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¹ *“Rotary Program University” is a service of Rotary District 5030 in the Seattle area and is authored by David Endicott, a two-term Past Program Chair of the Rotary Club of Seattle (2005-06 & 2006-07). Contributors include Howard Gutknecht of the Rainier Valley Rotary Club (representing small-sized Rotary clubs); Lance Georgeson, past Program Chair of the Rotary Club of Ballard and Ken Noreen, current and several-year Program Chair of the Rotary Club of Shoreline Breakfast (both representing mid-sized Rotary clubs); and Larry Granat, Past Program Chair of the Rotary Club of Seattle (2002-03).*

Keep updated about ideas for GREAT Rotary Programs by registering online with us at www.Linkedin.com and doing a search for our Group called “Rotary Program University.” Once there, you can request to be admitted to the Group (limited to Rotary Program activists) and then by participating in our ongoing discussion about Rotary Program ideas.