

Leadership in Uncertain Times - RI President Holger Knaack's address to the Virtual International Assembly on 1 February 2021 (Text).

Video: https://cdn2.webdamdb.com/md_IyQY2tdV97o6.mp4



Dear friends,

It is my pleasure to address this International Assembly. When I spoke in San Diego last year about great changes underway in the world and how they would soon affect Rotary in profound ways, I wasn't trying to be a fortuneteller. But the world soon showed us how dramatic change can happen far more quickly than any one of us would anticipate. become more difficult for people everywhere, and more people than ever need help. We have been forced to give up so much — not just simple handshakes but our entire way of life.

But this has not just been a year of loss. It has also been a year of new opportunities. And even before this crisis, people met and kept up with friends in different ways than before. Social media and online connections have become more important. Now, we are all used to meeting virtually.

And a new global village has emerged with new social rules. People who normally would not look each other in the eyes as they spoke have now become accustomed to doing so in Zoom. Today, physical distance is required. But we are now getting to know a whole new closeness.

We hope that in 2021, with new vaccines and treatments, the world will start to return to something closer to normal. But it will be a different normal and we have no choice but to embrace this age. Going forward, we will need to prepare carefully for unanticipated events. Adapting to the future also means connecting truthfully to ourselves.

The Four-Way Test is such an important tool for doing just that, because it requires us to use self-reflection. These days, you cannot even be sure of the things we see with our own eyes. But we can know ourselves and our motivations. Through The Four-Way test, we can continue to ask ourselves: Am I being honest? Am I doing the right thing? That is important.

In Rotary, we are proud of our five core values of service, fellowship, diversity, integrity, and leadership. These values form the basis for our organization. Even if we have to make major changes today and in the future, we will not change our values. But to be a community built around those values, we must represent them in their entirety. We cannot just ignore one of them because it suits us

in the moment. We cannot pick and choose. If we do not embrace all the values all the time, everything is just talk.

Tolerance is once again becoming a critical issue in the world, and Rotary's core value of diversity has never been more important. I am so pleased that we have formed a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Force and taken strong steps to ensure that Rotary meets and exceeds the diversity goals that we have established.

So too, we must all show leadership on issues of intolerance and we must all stand up and speak out whenever we see injustice. There are forms of discrimination everywhere in the world, but the issues are different country to country and culture to culture. They must be addressed at a local and countrywide level as well.

Your leadership can make a tremendous difference, and nothing will help us deliver our diversity, equity, and inclusion goals better than making them your personal commitments.

And now, the environment is an area of focus for Rotary. It is high time for Rotary to act. And it is so important that we emphasize environmental concerns in our programs and service projects. Young people — Rotaractors included — expect us to take clear positions on environment issues and also want us to show leadership, with vision and solutions. We can point the way toward intelligent solutions. Our incredible members give us the capacity to make an important and lasting impact.

So much of what has happened in 2020 has been building for quite some time. Terrible pandemics have been predicted for years. The social injustice that led to unrest was just beneath the surface for years. And the transition to a digital, online world was well underway until COVID-19 made it a necessity.

We have faced these challenges by showing greater care for each other. Our clubs have taken on an important mentoring role for members with businesses who are struggling through the pandemic. And we have learned that renewed focus on each other is often an important service work that we can do.

Despite all that we have been through and all of the rapid change we have endured, we are surviving this crisis and becoming stronger.

Rotary is not just a club that you join. It is an invitation to endless opportunities. It opens opportunities to service, most notably in our historic project to end polio. And it opens opportunities for you to live a richer, more meaningful life, with friends around the world, based on our core values.

As Rotarians, we are blessed to take on leadership roles in this moment for our organization. Now is your time. Now is your moment. If you hesitate, it will pass you by. Everything we do opens another opportunity for someone, somewhere.

Thank you.