



## GENERAL SECRETARY AND CEO'S REMARKS

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Good morning. Good morning, everyone.

It's a pleasure to be with you here in Singapore — this global economic powerhouse, hub of innovation — and the site of this wonderful Rotary Convention.

Es un placer estar aquí con ustedes en Singapur — esta gran potencia económica mundial, un centro de innovación — y la ubicación de esta maravillosa Convención de Rotary.

You are truly a global audience, and although I speak several languages, for years I have always thought how wonderful it would be if I could speak even more. And then I could greet even more of you in your own language.

But wait, wait, I think there is a way we could do this.

Now, the voice you just heard and my image on the screen were created by artificial intelligence — an AI tool that not only translated my English words into Hindi, French, Korean, and Chinese but was also able to imitate my vocal style and inflections.

And this is just but one of many examples of how rapidly the world is evolving. And in the face of this unprecedented change, Rotary has a simple choice: We can either embrace that change or fall behind.

Now, the risks of standing still are real. Our global membership has been stagnant for years. In some parts of the world, we're thriving. But in others, we're experiencing dramatic membership loss.

And to solve this problem, we can't just wait around for someone to lead us or to provide us with a magical solution. Each of us needs to take the initiative because we all have the potential to step up, to lead, and to help address this issue.

But to do this, we need courage and commitment to a cause greater than ourselves. And we also need vision.

Albert Einstein said it well: "It is impossible to apply methods and measures which, in an earlier age, might have been sufficient. We must revolutionize our thinking,

revolutionize our actions, and we must have the courage to revolutionize relations among the nations of the world.”

So, in the spirit of that famous quote, let me suggest five ways that you can revolutionize Rotary.

The first is to make your club — no matter how old, no matter how long it has been around — into something brand-new. And by that I mean a club that is willing to look inward, identify weaknesses, and embrace change as needed.

If your club is struggling — if it’s losing members, if it has become stagnant — then it’s time to revolutionize that club. And you can do this by identifying the impediments to success and adopting new and innovative techniques that address those challenges.

Our membership surveys tell us that it’s the club experience that matters most. If members feel engaged and supported — if they look forward to attending meetings and participating in service projects — nothing will stop them from coming back. But if a club does not meet their expectations or provide an appealing value proposition, they will leave.

Now, here is an example of a club that gets it. The Rotary Club Beveren-Waas in Belgium is recognized as a model club — and for good reason.

While it has been around since 1974, it continues to evolve with the times. The club has both a strategic plan and a membership plan. And when it comes to finding new members in their community, the club conducts a thorough analysis of its city’s professions, thereby enhancing its recruitment efforts.

All new members are quickly assigned tasks and roles. The club also mixes up meeting times, alternating between evening and afternoon sessions, ensuring accessibility for all members.

So, the first way you can revolutionize Rotary is to think of ways to address your club’s challenges and to make your club feel new.

The second way you can revolutionize Rotary is by embracing new club models. New clubs are the best way for Rotary to break from traditions and support innovative approaches that appeal to the type of members we wish to attract. The only limit is our imagination.

You know, today, there are e-clubs, passport clubs, satellite clubs, cause-based clubs. The terminology isn’t important — just know that there are a range of options for how to organize our clubs. And here’s just one example of a new club type that is working — we call them companion clubs.

As their name suggests, they are companions to existing, traditional clubs. Members pay full dues to the existing, traditional club. They just aren’t required to attend meetings. They just do the service.

And these companion clubs have become a magnet for young professionals interested in weekend service projects, and they're thriving. Attrition is roughly half — *half* — of that of traditional clubs. So, we need your help in speaking up for and supporting new club models.

And that leads me to the third way you can help revolutionize Rotary — to focus on achieving more by doing less.

All of us are busy people. And we take pride in that. In fact, we call ourselves people of action. But to be true people of action, we need to be engaged in meaningful service and not get tied down with too many activities.

Now, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to Rotary, and every club serves its community in its own way. But our research shows that clubs find greater success by concentrating their efforts on fewer, well-planned, more-impactful projects rather than spreading themselves too thin.

And this is something that people in the business world know very well. Warren Buffett, chair and CEO of Berkshire Hathaway, is known for his exceptional focus and strategic investment choices.

He once remarked, “The difference between successful people and really successful people is that really successful people say no to almost everything.” So, feel free to say no more often and focus your club's resources and energy on larger, well-planned projects based on thorough community assessments.

And this leads me to the fourth way to revolutionize Rotary: Look for and find allies everywhere.

Our polio eradication effort is the gold standard for meaningful partnerships taking on a critical global health issue. And it was Rotary that brought together the Global Polio Eradication Initiative. And that is why, when we eradicate polio after decades of commitment, advocacy, and hard work, Rotary and our partners deserve the Nobel Peace Prize.

But you don't need to change the world to do something meaningful and real. In fact, some of the most useful partners you'll find are in Rotary. This convention is a golden opportunity to find and connect with those partners. You can find them right here, in the House of Friendship, even if those connections might seem unusual at first.

For example, a Rotary Fellowship called Beers Rotarians Enjoy Worldwide, or BREW, has organized events around the world and is working to raise funds for Rotary's global water, sanitation, and hygiene efforts.

And they have found a special ally in the Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene — or WASH — Rotary Action Group.

For the past eight years, these two groups have worked together to identify clean water projects, funneling 25% of the fellowship's dues to those projects. Now that may seem like a strange combination, but it really isn't because you can't create beer without clean water.

And partnerships are critical at the club level as well. So, reach out in your community and identify partners for change. Look for these alliances far and wide, with universities, think tanks, corporations, and other nonprofits.

And finally, there is one more way that we can revolutionize Rotary, and that is by embracing new technologies.

Our reaction to the COVID pandemic is a great example. For years, there was resistance to holding our events virtually and conducting meetings online. But then, all at once, we had to adapt, and we embraced technology, and we kept going even as the world shut down.

Now, the next wave of innovation will involve AI. The translation tool I showed you earlier is a great example. But AI can also help with your service projects. It can help you sift through data, carry out research, and help identify community needs.

But clearly, AI cannot and should not replace direct conversation and human connections. But it can make the most of our relationships and make our service more accessible. So, if used wisely and prudently, AI can help reinforce our identity as people of action.

We have the potential to be an organization that mimics Singapore, that constantly evolves to reflect a changing world. And by adapting to change, we help the people we serve become part of that change.

We all have the power to become champions of change — change that starts in your clubs and in your communities. And if we all do this, the impact will ripple across the world. So let us embark on this journey of revolution with determination, open hearts, and a willingness to embrace the changes that lie ahead.

Let's recognize the power we have as Rotarians.

Let's embrace Einstein's call and revolutionize the way we think, the way we act, and the way we form relationships so that together, we can continue to change the world.

Thank you, and enjoy the convention.