



August 6, 2009

To the Leadership of Kiwanis International

Dear Kiwanis Leader:

A Balanced Approach

When my racquetball partner, Scott, developed a repetitive stress injury in his right elbow, it looked like our playing days were over. After a few weeks of rest, both of us realized that we needed to find a way to play again, which is when Scott suggested that he could play left-handed. Knowing that it would not be very competitive for me to play with my strong hand while he used his weak one, I agreed to play left-handed as well. We were quite a sight at the gym that first day as we both struggled to play racquetball with a side of our body that clearly had been ignored.

Though we both knew what we were supposed to do, that did not translate into success for either of us. Just knowing what to do clearly was not enough. Our shots were weak, our timing was off, and everything just seemed harder. It was a little embarrassing to have people watch us play because they didn't know that we were playing with our weak hands. I'm sure we just looked like a couple of rookies who needed a lot more practice.

After a month of playing left-handed, Scott and I are getting better. Our shots are getting stronger, our timing is improving, and we really don't notice whether people are watching us anymore. As I have considered this experience, I think there are some leadership applications to be considered:

1. It's easy to get out of balance in our development as we focus on one area and ignore others.
2. Knowing what to do is only part of the equation—practice is essential.
3. Things become automatic or “second nature” when we repeat them often enough (muscle memory).
4. A willingness to be exposed to laughter or criticism for a friend is always worth it.
5. Being forced to go back and connect with the basics can make you a better player/person.

Hopefully, Scott will be able to use his right arm for racquetball again in the future. But if not, both of us have learned some valuable lessons, and have lots to laugh about.

Kiwanis International Officers Working Well Together

One of the new practices that we established two years ago at Kiwanis International was the scheduling of regular conference calls with our five Kiwanis International Officers (President, President-Elect, Vice President, Immediate Past President, CEO). Twice a month, our officers get a chance to connect by phone and share what's going on in their part of the Kiwanis family.

This simple practice of regular communication between the past, current and future leaders of Kiwanis has added great value to our organization and I would recommend a similar approach at all levels. If you don't already have a meeting rhythm that includes your key leaders, please consider creating one. The head start that it will give your future leaders is priceless, as is the continuity that it provides for the organization.

Successful Succession

As our leaders throughout the Kiwanis world put the finishing touches on this current year of leadership, there are a few things yet to be accomplished. In addition to pushing right to the finish line, strong leaders always set their successors up for even greater accomplishments in the future. Each of us has a personal responsibility to make sure that there is a smooth transition of leadership and that each new leader is as prepared as possible for the task ahead. Here are a few thoughts about how to do this well:

1. Share with your successor that you will do whatever you can to ensure his or her success as a leader.
2. Communicate to as many leaders as possible your support of the new leader or leadership team.
3. Make a commitment to not interfere with the work of the new leader and to never engage in criticism or negative comments.
4. Prepare yourself to re-direct people who continue to come to you with problems/issues.
5. Volunteer to take on a new leadership role that will keep you focused on the positive and unavailable for things that are counter-productive.

Once the administrative year is officially over and you have a chance to slow down a little, take a few moments to make a list of the things that you learned this year about leadership and about people. You might be surprised at how the things you have learned will help you develop as a person and as a leader.

The final task is to make a list of all the people that made a difference on your journey and make sure you thank them. Remember to thank them in a way that is disproportionate with their contribution as it is probably the only payment they will receive. Lastly, please accept my personal gratitude for your willingness to share your skills, talents and experience with the Kiwanis family.

Thanks for leading.

Rob

Join the ongoing leadership discussion at www.kiwanisleader.org.