



Presidential message

August 2016

Forty years ago, a man named George Campbell, the owner of the company I worked for, invited me to join Rotary. Back then, that was a common practice in the United States. Your boss invited you to join Rotary because he thought it would be good for business and good for the community, and you said yes. It's not surprising that our membership surged during that period.

George warned me not to use Rotary as an excuse to slack off at work. Even so, I always had time to attend lunch meetings and serve on committees. I never had to worry that taking a long lunch once a week would hurt my advancement, or what my boss would think about the occasional Rotary phone call at work.

Today, things are different. Companies are less generous about time, and not every manager looks favorably on community service. It's hard to enjoy a Rotary meeting when you've got emails piling up on your phone. It's harder than ever to balance work with Rotary – and the model that gave us so much growth a few decades ago is part of what's holding back our growth now.

That's why the recent Council on Legislation adopted some innovative measures that allow clubs to vary their meeting times and expand their pool of prospective members. Clubs have more flexibility now to respond to the needs of their members and to clear away as many barriers to membership as they can. But there's one barrier to membership that only you can remove, one thing that every prospective member needs to become a Rotarian: an invitation to join a Rotary club.

Whenever I tell a group of Rotarians that we need more willing hands, more caring hearts, and more bright minds to move our work forward, everyone applauds. But those hands, hearts, and minds won't magically appear in our clubs. We have to ask them to join. And an invitation to Rotary is something that only you can give. An invitation is a gift. It's saying to someone, "I think you have the skills, the talent, and the character to make our community better, and I want you to join me in doing that."

I'm the president of Rotary International, but the only club I can invite someone to join is the Rotary Club of Chattanooga, Tenn. I can't make your club or your community stronger. Only you can do that – by inviting the qualified people you know to join you in *Rotary Serving Humanity*.