



K.R. "Ravi" Ravindran, RI President 2015/16

September 2015

There was once a strong young man who was offered a job as a woodcutter. He set about his task with energy: The first week, he turned 18 trees into firewood. The second week, he worked just as hard, but was surprised to find he had chopped only 11 trees. The third week, despite working nonstop from morning till night, the number was six, and he went despairingly to the foreman to offer his resignation. "I am losing my strength. I can no longer cut as many trees as I once could."

The foreman looked at the young man, who seemed to him in fine health. "Have you thought of sharpening your ax?" he asked.

"Sharpen my ax? Who has time to sharpen an ax?" the young man asked indignantly. "I have been too busy chopping wood!"

When we aren't making the kind of progress we feel we should be making, the natural response is to redouble our efforts. Sometimes, though, the better response is not to work harder, but to work smarter. Look at your tools. Analyze your processes. Are you directing your resources in the most effective ways? Or are you pouring all your strength into chopping wood with a dull ax?

For the last 20 years, we have relentlessly beaten the drum of membership in Rotary. We set goals and launch campaigns, all focused on bringing in more and more members. And yet, our overall numbers remain the same.

It is time to sharpen our tools. Instead of focusing on the question, "How can we bring more members into Rotary?" we should be asking ourselves, "How can we add more value to Rotary membership, so that more will join and fewer will leave?"

One way we are doing that is with the new Rotary Global Rewards program, which launched in July. This innovative program allows Rotarians to connect with, and receive discounts and concessions from, businesses and service providers around the world. Individual Rotarians may submit their own business to be included alongside those with which Rotary has already negotiated relationships; the most appropriate offers will be added to the listings. We have also created the option of allowing businesses to return a percentage of their profit on each transaction to our Rotary Foundation, and several companies have already been locked into this part of the scheme. Each month we will update the list with additional offers that we may receive. I urge all of you to try it out by signing up on My Rotary at Rotary.org now. The more Rotarians participate, the stronger, and more beneficial, the program will be.

Much more than another loyalty program, Rotary Global Rewards is a new way to benefit from being a Rotarian, and being part of the Rotary network. It is another way to combine business and service. And it is yet another way to add value to Rotary membership. We cannot forget that our potential members will be asking themselves, "What's in it for me?" We need to demonstrate the value of Rotary by showing that becoming a Rotarian will enrich their lives, as it has ours.