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Leadership

“How many of you would take this \$20 bill if I gave it to you? How ‘bout now?” Howard asked after crumpling the bill in his fist. After giving the bill to a student, Howard proceeded to tell us his point – no matter how often a bill is crumpled or stepped on, it still is worth \$20, it never loses its value. In the same way no matter how often people crush you to the ground and step on you, you always have value. This lesson, taught in the first session at Rotary’s Life Leadership Conference, spoke loudly to me. But throughout the week I learned many more lessons about what good leadership looks like: building relationships, leading with purpose, and being responsible and confident. I came to recognize these seeds of leadership not only in certain people I know, but also in myself.

Many people think that being a good leader means leading a group by taking charge. In reality the best leaders are those that selflessly build relationships. Bullying people into doing things is not being a good leader. Pushing people is often ineffective – the work you want accomplished doesn’t get done. To be a good leader you should listen to and care about people, taking personal interest in others and their opinions, thus making them feel valued. Knowing and respecting what various group members need, a selfless leader can build unity and loyalty to one agenda which is common to the group, not an agenda of his own. Leadership based on relationships is the best, most effective kind of leadership.

We all have a purpose in life and need to discover what that purpose is. In a similar way, all leading has to have a purpose, with the leader fully connected to that purpose. A leader’s purpose is to facilitate the discovery and recognition of the group’s purpose, making it meaningful to each member. A leader helps navigate the unified group toward its common goal, through its common agenda, always focusing on the purpose in order to avoid going off course.

Because people need leaders they can trust, a leader must be responsible and confident. A leader can’t expect his followers to be responsible in their efforts as group members if he is not responsible to them and to their common purpose. Most trusting group members will indeed follow mature modeling of responsible behavior and effort by their leader. Along with responsibility, a leader must demonstrate confidence – confidence in himself, in the group, and in their purpose. Different than an egotistical or overbearing nature, a good leader’s attitude is one of assurance that the appropriate goal can be achieved by the capable efforts of the group that he leads.

Knowing the challenge of effective leadership, Franklin Delano Roosevelt said, “It is a terrible thing to look over your shoulder when you are trying to lead – and find no one there.” Rotary’s Life Leadership Conference was a focused opportunity for me to learn about effective leadership. From the moment Howard crumpled that \$20 bill, I became increasingly aware of the traits of a good leader. I now have the desire and the insight to grow and develop the seeds of leadership that I see in myself. Selfless in building relationships, purposeful in leadership, and

responsible, I am maturing into a confident person who is capable and worthy of being a good leader.