

Making Dreams Come True

The State of Quota's Union

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Good morning again yo'all. Am I saying it correctly Rosemary? Yo'all. It takes some practice, but I am sure most of us will have it right by the time we leave New Orleans again.

I am very grateful for this opportunity to talk to you about Quota's business and give you a picture of where we are right now. In my welcome message I have used the quote:

“A journey begins not with the first step, but with the desire to go where you have never gone,” and for good reason.

Quota is on the move and our members are moving with us. The times we are living in are somewhat agitated, nothing is what it used to be, nothing will be the same as we remember it to have been.

Nothing will be the same again, ever. As the world turns, so does our reality and we have to evolve with it and make the best of it. And the good news is that we have made the best of it.

Our commitment to service is stronger than ever which is proven by the many projects our members have launched this year, especially in Quota Cares Month of March this year and we are very pleased that 92 clubs have responded to the Quota Cares Month Awards program. That's an excellent turn out for a first year program in Quota. The two most enthusiastic areas in this respect were Central and the South Pacific, way to go girls.

And I was so privileged to be present at some of them like the very successful fundraising luncheon of the clubs of Auckland and Takapuna in New Zealand and the hand over of a little apartment to a destitute woman in Fiji. Last year we promised to embark on a journey of consolidating what the previous board has started under the guidance of Lynne Caroon while at the same time keeping our eye on our mission of caring for others while sharing fun and fellowship with each other.

We have encountered obstacles that have swayed us but not defeated us, because we have kept our eyes on our goals. We have grappled with each obstacle and have found solutions for our dilemmas.

We have stayed calm and collected when our trust fund dwindled below the \$500,000 mark and took the necessary precautions; meanwhile the stock market is turning around slowly, although we are not out of the woods yet.

- We took a more assertive approach in fundraising when it looked like donations were also dwindling.
- We have decreased our number of staff when it became necessary to save also on cost of personnel.
- We have developed an alternative solution for the proposed Service Meeting when we understood that our members saw more dynamics in an enhanced Area Meeting.
- We are updating our policies and adding items to our management guidelines in order to respond to changing times, expectations and practices.
- We have successfully guided our members through the first stages of the transition.

Something that was really painful for our entire board was making the decision in November to halt our grants in both the Fellowship and the Youth Outreach Programs. This was more so because this year our motto is "Making Dreams Come True" around the world through our We Share Foundation and other special programs. Curtailing these two very popular programs, which are the embodiment of helping to realize dreams for others, has been our worst nightmare. I know you all were devastated by the decision, but I also know that you understand that safeguarding the principal sum of \$500,000 and adhering to bylaws took precedence. More about this later in the report of our treasurer!

I must say here that I am proud to be part of an organization where people care enough to be willing to dedicate their energy, money and other resources towards the well being of mostly strangers who later might become friends.

Our district conferences were in one respect quite different this past year. We asked our governors to allot the representative more time than usual for one of the most important messages we have given in recent years. This year we have worked together with you on finding pertinent answers to a very pertinent question. *How can we restructure our practices in such away that it enables us to save money on every possible front while maintaining enough instances of meeting each other and celebrating together?* Quite a challenge if you remember.

The discussions were lively, members felt deeply on way or the other. What I liked best was the passion displayed which I have not seen since we discussed adding a new service area next to Hearing and Speech. (By the way I like bursts of passion and bursts of color, both signify *joie de vivre*, life in a pure form!)

We have come away from the discussions with a better understanding of what makes our members tick. Money talks... sure, but we have also heard expressions of a commitment to loyal friendships, to tradition and to making things stick. Because of what we heard and after polling our membership we have continued with the transition or the calendar change.

- This has meant that we had our last traditional governor's training seminars in November and December on both sides of the ocean and some have held transitory district conferences in the first half of this year; others will do the same in the fall.
- Carolyn Rice has staged a South Pacific area meeting in March of this year based on the premise of a combined area/service meeting. I was privileged to be present and so was president-elect Mary. In my opinion the format rocks.
- Linda Minton has made some combinations too and I must say it gives much more content to the area meetings.
- We have experienced our first governor's training seminar coupled with convention just yesterday.

And what have we learned so far from the transition format? The feedback so far is very good and we are taking each piece of information that indicates a snag very seriously. We on the board are still patching up the bugs in the system and our creativity is on a roll. We are alive, we are moving, we are experimenting, we are learning, we are carving a viable future for Quota.

Does everybody like it? Noooooo. ...and we did not expect it either. We have known from the onset that we could not please all of the people all of the time but we sure have tried to please as big a chunk of people as possible.

I am convinced that as we continue to explore unknown shores we will come up with solutions unknown to us this far. And that is the beauty of discovery and of paradigm shifts. There will come a day that we will look differently upon district conferences, area meetings, and conventions again. And that is OK, because that is the law of our existence. There is a season for everything and to everything there is a reason.

This time, the reason is equity in our international organization. Our goal: Finding ways to make Quota affordable to all clubs especially small clubs everywhere and clubs in non-American countries impacted by an unfavorable exchange rate and different living conditions. This is true for the Philippines, for rural areas of Australia but also for the Blue Mountains in Canada. Even prosperous Holland is concerned about the exchange rate.

Through our Leaders as Listeners program we have learned that:

1. The exchange rate is a serious issue and a big concern for non-American clubs.
2. Convention is extremely valued by some members and not valued at all by other members.
3. A majority of Quota members have expressed the willingness to achieve financial goals even when the adjustment is difficult for some.
4. Although the US members and clubs are a majority, there is a sincere desire on their part to accommodate the differing needs of non-US clubs and members.

5. Global connectors who are our primary financial and leadership supporters have very different Quota needs and desires than our local connectors.

'Leaders as Listeners' changed the way Quota International operates in the new century. One of the most important lessons learned through the 'Leaders as Listeners' program was that "one size does NOT fit all" in Quota. "Honoring and supporting Quota's diversity" is the major principle under which Quota International now operates because members worldwide desire and define their membership experiences in very different, but equally important ways. Through 'Leaders as Listeners' we learned more about the different member, club, and leader constituencies in Quota, and one-by-one, we are developing services for each. And because diversity exists between and among clubs, districts, and areas, we look for ways that they can operate with increased flexibility.

So our quest right now is to find the best way to achieve equity. Now here I have some questions for you.

Did I say this was going to be easy?

Did I promise you a rose garden?

Nooooooo.

Do I believe we will find a way?

Absolutely.

My 16 years in Quota as a global connector with very strong local roots tell me so. Because at the end of the day we all want what is best for Quota and we do not want to lose the very people we want to meet so desperately at international conventions. It means sometimes that what is best for Quota might not be what I really want in my heart. And then there is this internal struggle. Another area of continuous concern is how to give Quota International a sustainable, competitive advantage in the new millennium?

If we look at our numbers right now we see that we are maintaining our own despite the loss of some clubs in recent months. We now stand at 7299 members compared to 7522 last year; that is 223 fewer members.

This year we have lost 13 clubs compared to 10 last year, 11 were lost by dissolution and two by revocation. The total members lost this way was 108. Can you imagine that one of those dissolved clubs had 23 members?

Our members continue to recruit new blood relentlessly but, alas, retention needs as much attention.

I know you have heard this before but it does not hurt to hear it one more time: on average, it costs seven times as much to acquire a new member as it does to keep the one you already have.

Continually acquiring new members and losing them--instead of continuing to recruit WHILE focusing on better serving and holding onto the ones you already have--can be a costly mistake. Understanding what club members value most and then providing it, is key to a club's success. But who determines value? The member of course! How do members tell leaders whether they value their membership experience? Through their feet. Those who value what is offered remain affiliated. Those who don't, leave.

Can you hear them stomping away? I am sure most of you don't, but still all of us need to tune our ear to the sound and know how to watch for warning signs. Let me share my own experience from Curacao; every year of a dynamic board and dynamite projects we have retained more members. Every high visibility community project has netted new members. Every dull period has cost us members.

In the coming period Quota will also have to focus on it's brand. I am talking marketing here. Defining our brand and devising ways to sell our brand. Think Aunt Sally's Pralines, NBC, Nike and Harrah's Casino, to name a few strong brands. Think Must See TV, Swoosh, Zum-Zum etc. How do you package caring and sharing, fun and fellowship into something that sells and creates loyal customers. Let me not get carried away now. (phew!!) I let the young Turks coming on the board figure that one out.

During this most interesting period in my life I have had the chance to visit all seven areas of our organization and nine out of our 14 countries. I have visited the Philippines, Singapore, Suriname and Malaysia in previous years and all this has given me the unique opportunity to see, listen, and participate; I have tasted different foods and I have touched hopeful women and children, I have smelled poverty and I have seen the fruits of our combined efforts. My senses have been triggered at every turn and I have come away with a better understanding of what makes our sisters all over the world want to join hands with each other and attempt to make dreams come true for others.

I thank you for embracing the theme, I thank you for opening your hearts and your homes, I thank you for the numerous gifts and rainbows, I thank all those who have grasped the opportunity to share their knowledge of the reality of diabetes, I thank you for all the newsletters, cards and emails.

I thank you for your friendship and for the honor of letting me be your navigator and your president.

And now, *Laissez les bon temps rouler!!!!*