

Ensuring Success with Ambassadorial Scholars and Beyond

**A speech presented at the Breakout Session titled
“Ensuring Success with Ambassadorial Scholars and GSE teams”**

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by

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It is my great honor to be here with distinguished Rotary leaders this afternoon. Let me first talk about my personal experience when I was a scholar about two decades ago, which will highlight the importance of the counselor role. Then I will introduce our joint orientation for outbound scholars and the alumni participation, demonstrating how important it is to get alumni involved in Rotary.

When I arrived at a local airport in New Hampshire as an ambassadorial scholar in 1987 all I had was a suitcase, which did not even arrive, and ambitions. Twenty one years later, I weigh more, my hair has grown gray, I have a mortgage, but I also have a good, decent life. My dear friends in Rotary, it all started with the ambassadorial scholarship.

Yes, I owe so much to the scholarship and the education it provided. However, they were not the biggest gift from Rotary. It was the very spirit of service for which Rotary stands. This gift came from my counselor, Bill Skinner, Past District Governor of District 7780. How did he do it? Well, he didn't do anything special. He just encouraged me to participate in almost every single fund raiser of his Durham Great Bay RC. I sold roses for St. Valentine's Day. I recycled cans in my dorm. I sold ruffle tickets when my university hosted a football game.

Yes, I knew that my scholarship had come from the donations by the Rotarians in District 259. But through these service activities, I learned that I was being supported by the goodness in man. Working with my Rotary Mentor, I breathed in the essence of Rotary, and now I dream and even bleed in Rotary blue and gold. I can assure you, had I not met him, I wouldn't be standing here as charter president of the first alumni club in Japan.

I hope my recollections have made it clear how important the counselor is because he or she has the power and responsibility to share Rotary with young ambassadorial scholars, to share the way of life called Rotary. Unfortunately, I know not all counselors are like my Rotary mentor. We must choose the right person, a caring and dedicated Rotarian for this all-important position in the first place, and then and only then a proper orientation would work.

Now let me move on to the orientation for scholars. Every year, Districts 2590 and 2780 jointly offer a 2-day orientation for outbound scholars. We've done this for the past 16 years. We introduce new scholars to Rotary and talk about the responsibilities of ambassadorial scholars. We give tips for making presentations at Rotary meetings. We do our best to send out our scholars fully-prepared, which is absolutely essential for ensuring success with Ambassadorial Scholars. Please feel free to look at copies of the program and the handbook table of contents in English. I should also add here that the Rotary Foundation now provides a financial support for multi-district orientations like ours.

One unique feature of our joint orientation is that it is hosted by the alumni associations of the two districts. Our alumni work really hard for this two-day event. They come up with the program, make all the necessary arrangements, and prepare a handbook for new scholars, which contains updated alumni contact information and latest reports by scholars. With the hard work comes the sense of accomplishment. Our alumni feel good about themselves because they can now give back to Rotary and help new scholars. They grow proud of their Service above Self. They also enjoy each other's unique experiences and expertise. In other words, they enjoy the same kind of fellowship that we all share in Rotary.

Our District has highly active alumni associations for the GSE and Youth Exchange Programs as well, and the same goes for their members. They work hard for their own programs and enjoy the fellowship. It was no coincidence that all of the 23 charter members of our club were active members of these alumni associations. I can assure you, without the alumni associations, our club would not have been possible. They were the cradle of Kanagawa Shonan RC.

The alumni are often called the "forgotten asset." I'm sure most of them haven't forgotten Rotary. It is Rotary that has forgotten them. The key, you see, is to keep alumni involved in Rotary after the ambassadorial scholarship, after the GSE and Youth Exchange Programs. Counselors and GSE team leaders can and must lead the way in this respect, and this is not difficult at all. Just ask your alumni to participate in service

projects of your club, just like my counselor did. Let them lead the way in organizing orientations for outbound scholars, GSE team members, and youth exchange students. Let them share their experiences with Rotary at club meetings and district conferences. Start an alumni association if your district doesn't have one. If you don't have enough alumni, see if you can join hands with neighboring districts. If you do have an alumni association, see if you can start an alumni club like ours.

Rotary began when Paul Harris asked three of his friends to share his dream. Our alumni association started when Professor Shimizu, a Rotarian who had long been involved in the ambassadorial scholarship, asked four alumni to organize an orientation for outbound scholars. Our club, the first alumni club in Japan, was made possible by our special representative, now RI director Kazuhiko Ozawa. Many people thought such a club would be impossible. Many people thought we were too young and wouldn't qualify for membership. But he never gave up.

Yes, they were only one, but they put their ideas into action. You never know what you can accomplish until you start leading the way in Rotary, because Rotarians always lend a hand. Now is the time to let the Rotary family feel really at home in Rotary, where they belong. Now is the time to share Rotary with our alumni. Ladies and gentlemen, the leadership must come from you, because you are Rotary.

When I applied for the scholarship, that Rotary wheel represented HOPE. My father's company had gone bankrupt when I was in high school and Rotary was my only hope to study abroad. Without the scholarship, my life would have been totally different, and I will remain forever grateful for what Rotary did for me.

I'm absolutely positive that there are tens of thousands of young students in the world who are much more gifted and yet far less fortunate than I was 21 years ago. You have their future in your hands. Don't destroy it, but protect it, embrace it. It will make you proud one day, I promise you.

All I want is to make sure that Rotary wheel keeps sending the same message, hope, to young and talented people who cannot receive higher education that they deserve because we cannot live without hope. Rotary has always helped the young to make dreams real. My dear fellow Rotarians, let's keep up the good work and show Rotary shares because Rotary cares.