

Greetings to the members and guests of the Rotary eClub of the Southwest USA!

This program just flew to you from somewhere on the internet, and boy, are its arms tired.

Did you laugh? Chuckle? Smile? Not grimace overly?

Telling a joke as part of an online Rotary club's program is a little like trying unsuccessfully to change the channel on your remote, only to learn later that your neighbor's TV was going haywire. That's my way of saying that those who write only rarely see how people react to what is written.

The power of a strong presentation, though, whether in writing, in audio or video files, or experienced in person, is undeniable. We can all remember moments when a teacher or speaker gave us something that made us see the world in new ways.

In our own club, there have been times when I have read the stories that sometimes grace the opening of our meetings, and their power has brought tears to my eyes. While that may call my manliness into question, it does speak to how much power a story can wield.

It was several years ago, when I was a member of the Rotary Club of Santa Clara (California), that I heard two speakers, Ted Rose and Susan Hill of Project Amigo (<http://projectamigo.org>), tell about the work they do with poor children in the small towns north of Colima, Mexico. It included an invitation to all of us in the room to visit and take part in their efforts. Several months later, there I was in the village of Cofradía, helping size children's feet for the new shoes we were giving them. My experience there is one that shapes how I think of myself, and the good I can do in the world. A good presentation makes such things possible.

(Ted and Susan will present to this club in the next few months about Project Amigo - stay tuned!)

As Rotarians, we come to meetings for all sorts of reasons - to see, talk to, or read about friends; to enjoy fellowship at a table or in a forum; and to learn about that which is interesting and honorable. I believe that in a world of news that is sensational, superficial, and downright bloody, we want to be reminded that there are people who devote themselves to interesting and honorable causes. And as Rotarians, we know that we are not simply learning; we are also capable of helping. We pool our energy and resources to do things that individually would have been at least improbable, and probably impossible, such as working together to eradicate a horrible disease. We come to meetings, and essentially, we are invited to change the world.

Perhaps the "why" of this is not so mysterious. It feels good to do good, after all.

The "how" of doing this is a bit more complex.

I'll illustrate my thinking by going on a bit of a tangent - I'm good at that. Let me tell you a bit about the work I do. I am a high school teacher of Japanese language, and probably the only native Texan teaching Japanese named "Rushton" you've ever run across. If you are saying to yourself, "No, I know someone like that," then make sure to send me a message (click on the "Members" tab to find me) - I'm guessing we've already met.

Teaching students to recognize vocabulary and grammatical patterns they read or hear is notably easier than teaching them to use the terms and structures in their own writing or speech. The reason is obvious - for most people, it is far easier to be passive than active. If you studied a language at some point, and never used it again after your classroom experience, you might have every difficulty producing a sentence. That said, you probably could still recognize some amount of it, if it were on a sign in front of you.

I taught English in Japan for about eighteen months after graduating from college. Many of the Japanese adults I knew were embarrassed that they had studied English for six to ten years, but had very weak conversational skills. In fact, this seems perfectly natural to me, as they spent the vast majority of time in their English classes simply translating written sentences. Had they explicitly practiced their conversational skills, they would probably be able to do quite a bit.

My point? We are all quite good at recognizing a good Rotary program, but are rarely given guidance on how to help make one happen.

And -that- is what this program is about. Click below for the reaction to my finally having come to the point.

<http://xrl.us/be2s96>

As Rotarians, we have the power to help people share powerful stories. Each of us can go to someone and, based on whatever rules there might be in a given club, ask, "Would you be interested in telling our group about the work that you do?" That person then has the chance to teach us something valuable, or promote a good cause, or both.

In RECSWUSA (the Rotary eClub of the Southwest USA, sometimes pronounced <http://xrl.us/be2ta3> (but hopefully not said that way too often)), there are two additional components to this kind of promotion.

First, most of our programs end up as PDF files, and as something that can be saved and shared, it doubles easily as a nice public relations piece, kind of like an article clipped from a newspaper. If you don't want to go to the trouble of downloading the file, you can simply send someone to the meetings page of our website (<http://recswusa.org/meeting>) and let them know the date and title of the meeting.

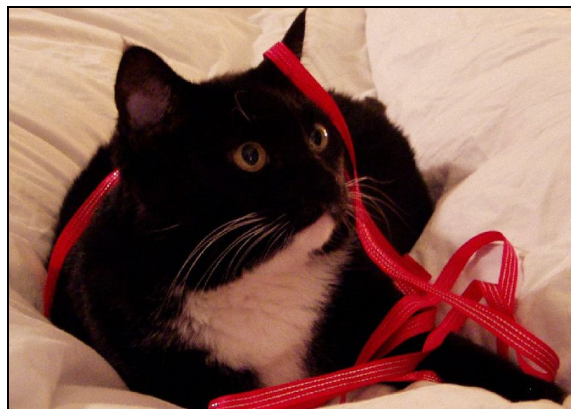
Second, we get a lot more guests than most clubs. A whole lot. Typically, RECSWUSA (<http://xrl.us/be2ta3>)

gets between one hundred and two hundred guests each week (<http://xrl.us/be2s96>). (I promise I'll go easier on both the sound effects and parentheses from here forward. Humble bow.) This allows for some serious spreading of the story, and causes some of our guests to ask whether it might be possible for a good story to be presented to their clubs as well.

Sharing good stories is one reason we do what we do in Rotary, after all.

RECSWUSA members, consider yourself licensed to go to anyone, no matter how famous, with the message that you have an international group of two hundred or so wildly cool, intelligent, well-connected, and impressively humble Rotarians who might be interested in learning about what they do.

Mechanically, you would simply want them to know that all we need is a document of four to eight pages (or so) in 16-point font telling their story, preferably with some pictures added in.



That's Gordita, one of our three feline children. She's a wide one, Gordita is. We're talking serious girth. Point being, it's easy to add a picture to what we present.

I've already shown that links to sound files are possible, and if you caught last week's program, you'll know that video, too, is something we can do. As an example of that, I'll give you a preview of the Project Amigo program by inviting you to go to the following page and click on the video screen that appears:

<http://www.nextvista.org/projectamigo-volunteer/>

The ideal program would include a greeting to our members, a description of the effort that is in some way personal, pictures and links to allow those interested to learn more, and a thank-you for being able to share the story.

If you would like for us to run a program telling about something that is important to you, please contact me, Rushton Hurley (rushton@hotmail.com), including "Rotary" in the subject line so I don't accidentally send your message to the mysterious realm of deleted files. While I don't have time to write the story for you, I can take a document that is in .doc or .rtf format and create the .pdf file that would go on the RECSWUSA site.

Members, actively think about people you know with interesting causes, work, or perspectives that you might want to help promote by giving them the chance to tell their story as the feature of one of our meetings.

Guests, feel free to connect us to those same people in your community. Who knows? We may end up seeing our clubs work together on a service project which we can share with the rest of the world.

The future of our programs is in your hands. 8^)

We will finish with some news and something new for RECSWUSA.

First piece of news: if you are a guest, we ask that you stop by our donation station (left side of the web page) and contribute the cost of a lunch to our club's service projects. Yes, we do those, and are happy to have your help!

Second: both members and guests, please leave a comment after you finish, as that helps us better understand how to improve our meetings and programs. The extra challenge this week is to leave a few sentences about the best Rotary program you've ever seen, heard, or read. When you read the comments, know also that you can normally click on the names of those who left them in case you want to send them a thought.

Finally, let's open the floor for questions. "What?" you ask, "You can do that in one of these asynchronous, online meetings?" We can, though not with every meeting. Crazy world we live in, no?

Go to the following page in the forums section of our site:

<http://xrl.us/ClubLevelDiscussion>

Assuming you are doing this in the week associated with this meeting, you should see a thread near the top titled, "2009-07-13: Powerful Programs and Rotary."

Click on that title, and you will see what has been asked, how I have answered (or where I will put an answer, if you see the question before I do), and the "Post Reply" link after the last posting. Click on that, and you can type a short or long question. You could even add your conspiracy theories about the world actually being flat and it's all a NASA plot, but we'd rather you not do so. There are far better web sites for creative writing.

Finally, thank you for giving me some of your time, as well as for staying with my tangent-ridden drivel all the way to this point. You're almost done!

We at RECSWUSA have a club full of interesting folks doing interesting things, and we are very happy to share our online space with you. Feel free to make up any missed meetings with us, at whatever time of day or night sings to your schedule.

Go forth, and share the good stories that remind us of the best of who we are.

(Imagine me bowing here.)

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Rushton Hurley is a high school language teacher and the executive director of <http://nextvista.org>, which he hopes will someday save the world from ignorance.