



A Tale Of Two (Well, Three) Speakers By BJ Sibley, Twain Hart Rotary

There are any number of ways to accomplish the same mission. I was treated to three diverse, but convergent, conduits recently. The purpose of the missions, in this case speeches, was to press home to the audience how important their tasks would be in the coming months. Three more different approaches would be almost impossible to find. One speaker was

dynamic, one gentle and another hilarious.

The dynamic speaker was “larger than life”. Handsome and tall, this speaker commanded the rostrum...no, it was more than that...he actually seemed to fill the stage. With his opening words he grabbed the throat of each audience member and shook it like a bulldog. His sentences, hurled toward us like arrows, found their mark. We nodded, applauded, sighed and cried. We were the puppets and he the puppet master. His deep throaty delivery wrung with emotion; when he stopped to take a breath, it was as if those of us listening to him felt that we, too, could breathe again. He exhorted us to be better, to be stronger, to be bolder. He praised our strengths and bolstered our spirits. When he was done, had spoken his last words, the room was totally silent then. Then, after a moment, we were on our feet clapping and shouting our appreciation for his effort. The applause filled the room. We felt empowered for the year ahead.

The next day we were treated to a very different type of speaker. This one was, in appearance, very different from the first. He was not handsome but his height and build lent solemnity and dignity to his demeanor. He sat on a stool at the edge of the stage rather than behind the rostrum. He said it was just “us” and he didn’t feel any need to be formal. He spoke without gestures or gesticulating voice modulations. He was calm and quiet but his eyes, which were unblinking, added volumes to his voice. What he said, he said with so much heart and soul, we found ourselves falling under his trance. He exhorted us softly and led us gently. The depth of his belief in what he was saying shone through and we were awed. He led, we followed. When he finished his speech there was utter quiet and then, first slowly and then with more intensity, the applause filled then overflowed the room. We felt worthy of the year ahead.

Day three found us on “training overload”. We were ready to get done and get gone and it must have showed. One more meal, one more speaker and we could boogie.

The speaker took the stage. He was rotund and grandfatherly and had a twinkle in his eye. He looked down at us; his glasses pulled low on his nose and commented that he was not sure he should be honored to be the last speaker on the last day, but “here goes”. For the next 40 minutes we laughed so hard our stomachs hurt. We laughed so hard our eyes watered. We howled and hooted, cheered and clapped. He drew amazing word pictures of our future year and our future trials and tribulations and they didn’t seem so daunting. He (a most revered and accomplished person in our field) laughed at himself and we were enchanted and flattered at the thought that he considered us to be a part of his world. With tears in our eyes we rose to our feet and paid him his due. The applause filled the room, rolled out into the hallways and, I’m sure, spilled down to the floor below. We felt committed to the year ahead.

Three speakers, three strong personalities, three messages with the same theme. The message I got from the weekend is that it is not necessary that we each approach a task in the same way only that we get the task done and that we do it well. It helps if we can cheer each other, laugh and cry with each other along the way.

Editor’s note:

These speakers were, respectively, Past Rotary International President Rick King, Rotary International President-elect William B. Boyd, and Past Rotary International President Cliff Dochterman.

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