

# **“People Matter”**

**Based on an Address**

**by**

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**to the**

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## **Introduction**

District Governor Rob Woolley; delegates from the 48 Rotary Clubs that comprise Rotary International District 9710 - it's great to see you all gathered here in the spirit of service and fellowship that distinguishes your cause and contribution.

Anecdote - that's when I learnt that if you get the people side right, the rest of the world falls into place.

People and relationships go hand in hand - something many lose sight of in this busy modern world. As Kalyan Banerjee has observed "In this life we may not be able to do great things, but we can do little things with great love."

Developing and maintaining effective relationships may well be the single most important thing we do in our lives. That view is not widely debated - in fact, it's not even on the radar screen of most people, let alone qualifying as a fundamental issue that deserves deeper consideration in contemporary society.

The importance that personal relationships play in the dynamics of issues, particularly where change to the fundamental order of things is being sought, doesn't seem to be well understood or even commented on most of the time.

As the architect of the APEC Leader's Meeting, Paul Keating sought "...personal knowledge of other leaders, which would improve our capacity to make judgements about what drove them, and the easy familiarity that made it easier to pick up a telephone to resolve a problem or misunderstanding" For his part, President Clinton wanted "...the opportunity for all of us to develop the personal relationships that are essential for our ability to work together cooperatively".

I have no doubt about the profound impact that 9/11 had on John Howard and his subsequent actions in the defence, security and

foreign policy fields, and that being in Washington on that fateful day was at the heart of his relationship with George Bush.

All relationships depend on what we, as individuals, do every day that we have on this mortal coil.

I have often wondered why all the people who know what's wrong with Australia and can solve every problem, are wasting their time as shock jock talkback radio hosts, taxi drivers, editorial writers, or hairdressers (except for Tim)!

It's most often the case that those who can see the easy solutions to complex problems are never willing or able to get themselves into a position where they can do something about it. Even more frustrating are those who - having vacated positions of influence - busy themselves advocating solutions that they couldn't or wouldn't do anything about when they had their hands on the levers.

The tenor of my argument about the fundamental importance of people and relationships to the scheme of things revolves around:

- effective communication;
- emotional intelligence;
- the balance between individual freedom and responsibility;
- meaning and success; and
- leadership.

## **Effective Communication**

There's no shortage of material about communication skills and techniques, but like most courses and programs on how to save time, the concepts and theories seem to bear no relationship to their execution and practice. That's because the skills and techniques alone, ignore the pre-requisite for effective communication - good relationships are required to facilitate receipt of the message that you are sending.

Three key personal qualities are the essential pre-conditions for effective communication:

- genuineness - being open and honest about one's feelings, needs and ideas;
- trusting, accepting, respecting and supporting other people in a non-paternalistic way; and
- the ability to really see and hear another person and understand them from their perspective.

Listening is a particularly hard skill. It can send a very powerful message that what someone is saying to you is important - or, more often, it represents an inconvenient pause until you can resume giving the recipient the benefit of your wisdom.

No one ever learnt anything while they were doing the talking. It helps to remember that the good Lord gave us one mouth and two ears and to use those organs in that proportion.

## **Emotional Intelligence**

As every man in this room knows, you can always win any argument with your spouse through the eloquence of your dispassionate rational objective logic!

Unless you make the emotional connection, you don't get to first base, let alone home plate. This is now referred to as Emotional Intelligence or Emotional Quotient.

EI or EQ refers to the capacity for recognising our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and our relationships. It describes abilities different from, but complementary to, academic intelligence - the purely cognitive capacities measured by IQ.

Given how much emphasis is put on it, IQ alone, explains surprisingly little about achievement at work or in life. At a maximum, it contributes 25%, but more careful analysis suggests no more than 10% and it may even be as low as 4%.

“Emotional Intelligence”, more than IQ or expertise, determines who excels at a job - any job. For outstanding leadership, it counts for almost everything.

Detailed studies reveal that “67% - two out of three - of the abilities deemed essential for effective performance are emotional competencies. Compared to IQ and expertise, emotional competence matters more than twice as much. This holds true across all kinds of job categories and organisations”.

The good news is that emotional intelligence can be learned - it continues to develop with experience, but sustained growth requires real effort to keep at it.

## **Leadership**

Highly effective leaders are adept at cultivating relationships; less effective managers generally fail to do so. Building relationships generates a reservoir of good-will and trust - the more support employees feel from their organisation, the more trust, attachment and loyalty they feel and the better organisational citizens they become.

The key to successful performance is enthusiasm and commitment, two qualities that people and organisations can learn, but not compel. That’s where emotional intelligence comes into play. In subtle (or not so subtle) ways, we all make each other feel a bit better (or worse) as part of each contact that we have with someone else.

Jan Carlson’s “Moments of Truth” maxim has equal applicability to the myriad one-on-one interactions between people that occur every day. Leaders take aeons to build trust - a nanosecond’s careless remark or gesture destroys it. Every encounter can be weighed along a scale from emotionally toxic to nourishing.

Each culture has its own unique underlying system of beliefs, values, structure, symbols and language that determines how its members see the world and react to it. A colleague of mine refers to these as “cultural imprints”. They’re neither right nor wrong, they’re simply there, but they underlie why we feel and act the way we do.

Australian workers classify their supervisors into one of three categories: Leaders, Bosses and Bastards!

Australians are very hard markers and notoriously reluctant to confer the leader mantle on anyone. Where they incline to the view that someone might meet the criteria to satisfy such status, they observe very carefully what the putative leader does and compare that to what they say. If they discern even the slightest gap or ray of light between the reality and the rhetoric, the tall poppy syndrome comes into play in all its glory.

Once a supervisor is classified as a bastard, it’s impossible for them to recover in their current work place. But, Australians make their own judgements, so someone who has that reputation somewhere else, when moving to a new position has to convince the new workplace that they still qualify for that title.

Australians actually like good bosses - those who are like the captain coach types of the sporting field.

Australians respond best to leaders and bosses who build a bridge between the present and the future. They follow such people, but often ask lots of questions about where they’re going and why, and “what’s in it for me?” before signing up for whatever the cause may be.

Too often we’re not careful enough about our language, our symbols and our communication efforts, e.g., the term “human resources” which treats people as just another input - just another resource, an asset, or intellectual capital. This sort of

talk and thinking is just plain wrong. It reveals a mind-set that sees people as simply another cost centre. One Aussie dollar is exactly the same as any other Aussie dollar. But, people are different - they're individuals; they want and deserve to be recognised and treated accordingly.

Unless executives get in touch with their people's opinions and respond to their need for meaningful, rewarding work, those people will increasingly vote with their feet. The new employee wants to work for a company where they feel they can make a difference - 40% of them citing that as most important while only 16% consider money as most important.

As the CEO of several large public sector organisations, I always saw my job as "shaping and sharing a vision that gave meaning to the work of others". I pursued a "Results through People" leadership philosophy which put people at the heart of matters, believing that people, leadership and relationships are the keys to unlocking organisational potential and purposeful teamwork. I was driven by a fundamental belief that you had to get the people side right before you could succeed on the results side in a sustainable way.

### **Freedom versus Responsibility**

The "Do your own thing" self actualisation mantra of the 60's led to many liberations, but combined with the current obsession with materialism and consumerism; there is a cost to be paid.

Some commentators believe that the balance between choice and obligation has altered radically. Choice is now almost totally dominant and virtually all obligations have become highly conditional, as we see almost every day in the media. This profound change is considered to be the root cause of social dislocation, characterised by increases in crime, drug abuse, family breakdown, suicide and anti-social behaviour.

Greater economic freedom has also been accompanied by greater loneliness, alienation and loss of community. A UK study coined the term “mega-relationships” to describe the fact that we now have many relationships, but they tend to be less deep, have less quality and so on.

Freedom and responsibility - how much of each, and how they are balanced - have profound implications for our personal lives, our work and our well being.

Some individuals seem to need near total freedom. At the other extreme, there are many who voluntarily relinquish their freedom, exemplified by mass movements, cults and fundamentalism

New evidence from studies on the length and quality of life indicate that the health of a population and its achievements are enhanced when individuals have some freedom and some responsibility, but not too much of either, and when civil associations of individuals, rather than individuals acting alone, are the essential social units. In other words, families, friendships and communities are the key organising principles. The consistent association of social contacts with health and productivity demonstrates my premise that relationships are essential to fulfilled lives and the axis around which such people’s lives revolve.

## **Meaning and Success**

It’s a truism that we in Australia have enjoyed a long run of economic good times. It’s an unfortunate human tendency, however, for people to measure their worth by comparing themselves with how others are doing - the classic “Keeping up with the Jones’ syndrome.

Economic prosperity and material well-being have not been accompanied by increased levels of happiness. People are more

often suffering from excessive working hours, job insecurity and stress in their lives. Many have been seduced into pursuit of more money as the end itself, rather than the means to an end. They become so preoccupied with doing what they're doing, that they don't take the time to stand back and look at their lives - asking themselves "Is this all there is? Is this what I want?"

Money is not the solution to our crowded lives or the key to meaning and success. Investing time and effort in better relationships is the way to a better and more productive life. Material gifts are no substitute for lavishing time, love and attention on those who matter to us.

Around middle age, many people begin to ask themselves what success actually means. I'm sure that most of you would have a friend or friends or have suffered from the classic mid-life crisis.

Some people equate success with money or material things - their job or position - power, or being a public celebrity. People who pursue these things are often dissatisfied or disenchanted - they lack meaning in their lives.

The best things in life are not things. That neat phrase encapsulates the central message of my sermon - it's not things, it's relationships that matter - relationships are the answer to questions about the meaning of life.

People who feel dissatisfied with their lot in life, live unfulfilled lives - they haven't found meaning or purpose in what they do.

The way to get meaning into your life is to devote yourself to family, friends and the community around you and to creating something that gives you purpose.

Our relationships with friends, family, colleagues and neighbours govern our sense of identity, self-worth and belonging.

Relationships with communities give us social support networks that govern our existence as individuals.

In old age we draw on the relationships we've invested in over our life-time rather like having a relational pension. The more affluent we are as a society, the more important these relationships become in determining our ultimate happiness and well-being. Without them, we are adrift, lonely and disconnected.

Relationships between people are conditional - they involve giving and receiving. They are rarely equal where each party provides exactly the same value to the other. Many are built on the notion of differential giving and receiving, either through different kinds of contributions or contributions delivered at different times. For example, the old paradigm where parents would bring up children, who in turn, would care for them in their old age. These days we are more likely to see the emphasis on choice as allowing people to escape their obligations.

US President Teddy Roosevelt once said: "Far and away the best prize that life offers is the chance to work hard at work worth doing". That's true, but you also need to strike the right balance between your work and home life. Very few people on their death beds wish they had spent more time at work. The big things in life - how you think, what you value, those you must choose for yourself.

At its essence, success means satisfying yourself - working towards your aspirations. The fundamental question is whether you are learning and growing - whether you're a better person today than last week rather than how you compare with others. At the end of the day - what you do - what you become - is up to you. In other words, what you get out of life depends on exactly what you're prepared to put into it.

Paul Harris, the founder of Rotary - your world-wide fellowship of business and professional leaders united in the ideal of service - argued that men and woman had a responsibility to make the best possible use of the resources they possessed. Someone of limited capacities who turns such capacities to good account is entitled to recognition, while someone who has squandered the abundant resources available to them only has themselves to blame.

## **Harry Chapin**

That sets the scene for me to say something about one of my heroes and inspirations - Harry Forster Chapin.

Harry who? I hear many of you think.

The epitaph engraved on his tombstone says;

“Oh, if a man tried  
To take his time on Earth  
And prove before he died  
What one man’s life could be worth  
I wonder what would happen  
To this World.”

He died 30 years ago on the evening of 16 July 1981 in a car crash on the Long Island Freeway at the all too young age of 38.

The very next day, ten senators and 30 Congressmen rose on the floor of their respective chambers to honour Harry Chapin - to this day it stands as a unique tribute from America’s legislators.

And on 7 December 1987, which would have been his 45th birthday at a special benefit in New York’s Carnegie Hall, two Senators and two Congressmen, representing one each from each party and each chamber, presented Harry’s family with a posthumously awarded Congressional Gold Medal - the 115<sup>th</sup> since the first one was awarded to George Washington in 1776.

Harry shares the highest civilian award conferred by the United States' Congress with the likes of Abraham Lincoln, John and Robert Kennedy, Mother Teresa and Martin Luther King.

Ralph Nader, Harry Belafonte, Pat Benatar, Pete Seeger, Paul Simon, Kenny Rogers, and Peter Paul and Mary were among the 100 people who spoke about how Harry had touched their lives, some of whom also sang at the benefit. Bruce Springsteen concluded the celebration with a speech about Harry before singing Remember when the Music.

I'm guessing some of you are still thinking I've still never heard of him and/or what made him so special?

It may strike a chord if I tell you that Cats in the Cradle, Taxi, Mr Tanner, A Better Place to Be, What Made America Famous, Dance Band on the Titanic, and Story of a Life were among the signature pieces of the 124 story songs and 18 albums that Harry Chapin recorded as a folk-rock singer of the baby boomer generation. But, he was much more than a singer songwriter.

Sometimes when someone dies, they are eulogised in a way that makes them seem greater in death than they were in life.

Not so with Harry, the social activist and humanitarian. He performed 200 to 300 concerts a year, over half of which were benefits for the 82 charities and 33 organisations on World Hunger that he supported. His philosophy was "I always play one night for me and one night for the other guy."

Although his financial contribution mattered, Harry's greatest gift was to convince Jimmy Carter to establish the Presidential Commission on World Hunger; Harry being the only Committee member to attend all meetings.

And more than anyone else, as the founder of World Hunger Year, he inspired the music industry hunger alleviation projects and fund raising activities all around the world.

Let me quote a few of his aphorisms to provide another insight into the measure of this man.

“Given this short opportunity we call life, the only sensible way is to operate on the one per cent chance that our lives mean something through a strong sense of purpose and duty. No matter what part we play, we can improve someone else’s life. Anything is possible if you believe strongly enough in it.”

“Be involved with the people with live hearts and live eyes, those who are committed to something.”

“Our lives are to be used and thus to be lived as fully as possible, and truly it seems that we are never so alive as when we concern ourselves with other people.”

“Yes we can. Yes we can dream. Yes we can believe. Yes we can.” I’m led to wonder whether President Obama (or his speechwriter) was channeling Harry or an undeclared fan when he gave that famous speech.

And last. “I’ve got nothing against selling out; but just let me do it for something that matters. Not so I can be Number One with a bullet, as it were; but so I can leave this world feeling like I’ve made a difference.”

You did that Harry - you lived your life for others. You gave your time and resources with boundless energy and passion - you proved that individuals can make a difference.

Harry’s message was to become involved in a process to help change wrong things into right things. He understood that smaller acts done on a consistent basis almost always yield more progress than mega events.

Bruce “the boss” Springsteen’s speech about Harry and the words of “Remember when the Music” are worth repeating:

“...I guess there was a time when people felt that music provided you with a greater sense of unity, a greater sense of shared vision than it does today. My generation we were going to be the generation that was gonna change the world. Somehow, we were gonna make it a little less lonely, a little less hungry, a little more just place. But it seems that when that promise slipped through our hands, we didn’t replace it with nothing but lost faith. And now we live in times that are pretty shattered. I’ve got my music, you’ve got your music, the guy down the street he’s got his. And you sit back and say truthfully, ‘Well maybe all men are not brothers and maybe we won’t know who or what we are to each other.’ But I think Harry instinctively knew it was going to take a lot more than love to survive. That it was going to take a strong sense of purpose, of duty and good clear eye on the dirty ways of the world.

“So in keeping with his promise to himself, Harry’s spirit reminds us to remember, to honour and to recommit to do something so that his song may be sung.”

His older brother James captured the essence of what Harry was on about at the Memorial Service when he said

“Our job is not to attempt the impossible task of filling Harry’s shoes, but rather to accept Harry’s challenge to better fit our own”

an inspirational challenge and resolution for all of us.

I want to leave you with another quote from another American President, Calvin Coolidge, which reflects my personal credo:

“Press on. Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence.

Talent will not: nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent.

Genius will not: unrewarded genius is almost a proverb.

Education alone will not: the world is full of educated derelicts.  
Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.”

Thanks for listening.