

A message from the founder of the Rotary Means Business Fellowship

For almost a year, information and opinions have been circulating regarding the Rotary Means Business Fellowship. Some of them are supportive, and some of them are critical. Some of the information is truthful, some is completely false. Many of the opinions are worded in ways that imply malevolent intentions by Fellowship leadership.

As founder of the Rotary Means Business Fellowship (RMBF), I think it is time to address some of these communications, and inform our membership of the truth, as well as improvements your leadership is making to address some legitimate concerns.

RMBF grew out of a business networking idea from a few Rotary Clubs in the region of San Francisco, California, USA. These small groups began meeting in the mid-2000's. My Rotary Club adopted RMB in 2009. In the early 2010's I traveled around the state of California, promoting the idea of RMB, and helping to launch a half dozen RMB groups. Then RMB was discovered by Rotarians in New York, Pennsylvania, and even in Australia. Rotary Means Business was a bootstrap operation that became an international movement.

Finally, in 2013, Rotary reached out to my group (we weren't called chapters yet) and gave us the opportunity to become a full-fledged Fellowship. I assembled a small team, and together we completed the arduous process to be approved as a Rotary Fellowship. We then invited other independent RMB groups to join us as the earliest chapters of the Fellowship.

RMBF grew slowly in the early years. Twelve months after our chartering, we counted only 8 chapters. In the next six years, we added fewer than a dozen chapters per year, totaling only 78 chapters and a few hundred members by the beginning of 2020. In those early years, we often did not have enough candidates to fill all the positions on our Board.

Then, suddenly, we hit a massive growth streak. In 2020 and 2022, we added 30 chapters each year. Last year we added 45 chapters, and in the first half of this year we have added another 26 chapters. Our individual membership exceeds 1,500 RMBians.

Much of the recent growth is due to the efforts of the Directors from India. The majority of recent life memberships and chapters came from India and surrounding regions during this period.

We are no longer a sleepy little Fellowship, We are now one of the largest Fellowships in Rotary. Growth like that is both rewarding and challenging. With our large membership, we are now more valuable to Rotary. But our governance may not have kept up with our massive and sudden growth. A 1,500 member group needs more specific guidelines than a 300 member group.

Some of the criticism, like that requesting more specific financial and chapter monitoring controls, was very legitimate. Other comments, especially those accusing leadership of nefarious motivations, were completely wrong, destructive, and hurtful to real people who were only doing their best to serve their fellow RMBians. RMBF leadership tried to ignore the dishonest and accusatory messaging. Nevertheless, we're only human, so those lies and attacks did hurt. And when certain critics took actions intended to harm the Fellowship, we were forced to take action.

One individual presented his misinformation to outside entities in order to inflict damage on RMBF. He attempted to get the Rotary International General Counsel to completely shut the Fellowship down. He pursued criminal charges, attempting to get members of the leadership arrested and imprisoned. He made demands that, if implemented, would have resulted in the complete disbanding of the Rotary Means Business Fellowship.

Your Fellowship leadership fought back. When we became aware of falsehoods, we attempted to bring the truth out. When attempts were made to have RMBF leaders arrested, we went directly to the authorities with the truth and they declined to press charges. When USA government agencies were presented with false information in an attempt to have those agencies destroy your Fellowship, I personally traveled to their regional office to meet with a representative of **to** those agencies, and presented the actual facts and evidence.

The leadership has been forced to spend thousands of dollars of your dues on legal costs to defend RMBF against these multiple attempts to destroy our Fellowship. Excessive legal costs will result in reduced funding available to upgrade our website, promote the Fellowship at future conventions, support regional meetings and other chapter promotion and mentoring activities.

Your Board of Directors recognized that it was time for governance to expand, to meet the needs of a larger organization. As such, a new set of Policies & Procedures were recently adopted by the Board. The Policies (as well as our By-Laws) are available on our website. Contrary to comments by some individuals, Policies do not require a vote of the general membership. Only By-Laws must be approved by the general membership, after first being approved by Rotary International, and then by the Fellowship Board.

A strict budget process for discretionary spending moving forward is outlined in the Policies. This was implemented to make costs for Fellowship promotion, local and regional event support, and convention attendance to be more structured and predictable. A new electronic voting software was purchased and utilized in the most recent election. An independent election committee investigated and declared that the election was fair and the results had not been interfered with. And term limits were included in the new By-Laws, recently approved by the general membership.

When further reforms or controls are identified as necessary, you can count on your leadership to consider those reforms very seriously. At the same time, we will not tolerate members whose goal is to spread falsehoods, cause harm to other members' reputations, or to destroy the entire Fellowship. The person referred to in this message, who shall remain nameless, repeatedly refused to discontinue his harmful actions, so his membership in RMBF and in his local chapter was terminated. Now is the time to move forward.

It has been a joy to watch this little project that was launched in suburban California blossom into a Fellowship that serves so many Rotarians worldwide, and helps them become more successful. Yet there continues to be room for new blood and new ideas. My service as a voting member of the Rotary Means Business Fellowship Board of Directors will end in 2026, with the completion of my final term as Director. However, I intend to remain active in a non-voting consulting role as long as the Board values my contributions.

If any member has suggestions for improvement to our Fellowship, I will remain available at Emeritus@RotaryMeansBusiness.org.*

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