

Fishing Opener and the Frozen Middle.

Saturday was the fishing opener in Minnesota. Fully 25% of the entire population of our State will head to the lakes this weekend and wet a line. However, it is still pretty cold around here. Not that long ago the lake near my home was finally clear of any winter ice. Obviously, in much of the upper Midwest our lakes freeze over in the winter time. In fact a few of the Rotarians in my neck of the woods have a much shorter commute to their Rotary meetings in the winter, since they can take a short cut driving their cars straight across the lake. When a lake freezes over the ice can be amazingly thick! Frozen solid with ice above, logic would say the fish are safe: After all who can fish through solid ice? But, ingenuity (or possibly stupidity) prevails and out comes the ice auger! Suddenly the fish are at risk!

Many of us at the Rotary zone level have struggled to be successful with our assignments. As a former RRFC, I know how hard it can be to pass a good idea down to the clubs. Try communicating even a basic change in one TRF program. A few examples of our struggles:

Take a look at our latest efforts with the Gates Challenge. How many of us are struggling to get the clubs to raise the necessary few dollars each year?

How about the new Humanity in Motion PR material? It is absolutely great material, but boy do we ever struggle to get the clubs to use it.

And, think about Every Rotarian, Every Year. We have made amazing progress, but after six or seven years we are still working on getting above the 50% participation level from our members.

I pose this question for you: Is there a frozen middle in Rotary? Is there something akin to a thick layer of ice that lies between the Rotarian at the club level and the good tools and support available from above?

Is our volunteer structure failing?

The single biggest line item in RI's budget is District Governor support: It represents almost 20% of the budget. San Diego is very expensive! We also spend time and money training zone level leaders to assist the district leadership. Is there a better way to get the job done? Is our training effective? Do we lack goals, action steps and accountability? How best can we support our clubs? Do the new methods of communication allow us to deal more directly with clubs and free us up to cut out layers of volunteer management?

Shouldn't our institutes involve open debate on this very issue and more? Come to Rochester New York in October: Let's talk. Let's discuss the bait we are using and whether it is time to pull out the auger. Do you have the courage to openly debate the status quo and the way you have been doing business?