



Friday, March 17, 2023

Dear fellow Rotarians,

The Board of Directors met Wednesday afternoon and discussed the recent decision to end the employment of Neil DeBoer as Club Coordinator. The position of Club Coordinator is a part-time paid position to assist in the day-to-day administration of club business, and the Club Coordinator reports directly to the Club President. Following consultation with members of the Board and others, President Sarah Clinton made the difficult decision to terminate Neil's employment last week.

The Board reviewed that decision, the reasons supporting it and the process that was followed and voted by majority to support President Sarah's decision. At the same time, the Board expressed concern that the procedures for making personnel decisions have not been well defined. Our vote included immediately instituting a process to review and clarify club bylaws and procedures to better identify organizational roles and processes.

As a member of the Rotary Club of Olympia, you deserve open communication and accountability from club leadership. While we need to be sensitive to the privacy interests of the individuals involved, the Board wants to provide some background information on the events leading to the termination and the process that was followed. Our goal is to address concerns that have been raised and reaffirm our commitment to helping the club move forward.

First, please know that the decision was not based on any illegal activity or financial mismanagement. No one has questioned Neil's diligence or attention to the details of club administration. The events of concern involved multiple incidents of acting outside the authority of the Club Coordinator and against the decisions made by the Board, the President and, most recently, the Program Committee.

In the most recent incident, Neil sent a lengthy email to a program speaker, journalist Austin Jenkins, regarding what Neil perceived to be political bias in the slides Mr. Jenkins provided for his presentation. He did not copy the Program Committee Chair or liaison, nor President Sarah, on this communication. Nor did he advise anyone that Mr. Jenkins responded to the email by stating that he would not serve as a speaker the following day. The cancellation came to light because Mr. Jenkins later reached out to the Program Committee liaison to inform her he would not be attending the meeting. It was later learned that Neil's concerns had been discussed at a Program Committee meeting where the decision was made to move forward with a program by Mr. Jenkins.

The process President Sarah followed after this event was deliberative and the decision to terminate Neil was not made in haste. She first talked directly with Neil about this incident and the connection to past incidents where he had acted inappropriately. She then reached out to the Executive Officers of the club to discuss the issue, share other incidents over the course of the year, and seek input on how to proceed. During this meeting there was consensus that the bylaws did not address the procedure to be followed and it appeared the decision fell to the President (in consultation with the President-elect). There was also



agreement that it was not in the best interest of the club to have Neil continue as Club Coordinator, and the group believed a transition period would be ideal if Neil would agree to resign and participate in a transition plan.

President Sarah then met with Neil to ask for his resignation. During this conversation, Neil agreed to stay on for the remainder of the month and assist in a transition plan. Later that evening, however, Neil sent an email defending his actions and stating that he would not resign, rather President Sarah would need to fire him. Before moving forward with that decision, the following individuals were consulted:

- a. All additional members of the Rotary Club Board
- b. Several past presidents
- c. One attorney who practices business law
- d. An outside HR and risk management professional

Board members with experience in managing nonprofit organizations confirmed that these steps taken by President Sarah were consistent with best practices in the field.

President Sarah and President-elect Debra Stephens then met with Neil to communicate the decision to end his employment as Club Coordinator. His membership in the club has not been affected in any way.

Several emails have been sent in the aftermath of the Club Coordinator's termination. A question was raised about whether the process followed in this instance violated bylaw provisions concerning Board approval of committee decisions. To be clear, no committees were created or took action in this process. Moreover, while the Club Coordinator reports directly to the President, the only bylaw reference to the employment of the Club Coordinator is a provision for a review of the appointment and compensation at the beginning of each Rotary year.

To date, the club has not undertaken regular performance reviews of the Club Coordinator or regularly documented prior concerns. The lack of formality perhaps reflects our longstanding culture of mutual respect and trust, but in situations such as this, the need for greater clarity in bylaws and operating procedures becomes apparent. The Board is fully committed to instituting a process to review and update our governing documents for the benefit of all concerned.

The Board is also committed to developing a short-term and long-term transition plan, including:

- Creation of the Club Coordinator job description
- Evaluation of job functions and structure
- Creation of policies related to club employees

While this work is underway, several of us will assume responsibility for Club Coordinator duties appropriate to our roles (eg, Secretary, Treasurer, etc.) We will continue to work on this plan with the support of key members, including those who have previously served in the Club Coordinator position.



Finally, we want to acknowledge that this incident has caused surprise, concern and some strong feelings. Terminating an employee who has been integral to club is not something anyone wants to do – particularly when the employee is also a fellow member of our Rotary Club.

We can move through this, but moving forward requires a clear focus in that direction. Looking backward at what went wrong or what could have been handled differently can help us improve our practices, but we must not let it divide us.

We encourage you to reach out directly to any member of the Board to ask questions or express your concerns. We value your input and ask you to consider the value of this method of communication over an exchange of further group emails about the termination decision.

Thank you for being a member of the Rotary Club of Olympia and for your commitment to our shared values of community building and service above self.

Sincerely,

Rotary Club of Olympia
Board of Directors

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