

AN ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA VALUING PEOPLE FIRST AND FOREMOST

‘The key to victory lies in uncovering fresh talent within the organization and pooling their abilities,’ SGI President Ikeda says. ‘The word “organization” tends to bring to mind an image of a monolithic, impersonal structure. However, in the Soka Gakkai, people are valued first and foremost.’

Nichiren Daishonin writes: “If the spirit of many in body but one in mind prevails among the people, they will achieve all their goals, whereas if one in body but different in mind, they can achieve nothing remarkable” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 618). This is a famous passage, radiant with an unchanging principle that holds true for all affairs, in all ages and lands.

The Soka Gakkai is a living, dynamic organization working to carry out kosen-rufu, to realize peace for all humanity and happiness for the entire world. There has never been, nor ever will be, an organization with a more sublime mission.

There are no days off in this noble struggle for the Law. The Soka Gakkai is a gathering of valiant champions of the Buddha, who are always forging ahead energetically and intrepidly over mountain after mountain of arduous challenges.

In order to initiate another great advance, we need a revitalized leadership lineup brimming with fresh vigor and determination.

In Japan, the young men’s division, student division, and future division have all embarked on a fresh, lively start with an array of new leaders. And our women’s and young women’s divisions, too, spearheading our drive toward a Century of Women, have begun to move forward with their characteristic exuberance.

In addition, new appointments have been made to the recently created position of Soka Gakkai vice general director. Many new leadership appointments have also been made at the ward, prefecture, general prefecture and region levels around the country. Currently, efforts are under way to appoint new leaders to the frontline headquarters, chapter and district levels of the organization.

At this time of fresh departure, unity is crucial. The great Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore wrote, “Those who cannot work harmoniously with their fellow human beings lose their true ability.” We cannot succeed, as the poet says, without unity. Let us completely unite our hearts, our prayers and our efforts!

Given the diverse array of positions in our organization, different leaders will be called on to play different roles. Some may be in the spotlight, while others work behind the scenes.

However, we are all praiseworthy champions of Buddhism who have emerged from the earth to spread the Mystic Law. Whether president or group leader, we are all equal as fellow members of the Soka Gakkai, dedicated to the cause of kosen-rufu.

Leadership positions with-in the Soka Gakkai are positions of responsibility. They are the emblems of courageous individuals who have voluntarily taken on the mission of expanding kosen-rufu and who battle against powerful negative forces to resolutely protect their fellow members.

Therefore, our Soka Gakkai activities — giving us the opportunity to take on leader-ship

and responsibility for our movement—represent a noble means of Buddhist practice by which we can carry out our human revolution.



One day, I was with my mentor, Josei Toda, in the “president’s office” at the old Soka Gakkai Headquarters in Nishi-Kanda, Tokyo. Though at the time the Headquarters did not have an officially designated president’s office, I referred to the spot from where Mr. Toda usually led activities for kosen-rufu by that name. [From 1946–53, the Soka Gakkai Headquarters, which was located on the second floor of the same Nishi-Kanda building that housed President Toda’s business offices, was comprised of just two small rooms.]

Anyway, on that particular occasion, President Toda asked me, “Daisaku, would you take on the position of Kamata Chapter advisor and get things seriously moving there?”

On observing the low monthly figures for new membership, he decided that the time had come to put me in the forefront of activities. He appointed me to a chapter leadership position in Kamata, in Tokyo’s Ota Ward.

This was in January 1952. Some nine months had passed since President Toda’s inauguration as second Soka Gakkai president and, contrary to his expectations, membership growth had slowed—or, rather, one could say, completely stagnated.

“Now is the time to make a breakthrough! Now I will open the way to victory!” With this spirit, I decisively rose into action, making it my mission to fulfill my mentor’s expectations.

When taking on a new position, the first three months are decisive. Results are determined by the energy exerted at the start of any endeavor.

I recall the kick-off held at a community hall in Unoki, Ota Ward, just after my appointment in Kamata Chapter. We pledged there to advance like a mighty wave. I first of all proposed to the frontline leaders that we set a concrete goal: to increase our membership by two new households per unit during the month of February.

The first step in any challenge is to set clear goals. If the goals are vague, people will find them difficult to relate to and take on as a personal challenge. Consequently, they will not make serious efforts to realize those goals.

At the same time, it is important not to impose goals on others. Goals must be presented in such a way that everyone can accept them and be enthusiastic about realizing them.

To that end, the central figure must have the firm resolve to take personal responsibility to achieve the intended target, even if he or she has to do it alone. The passion and enthusiasm emanating from such leaders inspires others to give their all for kosen-rufu.



We had just reorganized the Soka Gakkai into chapters, districts, groups and units, in descending order of size. The unit was at the very front line of the organization, corresponding to what we in Japan now call the block level.

President Toda wanted to give the frontline leaders confidence and a sense of personal responsibility; I, too, was convinced that this was crucial for the Soka Gakkai’s development.

I wanted the nearly 100 unit leaders in Kamata Chapter to take the starring roles and to be victorious. Instead of one person advancing a hundred steps, a hundred people would advance one step forward. I prayed earnestly and worked tirelessly within the chapter, determined that not even one unit would fall to the wayside, that each member would experience benefit in faith.

The key to victory lies in uncovering fresh talent within the organization and pooling their abilities. The word *organization* tends to bring to mind an image of a monolithic, impersonal structure. However, in the Soka Gakkai, people are valued first and foremost.

All the leaders in Kamata Chapter—including group and district leaders—participated in unit-level activities. Discussion meetings were also held on the unit level, because this allowed for warmer, more personal encounters. In these smaller settings, it was possible to properly address individual problems and concerns through one-on-one dialogue.

Each person who was inspired with fresh resolve at these unit-level meetings rose up courageously to propagate the Law.



Merely ordering people about will not inspire them to action. This is even more so considering that people are emotional beings. If people feel put-upon and act only out of a sense of obligation, they are not going to display their true power.

When I took on my leadership responsibilities in Kamata, I was only 24. How was I going to inspire everyone to take action with genuine enthusiasm and purpose? I would do it through my own actions, through my own sweat and hard work, through producing actual results.

I had resolved to take full responsibility for reaching our goal. I felt sure that if I became a good example, the members would appreciate my efforts and place their trust in me.

I stood up resolutely, as befitting a youth and a disciple of President Toda, and wholeheartedly exerted myself: “Watch me! Just watch my actions!” The Daishonin writes, “You need not seek far for an example” (WND, 614). It is our own example of personal struggle—not somebody else’s—that produces sympathy and understanding in those around us.



As a chapter advisor, I worked closely together with Kamata Chapter Leader Takashi Koizumi toward realizing President Toda’s vision. The position of chapter advisor was a support role, much like that of a vice leadership position today.

In that capacity, it was my function to assist the chapter leader, based on the same shared ideals and objectives. I strove with the spirit “I will support the chapter leader, so that we become the best chapter in Japan!” I made every effort to forge myself into a model chapter advisor.

As an ancient philosopher said, it is not the position that ennobles a person, but a person who ennobles the position. In other words, it is not the position that makes a person shine; it is the person who makes the position shine.

To think that an organizational position makes one important is a sign of authoritarianism. That is the behavior of someone who swaggers about cloaked in borrowed authority. Ultimately, this attitude only degrades the position’s value.

A month later, the results from our February campaign were presented. Kamata Chapter came in at No. 1, with 201 new member households!

Until that time, most chapters were unable to achieve even 100 new member households in a month. We had totally broken through that barrier and created a tremendous victory. We had achieved our unprecedented goal of introducing two new households per unit. Everyone was astonished.

No matter how difficult or painful the challenges along the way, once the goal is achieved, everything is transformed into joy and satisfaction.

Everyone was radiant with happiness and delight. Some unit leaders literally danced for joy. Nothing could have made me happier.

While I have written many times before on this February Campaign—the 50th anniversary of which we will mark next year—I have taken the liberty of doing so once again, in view of its significance in the history of our movement.



The German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe wrote that as human beings our “first task is to be active.” To all of you, the noble leaders of kosen-rufu, I say, “Let us take action!”

Having adorned the first page of the 21st century with total victory, please continue to boldly write a history of personal growth and wonderful benefit in faith!

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