

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF A TOMNET HANDSHAKE

The meaning of a handshake is whatever you intend it to be. In the case of TOMNET it is the members who have created and maintained the culture of TOMNET and it is this culture that preserves the strong tradition of members where almost automatically, shaking hands with a mate is par for the course. In fact it may be somewhat presumptuous of us to claim that a handshake among TOMNETITES takes on extra special meaning because of the culture we value. That a firm handshake has become synonymous with mateship, camaraderie and oneness among us is without question.

But allow me to confine my remarks to the notion of oneness in relation to the significance of a TOMNET handshake for we usually begin with a handshake and usually conclude with a handshake in our interactions and exchanges with one another.

About the oneness of TOMNET, there are four brief points I wish to make. Like the cry of the three musketeers its, "all for one and one for all".

First, a unity of purpose prevails in our organization. This does not mean that our unity is the same as uniformity. We are generally united in living by our underlying philosophy of older men supporting older men. However, we all go about our giving and receiving this support in our own individual ways. No two fellows do this exactly the same. What we also do nevertheless, is to shake hands on what we agree upon and what we don't agree upon. I suggest that this understanding and acceptance is captured in the TOMNET handshake.

Second, both givers and receivers within our membership are equally and highly valued. In a one-to-one interaction the giver – in addition to the satisfaction that is derived from simply giving to another – invariably receives something worthwhile from the receiver. This effectively means that the receiver becomes a "return" giver himself. This equates to due recognition of the receiver, even when appearing to be very passive with not much to offer in the interaction. The apparent giver is not superior to the apparent receiver who might appear inferior. They both represent equal value and this is acknowledged in the ritual of a handshake, whether this acknowledgment is conscious or subconscious. Just as the hands come together, two way communication is effected in meaningful connection.

Third: Because the vast majority of our members are passionate about what TOMNET means to them and therefore have strong views about what and how things should be done, there is not infrequently conflict amongst us. This is not necessarily a bad thing, especially when different orientations are thrown into the decision-making melting pot. It is this diversity amongst us that is like an amalgam of different properties that combine in strengthening a desired and collective end result in the best interests of TOMNET.

What is problematic is **unresolved** conflict that is unproductive, unhelpful and if not rectified, down right destructive. Because TOMNET is constantly in a state of flux, constantly experiencing challenging change and demanding development, the diversity of passionate people and their strong views are essential to the survival, growth and vitality of our organization. Where is the handshake relevant at this point? The handshake helps ensure that we accept and value the rights of others to have their own opinions, even if we are at odds with them. We may need to agree to disagree in the best interest of TOMNET and this agreement can be sealed by shaking hands after all is said and done. Of course, forging agreement where consensus is arrived at can also be sealed by way of a firm handshake.

Finally, a handshake binds us together, forms bonds of friendship and, builds bridges across various divides and chasms we encounter from time to time. The Builder Generation – those born before 1946 – and the Baby Boomers – born between 1946 and 1964 – have, notwithstanding their individual differences, much in common. While the culture of TOMNET is characterised by all sorts and conditions of men there is oneness about us.

Some of us are good talkers, some good listeners, some a bit of both and some of us somewhere in between. While some could be described as garrulous gentlemen of the babbling brook variety, others are of the silent type, best typified by the saying that "still waters run deep". In TOMNET, regardless of our personalities and how we fit into the organization, there remains one language of relationship that always speaks eloquently about our oneness. It is the TOMNET handshake.