

**Wing-Kun Tam**  
**2011-12 International President**  
**July 8, 2011, Seattle, Washington**

Immediate Past International President Scruggs, executive officers, members of the Board, distinguished Past Presidents, Lions, Leos, guests, it's such an honor for me to be up here to represent you as International President, to help our association move forward and reach new heights, to help you and your club be the best you can be. Let me ask you two questions: Do you believe in yourself? Do you believe in Lions? Two simple words: I believe. But said with conviction, they can change your entire outlook on life.

Lions, we believe anything is possible. For me, "I Believe" is not an empty slogan. It's based on my own experiences as a Lion, as a businessman, a husband, and a father. With belief comes courage. When all 1.35 million of us are united in service, we form a powerful force of good.

The power of belief is the story of humanity. Let me ask you, how many of you from New York walked all the way coming over here? And how many of you from Europe, Asia and Africa swam here? No? Of course, we flew. It wasn't that long ago that the notion of flying was crazy. Well you say man flying? That was done by birds. But men and women looked at the birds of the sky and said, "Why not us?"

It didn't happen overnight, did it? There were trial and errors. Then one day after years of research and experimentation by two brothers from America, Orville Wright flew 120 feet at seven miles per hour. Slow. We can run faster than that. But from that small triumph, came airplanes and jets.

Lions, I think there is a lesson for us here. Like the Wright Brothers, when we believe and we act and we are not idle dreamers but great doers—when we come together and believe in our mission of service.

Let me tell you another person who believed. He is why we are here today. Melvin Jones, a Chicago businessman, was a pretty good insurance salesman. But what set him apart was his belief that people should band together not to advance their own interests, as was the custom in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but to serve others. He organized clubs and districts.

Melvin Jones had one quality that made it all possible. He believed. He knew the difference between thinking and believing. To me, believing is different from

thinking because it has three other key elements. First, courage. Second, commitment. Third, action. Melvin Jones created a culture, organized around a belief in the value of giving back and he believed that one person can make a difference. He believed in this idea of creating an organization that has the courage to serve the people in need. He also had the courage to follow through his idea. He was committed to the idea to make the organization a success and he took the necessary action to bring everything to fruition.

My experiences as a Lion developed my confidence in the power of belief, the power of “we.” When I joined Lions, I was about 30 years old. Actually, I was the youngest member of my club. I just want to share with you that my charter president at that time he was, do you guess how old he was? He was 94 years old, the oldest charter president in the world. So I did what maybe some of you did when you were a new Lion. I looked around and I said, “Is this right for me?” I'm not sure I fit in.

Well, the charter president gave me an assignment right away. He said, “Tam, our club is sponsoring an outing for senior citizens. We are taking them out of their lonely senior home and treating them to a day of fun.” I said, “Sure! I will help!” But here I am, the youngest Lion being paired up with senior citizens, so my assignment was to get some gifts for them.

I brought them candies, biscuits, toothpaste and medical ointments. Well, no big deal, right? You wouldn't believe their reaction when I passed all the gifts to them. They shook my hand, they hugged me and they said “thank you” and “thank you” and over and over. Their face lit up with happiness and that was like a ray of light shining on my heart, making me happy.

So I told the charter president about their joy and he said, “Young man, it wasn't the value of the gifts that means so much to them.” It was the love and the care I brought them.”

And the project helped make me a dedicated Lion. My guess is if the charter president had not given me that assignment, I would have been an indifferent Lion, not one fully involved. I wouldn't be standing here today as International President.

My club treated me like a family member. The charter president was like a wise concerned father looking out for my best interests. As a new Lion, I was like a baby and my club took care of me until I was on my own two feet and be the one to nurture others. Lions, our club needs to treat our members like an extended

family. Care for them, nurture them, look out for them and challenge them.

If someone in the family is sick, visit them. Bring them food. If a Lion loses their job, try to cheer them up or alert people about a job opening or who may be able to help them. Africans have a saying: A river that forgets its source soon dries up. The source of our strength in our clubs is the relationship we have with one another. We need to believe in one another and take care of one another like families do. Don't forget. We are serving the community, we are helping others. Why don't we also help our members together?

If we do this, we will be having no problems with retention. Our clubs will be full of members who are enthusiastic about service. It's also important to engage our clubs. Clubs are the source of strength as organization. There are only two people in this organization who are called the presidents. The club president and the president of the international organization. I would like to ask, how many current or former club presidents are here with us here today? Please stand, be recognized! Wow. Thank you so very much.

This year when I'm traveling I will conduct many presidents-meet-the-president meetings. We will be talking to one another. I want to listen to you, learn from you, motivate you, and, most importantly, be motivated by you. I respectfully ask club officers to gently try and nurture member like loving parent.

Whether you are a current club president or future club president, just remember this about your club members: Every Lions matters. If you remember that and believe that, it will serve you well. I believe clubs are like families and can nurture members. That's why I have a program called "My Club, My Family." Lions, do you believe that? Clubs are like families? I believe in the power of Lions to make a difference. Lions, do you believe?

As you know, I lost my beloved wife, Irene, to cancer. She was a source of strength and she inspired me on a daily basis. Lions, she battled the disease for 15 long, tough but love-filled years. She believed she could beat it. She believed in our family. She believed in me, and I believed in her. She ultimately succumbed to this devastating disease, but it wasn't for lack of the power of believing. Her will, her character and her achievements during her 15-year battle with cancer was nothing short of a miracle.

As you can imagine, after my wife died, I was grief-stricken. I was worn out. I was exhausted. I'm not ashamed to admit I did what many people do when they are

gripped with sorrow. I lay in bed and watched news on TV day and night. I was feeling sorry for myself, my whole life. I had attained success. I had achieved my goals. And now my life was shattered and I began to doubt myself. I kept asking myself, if I couldn't help my wife, how can I possibly help others?

I was ready to give up everything, including Lions, and my daughter Tiffany said, "Dad, don't just sit around all day and watch the news on TV. The news is so depressing." But shortly thereafter I was watching the news when I heard of the terrible earthquake in Sichuan, China. The images on TV were horrifying. I realized that so many were suffering and maybe I could help. It was then I drew on my wife's strength. She would not want me to remain idle and I told myself, "Enough."

Although I was not able to save my wife's life, I believed I could help alleviate the suffering in Sichuan. So I called Lions Club International that same night. I was very lucky. The executive officers happened to be meeting then in Oak Brook, so I was able to talk to them, to the right people right away. I told them about the extent of the damage and I was willing to do whatever I had to do to help Lions Clubs International and Lions Clubs International Foundation respond to this disaster in my country.

Very quickly, LCIF approved a \$500,000 catastrophe grant. I was happy that Lions everywhere wanted to help those in China. I was happy to lend a hand to alleviate suffering in my country. I was very pleased to once again be myself, to realize the power and the value of belief followed by action.

Because so many believed and were committed to making a difference, we were able to rebuild homes, schools, hospitals and senior citizen centers. We made a positive life-changing impact on thousands of people. That is the power of "We."

Lions, we can't just sit on our couch and wait for others to serve. That's our mission. Like the example of my own personal family, there will be many challenges. But if you believe in our mission, and act with passion and compassion, all things are possible.

My three children have given me great joy and comfort. I'm so very proud of each and every one of them. In them I find renewed strength. In them I see vitality. In them I see the future. They keep me young, and I'd like to introduce them to you now. My oldest son, Alvin, and his fiancée, Elaine. My daughter Tiffany. and my youngest son, Andrew.

**Alvin:**

We're so proud of our dad. Both he and our mom always believed in us and always encouraged us to believe in ourselves and follow our dreams. Music, sports, laughter and quality time with each other has always been an important part of our lives growing up. Tiffany and Andrew would like to dedicate the following musical piece to our mom and dad. Although she is not here with us today, she continues to inspire us. This song meant a great deal to our mom and dad. We hope you all will enjoy it as well. Thank you.

***Musical Performance***

**President Tam:**

Isn't that great? Lions I'm honored also to introduce my mother to you. Mother, will you please come forward? Fellow Lions, I'm the person I am today because of her love and support. She always asked me to do my best and to believe in myself and she's always my boss.

A few years ago, I attended a little gathering at a Lions convention. It was a lot of fun, and I met some young people who were very idealistic and devoted to service. Lions, we need our Leos. We need to be around young people. Will all the Leos stand and be recognized? We need to turn Leos into Lions. And I just want to share with all of you, I'm an honorary Leo. So I am probably the oldest Leo in the world.

Leos are probably one of the very best things about Lions. Where would we be without their new way of seeing things? We belong to the past and the present, and they belong to the future. Next year at our International Convention in Busan, Korea, we will hold a Leo-Lions Summit. But this year in your clubs, please be engaged with Leos and make them feel welcome. Respect their talents and abilities and make them feel honored at the family table.

According to an ancient Chinese proverb, a bit of fragrance clings to the heart that gives flowers. When we care for others and we serve others, it enriches us and makes us better. This year the main service project I am asking clubs to take part in will literally be grounded in service. We want Lions to plant one million trees this year. Will that be too aggressive to talk about planting one million trees?

Trees are the lungs of the planet. They breathe in carbon dioxide and breathe out oxygen. By planting trees we are doing a great service to the earth and all its peoples. I believe this is a perfect project for Lions and Leos for many reasons. It's simple, anyone can plant a tree, you don't need to be physically strong or have a green thumb. It's achievable, it's deliverable, and it's measurable.

Planting trees will further club cohesion. It is a project that can be done together. It's also a project where we can invite family members to join us. Who can say no to planting a tree? We also can invite members of the community to join us in planting trees. This is an ideal way to become more visible to our communities. This is a golden opportunity to replenish our membership ranks as we replenish the earth.

Finally, planting trees is a marvelous way for partnering with other non-profit groups and with corporations. We can reach out to people and groups. That will help us achieve other goals down the road. We will report the number of trees planted on the LCIF website. In Busan next year, I will make a grand announcement about the tally of our planted trees.

As I said, will that be too many, too aggressive? We are talking about one million trees, but when you think it over, one tree is less than one tree per Lion. If we can accomplish this goal, it proves once again that we can accomplish everything, just like we did when we exceeded our goal for SightFirst, just like we did when we prevented over one million cases of river blindness, and just like we are going to do helping to eradicate measles. I believe we can do it!

I want you to let you know, your District Governor-elects have already pledged almost 4.8 million trees. Lions, do you believe we can plant trees, 4.8 million? May I believe in you? Let's do it!

As you know, Chinese are part of ancient civilization. I think I can find a proverb for nearly any sentiment. Here is one of my favorites: A book tightly shut is but a block of paper. We need to tell our story to others. Make sure your club Web site is attractive, up to date and useful. Use Facebook, Mixi, Orkut, Kaixin001, Twitter and blogs to network with others and keep our name and mission in the public eyes. We have to stay current with technology. We have to embrace the most modern technology tools.

Belief in service brings us together. I know in my heart that if we walk out of this

hall believing in our mission and one another, we can make the world a much better place. Lions, do you believe that?

I'm going to conclude with one final example of how the impossible becomes possible. When the seed was first planted to launch the SightFirst China Campaign, it was just a seed. But I had a dream. I had a strong belief that one day we would be doing cataract surgeries in China, and one day we would have Lions clubs striving in my homeland.

It took courage and commitment on the part of many people to move this idea forward and above all an effective plan of action. I appealed to the Chinese officials to allow Lions to initiate a campaign and presented the idea to Lions Clubs International board members. Uncertain about supporting a massive health care initiative where Lions clubs did not exist, it was a challenge. Lions Clubs International Foundation had never supported such an ambitious project.

Through persistence and working the right channels, the door on both sides crept open. A cataract pilot project began followed by Sight First China Action. Because so many people believed, we have restored sight to 5.2 million people in China!

Fellow Lions, this was not something that was accomplished overnight. It took years of work on the part of many Lions and many government officials. Many challenges had to be overcome. But look where we are now today. Lions clubs are thriving in China, and like Lions clubs elsewhere around the world, Lions there are serving the underserved not only in China but in Africa and other parts of the world. A tremendous challenge turned into an opportunity. Why? Because many people believed. That's the power of "WE!"

Lions, do you believe? I wish you a prosperous, service-filled year. I hope to meet with you again in the course of my travels and I ask you to support together we can bring help. Together we can bring hope. Together we can change the lives of millions of people. That is collective good. That is the power of "We." And that is the power of Lions! And I believe! Thank you!