



ROTARY INTERNATIONAL®

# An Introduction to Vocational Service

# AN INTRODUCTION TO VOCATIONAL SERVICE

Membership in Rotary is based on a member's vocation, with each club striving to create a microcosm of its community's business and professional world. This unique feature provides the source for Rotary's historic commitment to vocational service, the second of Rotary's four Avenues of Service. Through vocational service, Rotarians are expected to adhere to and promote high ethical standards in all their business dealings, recognize the worthiness of all useful occupations, and contribute their professional expertise and skills to addressing societal problems and needs.

The club and its members share responsibility for promoting vocational service. Each club should develop projects that allow members to use their business and professional skills. Members are expected to contribute to these projects and to conduct their own business dealings in accordance with Rotary principles.

# VOCATIONAL SERVICE AND HIGH ETHICAL STANDARDS

Historically, Rotarians have promoted the practice of high ethical standards as part of their commitment to vocational service. Two tools developed by Rotarians — The Four-Way Test and the Declaration of Rotarians in Businesses and Professions — provide a road map for practicing ethical behavior in the workplace and other areas of life.

## The Four-Way Test

The Four-Way Test was conceived in 1932 by Herbert J. Taylor, a member of the Rotary Club of Chicago who served as the 1954-55 president of Rotary International. Having been assigned the task of saving a company from bankruptcy, Taylor developed the test as an ethical guide to follow in all business matters. The company's survival was credited to this simple philosophy. Adopted by Rotary International in 1934, The Four-Way Test remains an essential standard against which Rotarians measure ethical behavior. The test has been translated into dozens of languages and promoted by Rotarians worldwide.

## The Four-Way Test

Of the things we think, say or do:

- 1) Is it the TRUTH?
- 2) Is it FAIR to all concerned?
- 3) Will it build GOODWILL and BETTER FRIENDSHIPS?
- 4) Will it be BENEFICIAL to all concerned?

## Declaration of Rotarians in Businesses and Professions

This declaration was adopted by the 1989 Council on Legislation as a means of more clearly defining the high ethical standards called for in the Object of Rotary. It provides a framework for ethical behavior that all Rotarians can use, together with The Four-Way Test, in their business and professional activities.

## Declaration of Rotarians in Businesses and Professions

As a Rotarian engaged in a business or profession, I am expected to:

- 1) Consider my vocation to be another opportunity to serve;
- 2) Be faithful to the letter and to the spirit of the ethical codes of my vocation, to the laws of my country, and to the moral standards of my community;
- 3) Do all in my power to dignify my vocation and to promote the highest ethical standards in my chosen vocation;
- 4) Be fair to my employer, employees, associates, competitors, customers, the public, and all those with whom I have a business or professional relationship;
- 5) Recognize the honor and respect due to all occupations which are useful to society;
- 6) Offer my vocational talents: to provide opportunities for young people, to work for the relief of the special needs of others, and to improve the quality of life in my community;
- 7) Adhere to honesty in my advertising and in all representations to the public concerning my business or profession;
- 8) Neither seek from nor grant to a fellow Rotarian a privilege or advantage not normally accorded others in a business or professional relationship.

## Advancing high ethical standards in the workplace

Rotarians can use their standing as business leaders and respected members of all professions to promote and advance high ethical standards by setting a positive example among employees, associates, and the community in general. All types of work-related interaction offer an opportunity to encourage ethical behavior. Here are a few specific ways that Rotarians can integrate ethics into their daily work life:

- In hiring, training, and review procedures, include discussion and emphasis of honesty, accountability, fairness, and respect.
- In internal communications, praise and encourage exemplary behavior both on and off the job.
- In relations with customers, vendors, and business associates, communicate and demonstrate your personal commitment to high ethical standards.

## Three keys to ensuring ethical behavior in the workplace

A 2009 article in *Forbes* magazine on leadership suggests that ethical business practices depend on three things: honesty in use of language, insistence on proper behavior, and a refusal to allow for gray areas.

- 1) Use honest language. “One of the most important things a leader can impart to his or her organization is an honest and explicit use of language.” Expose the unethical consequences that may be concealed in such euphemisms as “strategic business practices” and “competitive advantage.” Use your power of language to make a clear statement of your ethical position.
- 2) Insist on proper behavior. “Behavior results from values, yes. But values can result from behavior too.” Make ethical practices a standard component of your employees’ performance expectations to help them develop and strengthen their personal integrity.
- 3) Refuse to allow for gray areas. “While moral absolutism may sound like an archaic and austere concept, . . . it’s exactly what is needed to establish a clear, strong, unwavering voice for doing the right thing.”

Mendhro, Umamah, and Abhinav Sinha. 2009. Three keys to staying ethical in the age of Madoff. *Forbes*, 6 February.  
[www.forbes.com/2009/02/06/ethics-corruption-india-leadership-corruption09\\_0209\\_mendhro.html](http://www.forbes.com/2009/02/06/ethics-corruption-india-leadership-corruption09_0209_mendhro.html)

# VOCATIONAL SERVICE AND CLASSIFICATION

The classification principle — the guideline by which nearly all Rotary membership is determined — ensures that each club's membership represents a cross-section of its community's business and professional population. Classification and vocational service go hand in hand. Just as Rotarians represent their vocation in Rotary, so too do they represent Rotary in their vocations.

Classification talks are a great way to promote vocational awareness in your club. These presentations give members the chance to learn the inner workings of jobs other than their own, including the various problems that arise and the solutions used to address them. Classification talks may also serve as a starting point for initiating club projects that help young people and the unemployed develop marketable skills.

Organizing tours of members' workplaces is another way to recognize the value of each member's vocation. The name Rotary originated with the practice of rotating meeting sites among members' places of business, and that tradition remains an excellent way for Rotarians to share their vocations with their club. Those members who find public speaking difficult might prefer to conduct a workplace tour rather than give a classification talk.

If the size of the workplace and the size of your club permit, schedule an occasional meeting in a member's place of employment. Consider inviting young people to participate as well. Getting firsthand knowledge about various occupations may help them make sound career choices. You can also use this opportunity to introduce future prospective members to your club.

# VOCATIONAL SERVICE PROJECT OPPORTUNITIES

Individual Rotarians and Rotary clubs can support the RI Strategic Plan and emphasize Rotary's unique vocational service commitment by undertaking any of the following recommended project ideas.

## Promote Rotary's commitment to high ethical standards

- Post The Four-Way Test on a prominent billboard in your community.
- Display The Four-Way Test and/or the Declaration of Rotarians in Businesses and Professions in your office or work space and use it as a conversation starter to tell your colleagues about Rotary's commitment to business ethics and personal integrity.
- "Walk the talk" by ensuring that your actions in the workplace, community, and family demonstrate a personal commitment to high ethical standards.
- Sponsor an essay contest in which participants describe how they can apply The Four-Way Test to their lives.
- Sponsor a "character literacy" project for young children that integrates lessons about ethics with children's reading activities. For additional information, contact the RI Literacy Resource Group at [www.rotary.org/literacy](http://www.rotary.org/literacy).
- Conduct a RYLA event with special emphasis on ethics.
- Organize a discussion or group workshop on maintaining high ethical standards in the workplace and consider inviting local non-Rotarian business leaders to attend. Following are some recommended discussion questions you can use to get a productive conversation started.

## Discussion questions for workshops on ethics

- What are the benefits of making ethical decisions in your profession? In your Rotary club?
- How can one person encourage ethical behavior in others?
- How can Rotary's high ethical standards influence the community?
- How can Rotary's high ethical standards enhance our public image?
- How do you handle situations in which an unethical decision has been made?

## Recognize and promote the value of all useful occupations

- Make classification talks and tours of members' businesses a standard component of your club's program (see page 5 for further details).
- Join or form a Rotary Fellowship related to your vocation. Rotary Fellowships are international associations of Rotarians, Rotarian spouses, and Rotaractors who join together to pursue a shared recreational or vocational interest. Learn more at [www.rotary.org/fellowships](http://www.rotary.org/fellowships).
- Sponsor a career day for Rotarians to bring young people to their places of business to educate them about career opportunities.

## Support professional development

- Encourage club members to join and take leadership roles in business and vocational associations.
- Sponsor a seminar for small business entrepreneurs and invite members of the community to participate.
- Hold informal professional networking events where members can meet other local professionals and introduce them to Rotary.
- Start a career counseling program geared towards equipping unemployed or underemployed adults with the skills they need to compete in the job market.

## Volunteer your vocation

- Mentor a young person. Share your knowledge, skills, and values to help prepare your mentee to succeed in his or her academic and vocational pursuits.
- Register as a Rotary Volunteer and use Rotary's ProjectLINK database ([www.rotary.org/ProjectLINK](http://www.rotary.org/ProjectLINK)) to identify a project in need of your specialized vocational skills.



# PROMOTING VOCATIONAL SERVICE

Take advantage of the following resources and opportunities that can help you promote vocational service in your club or district.

## Contact your district vocational service chair

District governors are strongly encouraged to appoint a district vocational service chair to promote awareness throughout the district and provide project support and guidance to Rotarians. Refer to your district directory or e-mail [vocationalservice@rotary.org](mailto:vocationalservice@rotary.org) to obtain contact information for your district's chair.

## Observe Vocational Service Month

Vocational Service Month in October is an opportunity to initiate significant vocational service projects. Consider using some of the suggested project ideas provided in this publication as a starting point.

Visit [www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org) to find resources to assist you in promoting October as Vocational Service Month, including a downloadable flier and PowerPoint presentation.

## Sign up to receive *Vocational Service Update*

*Vocational Service Update* is a free newsletter produced by Rotary International that provides vocational service news and resources. Sign up at [www.rotary.org/newsletters](http://www.rotary.org/newsletters) or e-mail RI at [vocationalservice@rotary.org](mailto:vocationalservice@rotary.org).

## Earn the RI Vocational Service Leadership Award

The RI Vocational Service Leadership Award recognizes district governors who have conducted a forum to promote, celebrate, and advance the district's dedication to vocational service during the governor's year in office. Nomination materials are provided to district governors each Rotary year.

## Sponsor club and district awards

Clubs and districts are encouraged to develop their own award programs to recognize Rotarians and non-Rotarians for demonstrating outstanding commitment to the principles of vocational service.

## Share success stories on ProjectLINK

ProjectLINK is an online, searchable database that lists Rotary club and district service projects in need of funding, volunteers, donated goods, or Rotary Foundation grant partners. It also features a sampling of model project descriptions that other clubs and districts can adapt. After completing a successful vocational service project, consider submitting a model project description so that others may benefit from your example. Use the form at [www.rotary.org/ProjectLINK](http://www.rotary.org/ProjectLINK).



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