

## **A FRESH LOOK AT ETHICS**

**by Angus M Robinson, Past President, Rotary eClub One**

The issue of ethics as exemplified in Rotary by the application of the 'Four Way Test' is one which continues to evoke discussion and debate.

The interface between the value of the teaching of ethics and religious beliefs is currently being put to test in the State of New South Wales and Australia. A state sanctioned pilot study is being conducted in public schools to enable students who have elected not to attend the one hour per week mandated class for religious studies to be afforded the opportunity to study ethics. The driver for this initiative is not to encourage students not to undertake religious instruction ('RI') but to provide students who otherwise would not be learning anything during this period of study to be taught something of value.

The historical context for this situation is that in the early days of European settlement of the state of New South Wales, churches were responsible for education, but when this role was taken over by government, it was agreed that there would remain a mandated one hour of RI per week. In recent years, there has been an increasing number of students who come from families without a formal religious background to opt out of these classes, usually at the request of their parents.

To Rotarians, 'RI' is an acronym which has a different meaning – Rotary International, which is of course a worldwide meaning where 'the Rotary motto Service Above Self conveys the humanitarian spirit of the organisation's more than 1.2 million members. Strong fellowship among Rotarians and meaningful community and international service projects characterise Rotary worldwide' without dues regard to politics, race and religion.

As every member of Rotary would be aware, the Four Way Test of Rotary has become the organisation's guiding light for ethical behaviour with the Fourth Avenue of Service – Vocational Service as the driving force for its teaching and implementation.

Of the things we think, say or do...

Is it the Truth?

Is it Fair to all concerned?

Will it build Goodwill and Better Friendships?

Will it be Beneficial to all concerned?

According to the Rotary Global History Fellowship (RGHF) internet project, 'the simple and straightforward Four Way Test was written by Chicago

Rotarian Herbert J Taylor in 1932 and it was not necessarily a catechism but rather a purely subjective form of self-analysis.

According to RGHF, 'the test was primarily written for his bankrupt Club Aluminum Company in 1932. Herb actually gave up his job in 'packaged groceries; house to house sales' (his classification in #1 club) in order to join 250 other employees onboard the so-called "sinking ship". RGHF reports that Rotarian Herb retold the concept of the test in his own words:

*"To win our way out of this situation, I reasoned we must be morally and ethically strong. I knew that in right there was might. I felt that if we could get our employees to think right they would do right. We needed some sort of ethical yardstick that everybody in the company could memorise and apply to what we thought, said, and did in our relations to others. So one morning I leaned over on my desk, rested my head in my hands. In a few moments, I reached for a white paper card and wrote down that which had come to me – in twenty-four words."*

RGHF also cites the situation that 'when a company advertisement was placed before Herb, declaring his aluminum product as "the greatest cooking ware in the world", Herb simply stated "We can't prove that". The advert was rewritten simply stating the facts. Apparently Herb's heads of department belonged to different religions and all found no incompatibility with their respective faiths. RGHF concludes that the test was "for any man to take as arises".

RGFH also cites Oren Arnold's book about The Rotary club of Chicago entitled The Golden Strand, which explains that the club first learned of the test in 1939 when Herb was President. 'Herb's enthusiasm was described as "contagious" and members quickly and with fervour took up the Four Way Test, embraced it and spread the word. Rotary International officially adopted the Test in January of 1943. Herbert J Taylor would additionally serve the movement as RI President in 1954-55.'

In recent years, in reviewing the relevance of the Four Way Test to 'modern day' life, many Rotarians have agonised over the words embodied in the Test, particularly relating to the extent to which 'truth' itself can be determined. Arguably, the Test has been subject to a heavy dose of 'over intellectualisation' with its original context lost and indeed misunderstood.

As Rotarian Herbert Taylor simply stated, it was a matter of dealing with the facts, which in any situation, can be determined with a reasonable degree of certainty without having to explore the additional dimension of 'truth'.

The other three dimensions of the Four Way Test also embrace the ethical values of Rotary – fairness, goodwill and better friendships (we call this fellowship), and beneficial to all concerned (the latter encapsulating 'service above self' ideals).

In a modern day business context, it is now generally accepted that the best business outcome is based on 'win win' arrangements ('beneficial to all concerned').

Moreover, successful businesses these days understand and practice relationship marketing, a concept which involves employing strategies to develop long term relationships with customers. It is recognised that a business must not only meet but exceed customer satisfaction in order to retain them and must develop a sense of strong loyalty amongst their customers. Arguably, any organisation in the present day context that adopts the practices of the Four Way Test (first adopted some 70 years ago and following in the footsteps of Rotarian Herbert Taylor) is building enduring relationships with customers.

Another dimension of the use and practice of the Four Way Test is also worth consideration, and that relates to the practice of good manners. William of Wykeham (1324 - 1404) famously said, 'Manners maketh man, now the motto of Winchester College and New College, Oxford in the UK which he founded. According to the present day Winchester College website, 'as to its contemporary meaning (sic, of the motto), we can assume that 'manners' as we know today was not implied - more possibly it related to the mould, stamp or quality set upon a man by his education and the quality of his subsequent actions.'

As the Rotary movement moves forwards globally, now leaving sexism and now increasingly ageism in its wake, it is hoped that the 'marque' of the brand will be recognised by its strong values system embracing not only 'service above self' as daily demonstrated by its global following of good men and women, but also by universal and superior commitment to ethical behaviour, evidenced by their enthusiastic adherence to the Four Way Test.

Perhaps, essence of this branded package will encapsulate the concepts of grace and good manners which underpin a shared belief in fairness, goodwill and universal fellowship to fellow mankind.

**About the author: Angus is the Managing Partner of Leisure Solutions® which offers a range of strategic services which includes new product development in the area of ecotourism and geotourism.**

**A committed Rotarian since joining initially the Rotary Club of Sydney in 1994, Angus is proud to be a Paul Harris Fellow.**