

Rotary 101

- What Are We Doing Here?

At the heart of Rotary is the development of “acquaintance” as an opportunity for service. This idea was derived from the reason Rotary was founded in the first place: to bring together a group of professional people with different backgrounds and skills as a way to exchange ideas and form meaningful acquaintances. A strong Rotary Club is anchored by strong relationships among its members. At the heart of Rotary are these core values: integrity, diversity, service, leadership and fellowship.

Now, what about this Service piece. Well, Rotary has four avenues of service. Can anyone here (besides Randy Morse) name one?

Club Service - making your club strong with an active membership.

Vocational Service - asking Rotarians to work with integrity and to contribute their expertise to the problems and needs of our community and society in general.

Community Service - to encourage Rotarians to find ways to improve the quality of life in our community and to serve the public interest.

International Service - sponsoring or volunteering on international projects and using local expertise to build long-term partnerships abroad.

Youth Service - recognizing the importance of empowering youth and young professionals through leadership development programs like Interact, Rotaract and Rotary Youth Exchange.

Rotary was started in 1905 by a Chicago attorney named Paul Harris who thought it would be beneficial to bring together a group of professionals with different backgrounds to exchange ideas and form mutual acquaintances. In 1910 there were 16 Rotary Clubs. By 1912 Rotary Clubs could be found in a few more countries. By 1925 Rotary existed on six continents and today there are more than 35,000 Rotary Clubs worldwide. In 1932, a Chicago Rotarian named Herbert Taylor developed something called the Four Way Test. It was originally designed to guide his attempt at saving a failing aluminum company but later came to represent Rotary's value of integrity.

There are four “statements” in the Four Way Test.

Let’s see how good this Club is. Who can tell me the first statement (besides Jed Brummer) ?

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?

So, what is the Object of Rotary? What are we doing here anyway?

The Object of Rotary is to encourage and foster the ideal of service as a basis of worthy enterprise and in particular to encourage and foster:

1. The development of acquaintance as an opportunity for service;
2. High ethical standards in business and professions; recognizing the worthiness of all useful occupations;
3. The application of the ideal of service in each Rotarian’s personal, business and community life;
4. Advancement of international understanding, goodwill and peace through a world fellowship of business and professional persons united in the ideal of service.

So, it is plain to see that Rotary was, and is, sitting on the foundation of service...to one another, to our community and to our world.

But there’s more. In 1979, Rotary International began its fight against polio and to date, Rotary has contributed more than \$1.6 BILLION to that fight including matching funds from the Gates Foundation. Wow!

So...what are WE doing here? Why do we have weekly meetings? Why do we have an invocation? Why do we sing “America the Beautiful” and recite the Pledge of Allegiance? What’s the point? What’s the point?

There are really two points:

One is that Rotary International does some really admirable work worldwide. The eradication of Polio campaign, Rotary Peace Centers offering advanced educational opportunities to Rotary Peace Fellows, Rotary Grants supporting humanitarian projects, scholarships and vocational training teams. This and so much more. And if you’d like to know more, please go to Rotary.org on your nearest computer and see for yourself.

Two is what we, as a Rotary Club, do for our community. This is where the “rubber meets the road”. Why does Rotary encourage all members to attend the weekly meetings? Simple. Strong relationships among its members. The better we get to know one another, the better we serve. Example. A group under the astute direction of Mike Shea comes together to repair, place and recover no-parking signs for the Jaffrey Fireworks Festival. Because we all know one another so well, we knew what skills each member brought to the table and we were able to accomplish the mission in an organized, effective and, dare I say, fun way. And, as an outstanding example of Vocational Service, Mike brought to bear his broad expertise to the problems and needs of our community and helped us all do the same. Jon Frederick applies his expertise in organizational management to the daily operation of this Club. I could go on and on naming member after member. Because we know each other so well, we can all contribute to helping the Club identify and solve community problems.

I have often said, when asked what Rotary does, that we raise money and give it away. But a lot goes unsaid when I say that. What is left unsaid is how hard we work to raise that money AND how hard we work to give it away. It’s a big job and requires a lot participation.

Think about what we do as a Club...Camp Best. Annual Raffle Party. Roadside Trash Pickup. No Parking Signs for the Fireworks. Parking Detail at the First Church Fair. Hayrack at the Scarecrows Event Downtown. Cooking and serving at the Community Supper. Think about the MANY community organizations we contribute to and the support we offer them. Think about Students of the Month. Think about our Award of a Paul Harris Fellowship to a worthy community resident. These are all the things we can do because we are a community of people who are well acquainted and understand the talents and abilities of our fellow Club members. It’s a WIN-WIN.

We are not here just to have breakfast. That is the least important thing we do.

We are here to foster Rotary ideals which in turn allows us to muster resources and focus those resources on the needs of our community.

So, why would you ask someone to join an organization like this, to take an hour out of their week (just for starters) to come to a meeting and hear a speaker. Because that person might just be looking for a way to serve the community and might not be sure how to do it. Or perhaps they

are new in town looking to establish relationships, both business and social. I'll speak for myself here, but I find the members of this Club to be smart, interesting and entertaining. And so would the new member that you bring in.

As far as governance, Rotary is a top-down organization. There is a President and President Elect and a Board of Directors from around the world.

Below that level is the District level. We are in District 7870 which comprises most of Vermont and a good slice of, but not all of, New Hampshire. At the head of the District is the District Governor who is responsible to see that all the Clubs in the District adhere to the Rotary organizational guidelines. In addition, the District is responsible for the Youth Exchange program, one of the very brightest jewels in the Rotary crown. The District also organizes an annual conference, a chance for all the Rotary Clubs in the district to come together and share ideas, hear the winners of the Four Way Test essay contest and to celebrate the exchange students. Although most Rotarians say you couldn't drag them to a District Conference, anyone who actually does attend one will agree when I say they are very interesting and good fun.

I don't know anyone who has actually attended a Rotary International Convention. They are usually held in a large city somewhere around the world and 20-40 thousand Rotarians attend. The last one to be held in the US was two years ago in Atlanta.

And what about the Club level. How does it all get done. Who does the heavy lifting? Well, you all know the answer to that question. It's the President, President-elect, Vice President and the Secretary who put in lots of time and energy behind the scenes. Also, the Board of Directors, who meet monthly to iron out the wrinkles and make the tough decisions. The local Clubs are fairly autonomous but are required to operate within guidelines established by RI. Once a year, the District Governor attends a Club meeting and tries to meet with the Board to hear about Club projects and initiatives.

So, what does the future hold for Rotary? Interesting question. When I joined Rotary in 1977, there were no women allowed in Rotary. You could only have one Club member from any designated profession, so you couldn't have two trial attorneys, for instance. My first Club in Pittsfield Massachusetts had about 150 members, met on Thursday at noon, preceded by a short cocktail hour, if you can imagine. My next Club, the Keene Rotary Club, had about 130 members and we met at noon on Monday. No cocktails. In the mid-80's, a group split off to form the Keene Elm City Club with a Thursday morning meeting time of 7:30am. Women were allowed in Rotary by then and have brought a vibrant energy to the

entire organization from RI on down to the Club level. Meeting attendance used to be mandatory. If you missed three unexcused meetings in Pittsfield, you were asked to leave. Keene was the same. One was encouraged to “make up” a missed meeting by attending a meeting at another nearby Club. If you were travelling, you were encouraged to attend a Rotary meeting wherever you were. Makeups could be very interesting, especially in foreign countries where one found oneself welcomed like visiting royalty. Today that has all changed. Some Clubs meet online. Some Clubs meet for cocktails. Some Clubs still meet at noon. I suspect morning meetings are the most common now. Attendance requirements have been loosened up dramatically. What constitutes a “make up” has changed dramatically. But I believe the strongest Rotary Clubs are those where a majority of the members attend regularly. Members who attend meetings know what the Club is doing, they get to know their fellow members and make lasting friendships. Occasionally they hear an interesting speaker (today notwithstanding) and sometimes they even have fun.

Is Rotary viable? Are the young people in our community interested in an organization like Rotary? Who wants to meet every week anyway?

My answer comes as I look at the Conant High School Interact Club. This is a group of students who want to be there (I think there might be a waiting list), they are honored to be there, and they honor each person’s time by starting on time and ending on time. These young people are the future of Rotary. They are energized, focused and ready to take on any task. They raise funds like crazy and have no trouble deciding where to give the funds away.

So, I’ll finish by saying that Rotary is an honorable organization dedicated to admirable goals, with an enviable track record. To me, being a Rotarian is an honor. We are the gold standard of service organizations. This Rotary Club, the Jaffrey Rindge Rotary Club is a very honorable organization that has dedicated itself to the betterment of our community and the fostering of Rotary’s goals. We enjoy an enviable reputation in our district. We are succeeding where other Clubs are struggling.

So, my challenge to you today is two-fold:

Tell our story wherever and whenever you can. Tell anybody who’ll listen about Camp Best or how we support just about every worthwhile organization in our community that asks for our help. Tell them about our Student of the Month program. Tell them about our participation in the Youth Exchange Program.

Or...better yet...bring them to a meeting and let them experience our Club firsthand. New members are critical to our future success and the only way we can get new members is if you bring them in.

Please do not miss that opportunity.

Thank you for listening.