

ROTARY DISTRICT 5440 PEACEBUILDER  
NEWSLETTER JULY 2018  
NUMBER 10

***PEACEBUILDING AND ROTARY'S FOUR-WAY TEST***

William M. Timpson and Bob Meroney  
Fort Collins Rotary Club  
and  
Lindsey Pointer, 2017 Rotary Global Grant Recipient

In these newsletters of the Rotary District Peacebuilders, we want to invite readers for contributions and ideas, suggestions and possibilities for our efforts to promote the foundational skills for promoting peace, i.e., nonviolent conflict resolution, improved communication and cooperation, successful negotiation and mediation as well as the critical and creative thinking that can help communities move through obstacles and difficulties.

When you dig below the surface, these are the same skills and ideas we can see in various Rotary activities, Community and Global Grants. By sharing what we learn, we hope to spark new thinking about what can be done locally, on college campuses, elementary and secondary schools, in churches, other organizations as well as in communities of all sizes, formally and informally—wherever people are looking for new and constructive ways through conflicts.

You can look through previous Newsletters that have been archived on the District 5440 website: <https://www.rotary5440.org/SitePage/peace-building-newsletters>

**Rotary Four-Way Test and War!**

**Robert N. Meroney**

*NOTE: Bob Meroney is an Emeritus Professor of Fluid Mechanics and Wind Engineering with a long career at Colorado State University. He has been an active member of the Fort Collins Rotary Club and regularly researches a range of topics on modern life, issues and politics that serve to spark deeper conversations among friends and colleagues.*

Since 1943 Rotary Clubs have promoted and shared with others a simple and succinct ethical tool called The Four-Way Test to evaluate what it is appropriate to think, say and do. It was originally proposed in 1932 by Chicago businessman Herbert J. Taylor, who later became the president of Rotary International (1954-55). The test consists of four questions:

- 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?**

In 2003 John W. Dean III, U.S. lawyer and White House Counsel under President Richard M. Nixon, addressed the Rotary District 5670 Conference on the topic *Watergate, War, and the Four-Way Test*. He examined what might have happened if he and others in the White House had thought to apply The Four-Way Test to the pending war with Iraq (2003) as well as the Watergate conspiracy (1971-74). He concluded that *“the purely secular Four-Way Test cuts through a lot of hotly debated, often deeply nuance(d), theological discussion and arrives in the end at a very similar place.”* ... when and why should countries consider war and lies as acceptable alternatives.

Dean did not choose to give explicit answers to the conundrum of when and why are war or conspiracy acceptable. Instead he perceived The Four-Way Test to be a personal ethical outline and a private guide for each of us to find the answers for ourselves. John Dean concluded *“that had those of us in the Nixon White House who were involved in Watergate stopped to apply The Four-Way Test — even if only occasionally — there would have been no Watergate.”*<sup>1</sup>

Between 1998-2003 a brutal civil war broke out in the Solomon Islands that involved violence and fighting between different ethnic islander groups. Thousands of islanders fled between the islands as intimidation and violence accelerated. Initial attempts at reconciliation were to no avail, and two separate peace agreements negotiated in 2000 and 2001 were unsuccessful. One peace initiative that helped to produce dialogue among the various protagonists was based on The Four-Way Test as introduced by U.S. diplomat and former Peace Corps member, John E. Roberts. Mr. Roberts provided the script below which described his involvement:

### **How the Four-Way Test Helped Resolve a War in the Solomon Islands!**

As told by John E. Roberts to Bob Meroney: (5/30/2018)

*John Roberts was among the first Peace Corps volunteers, who joined shortly after President Kennedy's death in 1963. He served as a Peace Corp volunteer in northern Somalia (1964-1966), then joined the U.S. Foreign Service and served the U.S. State Department for 33 years in some fourteen countries. After retiring from the Foreign Service, Roberts rejoined the Peace Corps and served in Tunisia, Malta, and the Solomon Islands. He returned to Fort Collins, CO, in 1998, taught International Studies at CSU for a decade, served as president of the Fort Collins Rotary Club (2005-2006), Asst. Governor of Rotary District 5440 (2008-2010), and founder of the Fort Collins Global Village Museum in 2008.*

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://eclubofarizona.wordpress.com/2015/10/27/watergate-war-and-the-four-way-test/>



---

I served as the Director of the U.S. Peace Corps in the Solomon Islands from 1995-1998. Following my service, I returned annually to the Solomons. In late 2000, a brutal civil war (inter-island) ensued. Islanders from Malita had always been the most out-reaching and all-island engaging of the population, and many had migrated to the island capital of Guadalcanal and the capital itself, Honiara. Bitter political squabbles had long been the norm in the Solomons. Occasionally, these issues would break out in cross-island tribal and clan violence. An "eye-for-an-eye" attitude to conflict has always existed in this island society; thus, the stage was consistently set for potential communal violence.

By 2002, conditions caused by the civil war became untenable. As I had been a Rotarian since 1985, and I had been an active member of the Rotary Club of Honiara, I was well acquainted with many of the adversaries. During my one-week 2002 visit, nearly two years after the Peace Corps had been evacuated due to the war, I met with several individuals both within and outside Rotary and suggested that Rotary's 4-way Test relative to Truth, Fairness, Goodwill, Friendship, and the concept of general Benefit to All might help resolve some of the issues. I convinced several individuals to try to convene a series of meetings with the leading combatants.

I returned to the Solomon Islands in February 2003, and most of the communal violence had subsided. They had also established a plan for the turning in and collection of firearms and other weapons. Several people told me that the application of Rotary's 4-way Test in discussions among the warring parties had played a major and significant role in the peace negotiations. When I again returned to the Solomons in 2004, most weapons had been collected and reconstruction/rehabilitation of damaged buildings, roads, bridges, and schools were underway. Several friends confirmed to me that the 4-way Test was clearly instrumental.

Subsequently, I learned that the Island's women (wives, mothers, and daughters) had taken the 4-way Test and its applications to its widest success. Through their tireless dedication and work in applying Rotary's 100-year old code of conduct, today in the Solomon Islands there is relative peace, and hopefully enhanced mutual understanding and respect as this little island nation strives to develop and prosper.

John E. Roberts, 30 May 2018.

## **Justice and the Rotary Four-Way Test**

### **Lindsey Pointer**

*NOTE: Lindsey Pointer has been working on the use of restorative principles in the criminal justice system. She defines herself as a restorative practices facilitator, trainer and researcher and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Restorative Justice at Victoria University in New Zealand with support from a Rotary Global Grant Scholarship and the [Fulbright](#) Program from the U.S. State Department.*

I carry a coin with the Rotary Four-Way Test printed on it that was a gift from the Fort Collins club with me every day in my purse. I like having it with me. The question are such a clear way to check my words and actions when I feel lost, uncertain, and especially when I feel hurt or angry.

When people experience hurt or anger, there is a natural tendency to want to hit back. I think this is why our societal justice responses have so often tended towards retributive harming, also known as “punishment.” Hitting back can feel like the only possible response in a moment of fear and fury. But as Mahatma Gandhi said, “An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind.”

The retributive justice response also doesn't align with the Four-Way Test. The threat of severe punishment often deters those who have committed a wrongdoing from taking responsibility, thus preventing truth-telling. The severity of the punishment often depends on factors such as race, gender, religion, socio-economic class, and citizenship status, making conventional justice responses consistently unfair. The adversarial structure of our justice system often drives a further wedge between victim, offender, their families and the wider community, further fragmenting relationships and preventing goodwill. Finally, often all involved parties end up experiencing additional harm as a result of participating in the justice process.

In contrast, restorative justice offers a justice response that aligns with the requirement and principles of the Four-Way Test. Restorative justice promotes responsibility-taking, fair and people-centred procedures, the reparation of relationships, and a way of responding to harm without causing further harm.

### **Aligning Values with Actions and Thinking Ethically**

#### **William M. Timpson**

*NOTE: Bill Timpson has been on the faculty at Colorado State University in its School of Education for many years and a member of the Fort Collins Rotary Club where his focus on sustainable peacebuilding in Burundi, East Africa, has been supported by two Global Grants.*

*The following is adapted from his (2002) book, Teaching and Learning Peace (Madison, WI: Atwood).*

Laying the groundwork for teaching and learning peace must also include a close examination of how ethical we are—how well our actions reflect our values. How effective can the Rotary Four-Way Test be in promoting a deeper, more reflective reaction to challenging, complex issues, in particular?

Bringing values and actions in line is no easy task; and if they are not in line, we should be willing to take action and make changes. You can see a deep well spring of anger and frustration when core values are not in alignment with actions. For example, James Farmer (2000), one of the founders of CORE (Congress on Racial Equality) and a leader in the U.S. Civil Rights movement, noted in this essay from 1945 that a fundamental values conflict had emerged out of World War II when African American veterans returned home to find that little had changed. Despite fighting for their country, they returned to a second class citizenship or worse, a culture weighted down by the legacy of slavery and racism with very little in the way of meaningful opportunities.

*Nearly a million [African American] youth have been inducted into the nation's armed forces. These men have been told that they were fighting against the theory of the "master race" and for freedom from the terrors of exploitation. That lofty aim they have in large measure accepted, though sensing an inconsistency in fighting abroad to protect for others the rights which they themselves have never enjoyed. Furthermore, their treatment, while in uniform, by their own countrymen and superior officers, has often been such as to lead them to question the war aims professed by their superiors and their government... We do not know whether the American people realize how shameful, wicked and tragic it is... These young (African Americans) will have gone through all that other servicemen have of weariness, of danger, pain, disfigurement, horror. But in addition they will have experienced almost constant discrimination of one kind or another and frequent humiliation, and this while fighting a war allegedly fought to put an end to such a thing (p. 170).*

We want practiced what is preached. Going off to fight in World War II to stop a self-proclaimed master race meant some deep national soul searching when the returning African American veterans insisted that their country face its own racial bigotry. Muhammad Ali went to prison and lost some of his best years as a fighter when he refused induction during the Vietnam War on religious grounds, citing the hypocrisy of a war for freedom abroad when racism kept African Americans in shackles in the U.S. He offers a model of someone acting courageously on his values. His action was one of many in the 1960s that forced Americans to face the contradiction between the traditional values of democracy and the continuing practice of discrimination. In a similar manner, we can ask students to use the four way test to reflect on their values and actions, to see if there might be something out of alignment that is limiting their ability to learn.

### **Working with values in the classroom**

Arriving at an ethical and moral position where we act consistently with our values requires a process of development and growth. The book *Values Clarification: A Handbook of Practical Strategies for*

*Teachers and Students* offers a model for working with values that many have found useful. This six-level model reflects a hierarchy of growth beginning with clarification and moving to commitment and action. It builds from a very egocentric, self-referenced position on the first level to one that emanates from deeply held “universal ethical principles” at level six.

Level 1: Choose your values freely

Level 2: Choose from alternatives after considering the consequences

Level 3: Prize your value choices

Level 4: Prize (affirm) your values publicly

Level 5: Act on your values

Level 6: Act repeatedly and consistently

Try using this model of values clarification when thinking through the four-way test.

### **References**

Farmer, J. (2000) The coming revolt against Jim Crow. In W. Wink (Ed.) *Peace is the way*, New York: Maryknoll, 170-174.

Simon, S., Howe, L., and Kirschenbaum, H. (1972) *Values clarification: A handbook of practical strategies for teachers and students*. New York: Hart.