

---

# The Rotary: Organization and Motivations

---

## 1.1. The Rotary in a few words

February 23, 1905. A young lawyer from Chicago, Paul Harris, met three friends at home: a tailor, a coal dealer and a mining engineer. The four men, questioned and motivated by the difficulties and moral drifts they encountered, had the same goal: to try to revive and recover, in the big cities, the spirit of friendship and mutual assistance between businessmen whom they had known in the small towns of their childhood. They were of American, German, Swedish and Irish origins, and of Protestant, Israelite and Catholic faiths.

Soon, other businessmen who shared their goals attended their meetings and, by the end of 1905, the Rotary Club of Chicago already had 30 members: it was a team of various jobs, working in a climate of trust, friendship and integrity, to be “kind, respectful and helpful to one another”. The name “Rotary” was selected for their group due to the fact that its members met in turn, every week, at their workplace. The Rotary grew rapidly and became an International Organization as early as 1912. One hundred years later, Rotary has more than 1,200,000 members in 33,700 Rotary Clubs around the world.

Rotary is therefore a cluster of various skills and professions, men and women, of high probity, with well-agreed expertise, issued from all the countries in the world, respectful of human beings, who are working to achieve the development of harmony and understanding between people, trying to improve their standard of life and promoting peace, without any distinction of culture, race or religion.

The Rotary International (RI)<sup>1</sup> has always been committed to serving the general and global interest. The Rotary members have to apply their “Ideal of Servicing” either in their private area, or their vocational and public life. This commitment is centered on five basic domains of action that form the cornerstone upon which the club’s activities are based. To provide more meaning and consistency to our actions, a vision, or strategic plan, has recently been set-up.

## 1.2. Strategic plan: a vision

The Rotary Strategic Plan has been defined to give a long-term vision, and prioritize the targets of our action plans. More specifically, it is dedicated to seven areas of focus in order to build international relationships, improve lives, and create a better world to support our peace efforts and end polio forever. Among these seven areas listed below, the first six will soon become the backbone of the future Rotary strategic plan:



1) Promoting peace: The Rotary encourages conversations to foster understanding within and across cultures. Its objective is to train adults and young leaders, to prevent and mediate conflict and help refugees who have fled dangerous areas.

---

1 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rotary\\_International](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rotary_International)



2) Fighting disease: its goal is to educate and equip communities to stop the spread of life-threatening diseases like polio, HIV/AIDS, malaria, etc. The Rotary improves and expands access to low-cost and free health care in developing areas.



3) Providing clean water, sanitation and hygiene: The RI supports local solutions to bring clean water, sanitation and hygiene to more people every day. We do not just build wells and walk away. People have to share RI expertise with community leaders and educators to make sure the projects succeed in the long term.



4) Saving mothers and children: nearly six million children under the age of five die each year because of malnutrition, poor health care and inadequate sanitation. RI expands access to quality care, so that mothers and their children can live and grow stronger.



5) Supporting education: more than 775 million people older than 15 years of age are illiterate. Our goal is to strengthen the capacity of communities to support basic education and literacy, reduce gender disparity in education and increase adult literacy.



6) Growing local economies: The RI will carry out service projects that enhance economic and community development and create opportunities for decent and productive work for both the young and old. Its goal is also to strengthen local entrepreneurs and community leaders, particularly women, in impoverished communities.

7) Ending polio forever: The Rotary has been working to eradicate polio for over 30 years, and our goal of ridding the earth of this disease is in sight. This program started in 1979 with vaccinations for six million children in the Philippines. Today, Afghanistan, Nigeria and Pakistan are the only countries where polio remains endemic.

### **1.3. Organization of actions and projects in the Rotary**

Rotary members are helping others in communities around the world every day through thousands of service projects. For this purpose, the

organization, common to most Rotary Clubs, is set up and renewed every year:

– Each club elects its own president and officers among its active members for a one-year term. The clubs enjoy considerable autonomy within the framework of the standard constitution and the constitution and bylaws of The RI. The governing body of the club is the Club Board, consisting of the club president (who serves as the Board chairman), a president-elect, club secretary, club treasurer and several Club Board directors, including the immediate past president and the President Elect.

– The president usually appoints the directors to serve as chairs of the major club committees, including those responsible for club service, vocational service, community service, youth service and international service.

Indeed, The Rotary Club is often organized in five parts, or responsibilities, so that they can initiate, implement and follow all the programs and projects in progress:

1) Club service (domestic actions): the internal action consists of ensuring the management of the Club, strengthening the spirit of friendship and ensuring its smooth and effective operational management.

2) Vocational service: professional action encourages Rotarians to serve others through their vocational job and to apply their sense of ethics. Rotarians can share their expertise and skills with altruism and thus be a model and motivating factor for other partners. They must observe rules of high probity in the discharge of their duties, in any profession, respect the dignity of any useful occupation and consider the professional work fulfilled by each Rotarian as a possible vehicle of actions to help in the improvement of the society.

3) Community service (local public interest actions): public service action allows clubs to take action and undertake activities to improve the well-being of the local community.

4) International service (global public interest action): international action includes actions to extend the humanitarian reach of The Rotary worldwide,

and to promote altruism, respect for peace and mutual understanding among people. It is carried out through contributions to PolioPlus and through the help given to young professionals to participate in an exchange and to adapt to a host country.

5) Youth service (young generation actions): the young generation action recognizes the positive changes brought about by young people and young adults through leadership development activities, local and overseas action and exchange programs that enrich and develop peace and prosperity.

6) To develop Youth Services, an International agreement has been set-up, and several youth programs have been defined and implemented through, for example: Rotaract, Interact, RYLA (Rotary Youth Leadership Awards), student exchanges, scholarships, etc.

#### 1.4. The Rotary leadership

In addition to the above organizations, The Rotary's programs are developing the next generation of leaders, providing funding to make the world a better place and to make peace a priority. These programs are not just for club members. Their objective is to learn how to make a difference in our community through leadership principles as promoted within The Rotary:



– Rotary Peace Fellowships: each year, Rotary selects up to 100 professionals from around the world to receive fully funded academic fellowships at our Rotary Peace Centers.



– Rotary Community Corps: to find community solutions to community challenges, Rotary Community Corps unites Rotary members with non-members to make a positive difference.





– RYLA: RYLA is a leadership development program for young people who want to learn new skills, build their confidence and have fun. Events range from one-day seminars to weeklong camps.



– Rotary Youth Exchange: Rotary Youth Exchange builds peace one young person at a time. Students learn a new language, discover another culture, and truly become global citizens.



– New Generations Service Exchange: New Generations Service Exchange is a short-term, customizable program for university students and young professionals up to 30 years of age. Participants can design exchanges that combine their professional goals with a humanitarian project.



– Grants: for 100 years, The Rotary Foundation has been turning project ideas into reality. Our clubs receive funding to support humanitarian projects, scholarships and international exchanges.



– Scholarships: The Rotary invests more than \$7 million per year in our future leaders and philanthropists by funding scholarships for undergraduate and postgraduate studies.

– Job forum: every year, many Rotary Clubs get involved in the so-called “forum” where one-to-one discussions take place, in order to help and give advice to young people in secondary schools. Here, Rotary members can directly inform the students about their vocational experience, professional knowledge, career development, management rules, recommended behaviors, etc.

Once again, Rotarians must accept to fulfill such a role since this will enable the creation of a better world. In some areas, however, it is difficult to develop leadership, due to the established educational structures. And so we are limited to the role of followers: since the momentum is already there, our mission consists of simply being a coach, not to have bitterness, but to feel confident in focusing on leadership and business ethics because young people always remain eager to learn about their future job and vocational evolution.

Most Rotary members are committed to the vocational mission of their club and are highly skilled in their given roles.

Going back to business ethics, the more frequent attributes, on which we focus are:

– self-management, respect and courage. Indeed, the first role of a leader is to be able to work independently and maintain a high level of ethical standards;

– completed staff work: this consists of always doing a fully analyzed, elaborated job associated with considered results and proposed decisions, similar to what a coach does to successfully make progress.

Here, we find what was commonly taught, trained and followed at IBM. This is not to say that our willingness was not to win at all costs. But most of the ethical values can positively contribute to a sustainable business. This is why The Rotary is so involved in this program.

### **1.5. Business ethics management: the four-way test**

The Rotary has a “code of ethics” which is now replaced by the so-called “four-way test”. Since 1981, the main purpose of this test has been to develop and maintain high ethical standards in human relations and vocational service.

The four-way test is related to all the things we think, we say or we do and it is given as follows:

- 1) Is it the truth?
- 2) Is it fair to all concerned?
- 3) Will it build good-will and better friendships?
- 4) Will it be beneficial to all concerned?

Any business, even one dedicated to increasing sales or profits, has to be conducted in such a way that the human and business relations of the firm, organization or institution are in agreement with the lines of the four-way test.

Within, or inside The Rotary, the worldwide relationships, communications and information exchanges also have to be conducted along the lines of the four-way test. The test should not be referred to as a “code” (the one defined in 1932).

### **1.6. How to conduct efficient ethical debates?**

We are often faced with the distress of hungry people, poor individuals who have lost their homes due to earthquakes, natural disasters, etc. What can be done? Do we have to continuously bring food and tents to these starving people? Can we act more efficiently and send complaints or observations on human rights practices or law and order to those responsible? The same questions arise with the doping of athletes, the prohibition of drone warfare on moral grounds, etc.

### **1.6.1. *Entertainment and ethics***

For many people, thorny ethical questions can be difficult to process. For some non-profit organizations shown on TV and in the media, which are often mainly concerned about buzz, the moral ambiguity and support actions are sometimes reduced to discussions around culinary shows where special dishes and drinks are served.

Rotarians look to the four-way test when we are ethically evaluating whether to do something, but people offer different perspectives and have their own moral yardsticks. This is common everywhere as many people are quite busy and get requests from all sides.

The questions are: how do we quantify ethical dilemmas? How do we engage people in ethical discussions in a positive and attractive way? How can we ask for the tough questions?

### **1.6.2. *Barcamps, think tanks and showcases for new ideas***

To address these questions and still improve our ability to implement business ethics in our practices, we must be sensitized to that concern. Just as a reminder, we can notice the following:

- a long time ago, the Greeks had their acropolis and the Romans their forum;
- during the Middle Ages and later, we had issue-based discussions with men and women from the nobility, in the castles;
- more recently, organizations such as The Rotary played that role. Now, such discussions are conducted through social networks.

Good team work is based on the contribution of people coming from various areas, institutions and groups, including different non-political people, jobs and cultures. The problem lies in being neither superficial nor temporarily emotional.

This is why bringing together many people from different backgrounds to talk about ethically focused questions, in a meeting room for instance, is the most efficient and innovative way to think about ethics implementation, to perform a more in-depth analysis and to promote it. It is an integrated and unique approach, as encountered in The Rotary.

### **1.7. Summary of the missions and roles of the Rotary**

As can be seen, The Rotary's goal is to SERVE, in agreement with a number of core values such as Respect, Service, Fellowship, Diversity, Integrity or Probity, and Leadership. It is this set of values that constitutes some of the foundations of Ethics in the Rotary.

It was on this set of values that a pamphlet was originally drafted in The Rotary, for new members. The aim was to allow new members to think about ethics and to be able to participate in a manner that was consistent with the philosophy of the Rotary. But, it is important to put the Rotarian in the society in which he/she lives, to position him/herself in conjunction to what exists around us, to understand this philosophy in a wider context by also allowing everyone to pick up critical points and understand how to live better together and how to participate to create a more sustainable world.

It is therefore a broader and global framework of actions that is proposed to anyone who wishes to invest themselves within the overall interest of our society. Many points of view presented here are subjective and require a kind of analysis: there is therefore a very open field of discussion that specialists, philosophers and sociologists will open or ignore. However, there are no false perspectives, given the reactions of students or other populations with whom we discussed these topics. Indeed, being involved in several RYLA seminars (the last one in 2012 D-1700 was dedicated to Business Ethics) and based on several reports (those of the academic winners of the Ethics Prize, delivered every year in France), we can say the following: some minor discrepancies between the theorists and the practitioners may occur, but the basic concepts behind various ethics models remain the same.

## 1.8. Importance of business and vocational ethics in the Rotary

First, most professionals have an informational advantage over those they serve. This is due to so-called information asymmetry: this power can be exploited to the advantage of the professional and thus there needs to be a corresponding sense of professional responsibility that obligates the professional to act in the client's best long-term interest and, additionally, to take appropriate measures, to make necessary disclosures and to secure consent to protect the client and assure that the professional's behavior is improving.

This is particularly true with new technologies, the development of biotechnologies, for example, and a lot of discussions are now undertaken everywhere in the world. It is the responsibility of the Rotary, which behaves as a think tank to discuss these very important societal problems, to help our partners, in any field of activity, to take up these new challenges: indeed, we have to be able to identify these future moral hazards and provide the appropriate avoidance or work-around strategies.

Second, most professionals and scientists working around us are, at some point, young and inexperienced. Thus, professional and business ethics represent a kind of collective, time-tested wisdom that can be transferred to new professionals: it is the role of the Rotary to avoid deviances and to give advice such as "be careful on this point", "watch out for this" or "do that". It is a way to contribute to creating a better society. Also, with rapidly changing laws, technologies and social cultures, professional standards and ethics are complementary in keeping the profession, in a given field, abreast of new ethical challenges, emerging responsibilities and best practices.

Third, professional ethics act as a somewhat effective countervailing power to organizational influence (such as political or social pressure) or the power of authority (such as from a supervisor or boss). Everybody, in their professional career, has been faced with so-called RIP (Rank Is Privilege). This is a kind of practice we cannot accept any more in our society: it is neither fair nor ethical! The role of the Rotary is to help in promoting ethics and to explain how one should not be swayed by influential people.

Finally, insofar as professional ethics often get promulgated by professional organizations, like The Rotary, they may play a role in enforcement and disciplinary action with respect to those who ignore or violate such standards.

### **1.9. Comment about empathy and ethics**

Empathy is a common, universal and scalable emotional and cognitive capability that allows us to be sensitive, understanding and to respond more appropriately to the subjective concerns of others. Empathy thus allows us not only to feel the emotions and feelings of other human beings, but also to know, predict or anticipate their behavior in order to better adapt our intersubjective behavior. This behavior can range from simple cognitive and social coordination up to truly ethical behavior.

Thus, the conventional definition of empathy, which oscillates between that of sharing of points of view and that of emotional sharing, could be subject to a natural convergence and provide a way for better inclusivity.

Empathy can be considered as a powerful contributor to ethics. Indeed, empathy is part of a “moral sense” and plays an essential role in the prescriptiveness of ethical principles, even allowing us to grasp them, if necessary, and to ensure their ultimate development.

As we will see in Chapter 11, which is intended to explore the complexity of ethics, empathy is necessary but not sufficient, since there are many factors involved in the successful application of ethics into business (for instance: respect, sympathy, humanism, etc.). In contrast, lack of empathy encourages exclusivity (in terms of immorality and even amorality) since there is an open door to indifference and the distress of others. Valorization of empathy and focusing on the importance of its development can be done through education and training of both youths or adults. It is a daily challenge.