

Vocational Service in Practice

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Vocational Service is Rotary's challenge. This Avenue of Service is what sets Rotary apart as a unique organization. It's not an overstatement to say that it is one of the main reasons for Rotary's very existence in a world in need, more than ever, of service through our professions.

By sharing this Rotary concept with their peers, Rotarians put aside their judgment of their professional colleagues' character to explain and exemplify our vision of acting responsibly and ethically, helping them follow this concept in their daily acts and decisions.

To better illustrate the need to act responsibly and ethically in our professions, I would like to share an experience with you. During a meeting with the board of a multinational company, I had to find the solution for a delay in the delivery of an essential product. This product was necessary for the implementation of a telecommunications system within the company. After presenting a new timetable that would meet their needs and repair some of the damage caused by the delay, the company's president asked me, "What guarantee will you give us that you'll meet this new deadline?" I was about to answer when one of the directors pointed to the Rotary pin that was on my jacket lapel. He said: "He is a Rotarian. We can trust that he will put forth all the efforts necessary to make it happen." They put their trust in us, and my responsibility grew exponentially.

After the meeting, the need to meet the deadline became not only a professional matter to me but also a mission. I wanted to prove that the statement made by that director was valid. As a Rotarian, I felt a mixed sense of pride and commitment.

We met the deadline.

From that day on, I never forgot that when we wear the Rotary pin on our lapel, it represents a powerful image of integrity and responsibility.

I am the proud son of a Lebanese immigrant who arrived in Brazil in 1918, the same year that Rotary was established in Latin America. I still remember some of the lessons my father taught me: Love your family above yourself. Have a profession, because this is the most important legacy a father can leave for his child. Be honest, truthful, and fair in your profession and personal life.

I've always seen my father abide by these words.

When it comes to the Avenue of Vocational Service, the principles are similar. Of the 322 pages of the *Manual of Procedure*, three are dedicated to Vocational Service. Only three. Nonetheless, those three pages make it clear that this avenue is the vehicle used by Rotary to support and promote the ideal of service. There we can read about

- Ethical standards, which can never be laid to rest
- Loyalty to employers and employees and the fair treatment between them
- The worthiness of all dignified occupations
- The use of our professional expertise to benefit the communities we serve
- Integrity and justice to all club members, clients, and also competitors, who should be our allies and not our enemies
- The Four-Way Test

- Our proper participation in professional associations
- Vocational training to youth, which reminds us of our responsibility for the future
- The connection between Vocational Service and the improvement of our communities

All that in only three pages. This is the guide to excellence!

I'd like to give two examples to better explain the role of vocational service in the development of ethical character and the dissemination of values within the community.

The first one is a project created at Virginia Tech University, developed by the Josephson Institute of Ethics and implemented in several countries. It was replicated in 60 schools in Joinville, Brazil, through a Matching Grant involving seven clubs of District 4650. The name of the project is Character Counts. The scope of the project is to help educators instill ethical values and principles within their students, building character so that students will grow to be productive, upright professionals and citizens. This initiative can be replicated anywhere.

Through playful teaching and effective methodology, children learn the six pillars that form good character: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. These pillars are essential to guide their lives and to build happier and more harmonious communities. To set an example, we should exercise good character and demonstrate moral strength during trying times. We must respond positively and with certainty and resist the temptation to place popularity, well being, and comfort above ethics. When we do the right thing, even in the smallest aspects of life, it gives us the confidence and strength to overcome bigger challenges.

The other example is also a school project. It's a booklet with appropriate images and text that presents the implied concepts of The Four-Way Test in an objective way. This booklet was created based on "The Four-Way Coloring Book" of the Rotary Club of Millen, Georgia, USA, and customized according to the Brazilian culture and sports preferences.

I mentioned these two examples because they show an important task performed within the Avenue of Vocational Service, which is helping youth in our communities become honest and principled business men and women and professionals in their communities. We should reach out to them before they may be exposed to drugs and crime. We must give them a sense of purpose in their lives, teach them early on how to face the challenges that will come their way and develop excellence in their character.

I conclude with an excerpt of a poem written by Sidónio Muralha:

*I can't stop.
I may run, without stumbling.
But if I stumble I can't stop
because I'm not deserving.
Nobody should give me a hand
nor ask me if I suffer.
If character is expensive
I'll pay the price even if tougher.
It is rare but I'll pay its toll.
Even if I stand alone
because the strength of the throw
equals the weight of the stone.
If character is expensive
I'll pay the price even if tougher.*