The Four Way Test

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?

Core Values of the Rotary Movement

By

William E Hull
The Rotary Four Way Test is one of the most widely known codes of conduct in contemporary life. It has been translated into languages of more than a hundred countries. High schools and colleges in more than twenty-five countries display the Test for the inspiration of their students and faculty. It has been put into poetry, set to music, displayed in judicial chambers, and incorporated into safe-driving programs, fire prevention campaigns, and labour contracts. NASA astronaut Buzz Aldrin even planted a Four-Way Test pin on the moon’s surface! Printed on cards, etched on plaques, chiselled in granite, and publicized by billboards, it is Rotary’s most conspicuous contribution to the moral climate of the modern world.

And yet those of us who are members of Rotary tend to take The Four Way Test for granted. We may occasionally hear a program on one or more of its precepts, but we seldom step back to ponder the significance of the Test as a whole. Before looking at each part of the Test separately, let us attempt here to grasp its wider dimensions by considering both the background and its composition. Much is at stake in gaining a more spacious understanding because The Four Way Test is the soul of the Rotary ethics and source of our distinctive lifestyle and civic endeavours.

**Background**

In 1932, in the depths of the Great Depression, a businessman named Herbert J Taylor was urged by the creditors of the Club Aluminum Company of Chicago to take over the management of the company and save it from bankruptcy. The cookware manufacturer was already insolvent, owing its creditors some $400,000 more than its total assets. Despite holding a secure job with the Tea Company and being in line to become its president, Taylor was persuaded to risk everything, taking an eighty-percent cut in pay and loaning $6,000 of his own money to the new enterprise to give it some operating capital.

Realizing that one false move could be fatal, Taylor began to search for some way of survival. His competitors had equally fine products and personnel and could easily compete with him on price because they had much less debt to repay. Taylor concluded that his company would have to develop higher standards of corporate character, dependability, and service in order to secure any competitive advantage. A deeply religious man, he prayed earnestly for a way to challenge his troubled staff to a new resolve. In July 1932, after mediating about the matter at his desk, he began to compose a hundred-word guideline which he first reduced to seven tests and then to four tests, putting the result on a card that he kept under the glass top of his desk for sixty days.

As business decisions flowed across his desk on a daily basis, Taylor began to examine the extent to which his company was measuring up to the ideals which he had captured on a card. He was shocked to see how often his business failed to meet the
four tests which he had conceived. After sharing the guidelines with his department heads and gaining their support, the Test was adopted by the company, memorizes by every employee, and soon began to function as the criteria for building a new corporate culture. Taylor literally turned his company around by making everyone in it including himself, accountable to these four accepted standards. The result was a great success story by 1937, the entire indebtedness of Club Aluminum was paid in full, and during the next fifteen years, the firm distributed more than a million dollars in dividends to its stockholders. The net worth steadily rose to more the two million dollars from the $1,600 of borrowed money and The Four Way Test. In the worst climate that American business had ever known. Taylor proved that these simple guidelines could provide new energy and direction in the arena of practical commerce.

In 1942, a director of Rotary International suggested that it adopt Taylor’s test which was approved by the Board in January 1943, making the Four Way-Test a component of the Vocational Service Program, although it has today become a vital part of all four Avenues of Service. In 1954-55, its golden anniversary year, Taylor served Rotary International as President, during which time he transferred the copyright for The Four-Way Test to the organization where it continues to provide an effective summary of the movement’s ideals.

**Composition**

Consider now the architecture of The Four-Way Test as reflected by its overall design. Notice that each test asks a question rather than delivering a commandment. We are invited to search for our own answers rather than to satisfy someone else’s preconditioned preconceived conditions. The form of the fourfold test challenges us to probe our own attitudes and behaviours until we are satisfied with our performance. The Rotary lifestyle is shaped, not by theoretical presuppositions and principles, nor by ethical mandates and imperatives, but by our capacity for self-examination, our responsiveness to the unanswered and unsolved, and our willingness to engage in honest inquiry. In a world of brittle absolutes and shouted slogans, let is rejoice that our civic affliction offers an invitation to exploration and discovery rather than to coercion and conformity.

Notice that these tests are non-parochial. When Herbert Taylor first devised guidelines for his company, he asked his four department heads if any of the tests were contrary to the doctrines and practices of their faith. They all agreed that truth, fairness, goodwill and helpfulness were common to all the religious traditions even though one of them was a Roman Catholic, the second a Christian Scientist, the third an Orthodox Jew, and the fourth a protestant Presbyterian! Today the Rotary movement embraces members from all of the world’s great religions who can unite
in affirming The Four-Test because of its universal appeal. Like the Wisdom Literature of the Jewish Scriptures, each of the tests offers practical guidelines in the form of self-evident standards free of theological presuppositions or ethical abstractions. They are welcomed as inclusive because they define the rights and responsibilities of every person whether they are Rotarians or not.

Notice finally the careful sequence of the four parts of the Test. Truth comes first because all of life must be based on reality rather than deception. Fairness comes next, before friendship to protect the latter from cronyism. And goodwill is placed third, before seeking a beneficial result, lest we superimpose our service on others in a condescending manner that masks a desire to control in the guise of compassion. In a profound sense, truth and fairness are foundational for fruitful relationships characterized by goodwill and beneficial results.

This is why, for example, the Ten Commandments are so arranged as to make religious integrity, or fidelity to God, the basis of ethical integrity, or fidelity to others. There is deep wisdom in the design of The Four-Way Test, each part depending on what comes before it for its finest expression.

With this brief survey of its history and an overview of its construction in mind, let us now look at each part of the Test in turn before concluding with a probe of its relevance for the life of today.

**Test I**

*Is It The Truth?*
At first glance, it may seem surprising that The Four-Way Test begins with truth, for we usually think of truth as belonging to the realm of philosophy rather than of ethics. But, in the Western World especially, since the time of Aristotle, ethics has been grounded in philosophy, hence we do well to begin by probing what I might call the Reality Principle. Are things really the way we say they are? Or do we, by word or by deed, introduce distortion into our representation of reality? As the career of Adolf Hitler so vividly illustrates, nothing corrupts a culture like the propaganda that paints a worldview that is simply not true,

_The Legitimation of Lying_

For us as Rotarians, however, the temptation to spread outright falsehoods. The danger we face is rather the pressure to accept distortions of reality because we humans are unable or unwilling to live with the “the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth”. Consider a few examples of this tendency to skirt the truth suggested by Sissela Bok’s book, *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life.*

**The paternalistic lie:** To Children, shielding them from ugly facts; then to employees or anyone else to whom we “talk down” as not strong or wise enough to hear the whole story. Even ministers often pretend that all is well in an effort to bolster morale when the church is spiritually dead.

**The therapeutic lie:** A verbal placebo, the “white lie” to the sick and dying; helping the vocationally trapped with an exaggerated letter of “recommendation”; even introducing a guest speaker with excessive affability! Lies of evasion, of exaggeration, of euphemism fill our daily conversation.

**The political lie:** Here one thinks of efforts to put the best face of Vietnam and Watergate; of campaign promises never kept; of party platforms ignored; of playing public relations games to checkmate the media; of putting a “spin” on the interpretation on events to the benefit of those involved. This media strategy filters down to the local level as businesses hire experts to make them “look good” regardless of their true condition.

**The promotional lie:** Modern advertising is saturated with over claim, the deliberate manipulation of fantasy, offering an invitation to live in a dream world. We even lie about life as in the television soap operas. How common to flatter preachers regardless of quality of their sermons, or the hostess regardless of how the meal really tasted.
The strategic lie: Here deception is justified as being for the public good, such as hiding preparation for the invasion of Cuba, or protecting secret U-2 flights over Russia, or outsmarting enemies by the CTA arranging a false police leak in order to trap or mislead an enemy into overconfidence. One thinks of the career of Oliver North who became a national hero by interpreting his clandestine cover-ups as acts of patriotism.

The tactical lie: We cut corners on truth when we fudge on our income tax returns, pad our expense accounts, keep a hotel towel merely as a souvenir, “borrow office supplies from the company, cheat on an exam, or plagiarize a term paper. Here the degree of deception is so minor that the practice is “winked at” because the damage is so slight. The assumption is that such cheating is somehow “covered” in the cost of overhead and is just “the way things are”.

The covert lie: Perhaps more ironic of all is the dissimulation that takes place to avoid rejection as a nonconformist. I have known preachers who mouthed the latest ideological orthodoxy in order to gain acceptance by their peers, or theologians who entertained “mental reservations” in order to avoid becoming a persecuted heretic. Then there is the Machiavellianism of politicians who posture on public issues to justify the contributions made by political action committees to their re-election campaign fund.

The Culture of Deception

The problem with this pathology is not simply that it compromises the individual but that it creates a climate in which reality is hopelessly confused. The danger is that deliberate, intentional distortion can become an unconscious way of life even for the kind of people in Rotary! Consider the following:

We do not really expect our public leaders to use a press conference to clarify issues, to serve the cause of truth, or to correct distortion, particularly if it involves admitting a failure that might make them look bad. Rather, we expect them to use carefully rehearsed answers to put the best face possible on every subject for public relations purposes.

We do not expect politicians to use campaign rhetoric to clarify issues in a way that educates the voting public. Rather, we expect them to be coached in advance to use carefully rehearsed answers to put the best face possible on every subject for public relations purposes.

We do not expect politicians to use campaign rhetoric to clarify issues in a way that educates the voting public. Rather, we expect them to be coached in advance to use words as weapons of warfare to gain advantage over their opponent. We actually
judge them on their ability manipulate the truth rather than to honour it. We speak with admiration of “Teflon presidents” who can parry reporters’ questions in a press conference so as to never admit that a problem exists. Everywhere it is the same: we have been conditioned to be credible, to be consistent, to be convincing—and if a lie does that best, then use the lie. By this reasoning, the lie takes on a usefulness, a persuasiveness, almost a “morality” all its own. But it is not the truth!

When deliberate deception becomes an instinctive reaction rather than a conscious decision, its most corrosive effect is in what it does to relationships. Words are the building blocks that bind us together in voluntary associations such as civic clubs, social organisations, and religious congregations, plus a host of business enterprises. But when words become a smokescreen, then we no longer say what we mean and mean what we say, the inevitable result is a collapse of trust which is the essential glue holding relationships together.

In the criminal justice system, there are only enough jail cells for a very small percentage of the population on the assumption that the great majority of our citizens will be law-abiding. If that were not the case, if only ten or twenty percent of the population required incarceration, chaos would result. Likewise, if our word is no longer our bond for much of what we say, then anarchy soon reigns. We simply cannot tolerate the suspicion that arises when we have to second-guess everything we hear. There is just not enough time to check the veracity of more than a small percentage of what others tell us. Truth is the theme of our first test because it is prerequisite to the maintenance of the social contract on which our common life depends.

The Recovery of Integrity

Now let me offer four suggestions as to how we may pass this first test with flying colours by replacing the culture of deception with what might be called a culture of candor.

Individuality: There is so much deception in “the system” that we must begin to recognize that each individual is a moral agent. Will I guard my autonomy and refuse to be steamrolled by the “powers that be” especially on an emotional issue when some demagogue has stampeded the masses? Will I get to the source of a report, or will I be content with “canned” news served up second-hand, often from a biased perspective? Will I seek out informed opinion on both sides of a controversial issue?
**Integrity:** Do I want my word to be guaranteed by my character, or do I want to project an “image” that may not be my true self? Paul Tournier made an important distinction between the “person” at the centre of our being and the “personage” we project by the many masks we wear. None of us can help being stereotyped by forces beyond our control, but we can resist letting a “public self coexist in contradiction to our true selfhood.

**Intention:** Much hinges on whether or not we really want to deceive as a final result. No parent “tells all” to children when they are young. Every teacher must time the unfolding of truth lest it be misunderstood by a growing mind. But always we must always ask: Am I doing my best to disclose the true nature of reality to those about me as soon as they are able to grasp it?

**Incentive:** As leaders, do we create a climate of openness where questions are freely asked, where hard facts are not swept under the carpet, and where honesty is rewarded? Or do we reward “double-speak”, the “party line” that George Orwell described so chillingly in his novel, 1984? As the price-fixing scandals of the 1960s showed, we do not just need stronger codes of ethics but rather stronger incentive systems which encourage dissent against duplicity without fear of reprisal. Given a fair chance, the human conscience will guard us from a multitude of evils! But totalitarian regimes, whether in a government or business, shows us how the conscience can be controlled by intimidation.

A disturbing movie a few years ago was “Quiz Show” Robert Redford’s telling of the Charles Van Doren story.

It depicts how the scion of one of America’s leading intellectual families brought his brilliant intellect up against the seductive powers of the mass media and succumbed to a national deception. The film suggests that the corruption of Van Doren is a parable of our time, how we have lost the ability to recognize and tell the truth in an age when image was triumphed over reality, when impact is more cherished than honesty, when success is more eagerly sought than integrity.

Over against this pervasive mood, our first test summons Rotarians to be people of truth far beyond the surface level of merely avoiding prevarication. Do we take the trouble to learn all the facts, or do we make up our minds on the basis of emotion rather than of evidence? Do we listen thoughtfully to all sides of an issue or do we avoid contrary opinions? Do we view ourselves as a witness to the nature of reality as best we can understand it, or do we leave it to others to construct a fantasy world for our indulgence? Do we have the will, the fortitude, the courage to declare our clearest perceptions and deepest convictions when the drumbeats of propaganda sounds the loudest?

The philosopher Gabriel Marcel once said: “I am obliged to bear witness because I hold, as it were, a particle of light, and to keep it to myself would be equivalent to extinguishing it” The Rotary Four-Way Test simply asks of the story that is our life,
Is it the Truth?”

TEST II
Is It Fair to All Concerned?

Having looked at the Reality Principle in test I, we turn to the Morality Principle in Test II. What a remarkable use of Four-letter words to define norms: no fancy verbiage, just “is it true, is it fair”? This close combination of truth with fairness
reflects the classic linkage between philosophy and ethics which provides a foundation for all that follows.
The word “fair” comes from a root meaning “beautiful, gracious, agreeable, balanced, reasonable, proportioned.” Of all the words for right versus wrong, “fair” is the most subjective, appealing to open-mindedness, impartiality, freedom from bias or favouritism. This choice of key words in Test II lays us a heavy responsibility to decide for ourselves, which would not be the case if we were enjoined here to be “just, equitable, righteous, or lawful,” for those words would have placed us under some external mandate.

The Crisis in Business Ethics

Sad to say, many in our culture have not measured up to the freedom implied by the concept of “fairness.” We must honestly confront a crisis of business and professional ethics that strikes at the very heart of the social “class” most involved with Rotary! With sickening regularity it seems, we must endure an upsurge of fraud and corruption that contradicts the nature of fairness. A hasty survey of the last three decades will remind us of the magnitude of our problem.

In the decade 1975-84, at least forty-five of the top one hundred military suppliers, including General Electric and General Dynamics, were under criminal investigation for defrauding or overcharging in the U.S. Government. Financial Institutions such as Penn Square Bank, the Bank of Boston, and Crocker National Bank were found guilty of illegal loans and failing to report cash transactions. Securities firms such as ESM Government Securities marketed bogus portfolios while the chairman of LTV Corporation was sentenced for passing insider trading information.

If anything, the prevalence of white-collar crime increased in the decade 1985-94. Medicaid was defrauded of millions of dollars for bogus laboratory tests. Wall Street titans such as Ivan Boesky and Michael Milken were led away in handcuffs for their feeding frenzy at the trough of corporate greed. After the mighty have fallen, such as Drexel Burnham Lambert and Lehman Brothers even those pillars of rectitude, the savings and loans, were carried into the wilderness by the of Charles Keating. Everywhere, it seems, millions were recklessly gambled and lost in leverage buyouts, direct mail scams, and the marketing of bogus artworks. The slime seemed to spread over the entire economic enterprise.

But just when we were certain that things could not get worse, we were given the current decade of 1995-2004. Now fraud in millions became fraud in billions. What a cast of characters, populates our daily newspapers, among them Bernie Ebbers of WorldCom, Dennis Kozlowski of Tyco, John Rigas of Adelphia, Martha Stewart of Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia, Jeff Skilling of Enron, and Sam Waksal of ImClone. So massive was the corruption that, in many instances, precise accountability has not
yet been established. Indeed, the scandal of the next decade may well be how many millions it will cost to bring to trial those currently under indictment! Meanwhile, we must be careful to regard every participant as innocent until proven guilty. But even before the verdicts are in, there is no mistaking the unbridled greed that has exploited good people in ways that are manifestly unfair and resulted in a serious erosion of public confidence in the very class of people that Rotary often covets for membership.

**The Causes of Ethical Collapse**

It is imperative that we probe why there is an increasing disregard for ethics in the business culture so crucial to Rotary. When we do so, we discover that symptoms are not limited to that particular culture but are the part of a much broader moral malaise that is characteristic of contemporary. In order to probe the roots of the difficulty, I have selected one scandal from the many summarized above for more detailed analysis as a representative case. My choice is E.F. Hutton because its collapse took place several years ago, and thus we can attempt a critique with benefit of the hindsight provided by history. I mention four factors for your reflection.

First, Robert Nisbet, in his insightful book, *The Present Age: Progress and Anarchy in Modern America*, provides a synthesis of trends that contribute to the problems of E.F. Hutton in his critique of the “cash culture.” In modern life cash has replaced property as the measure of value. This results in “loose individuals” who may earn a huge income but have no stake in building a stable society. Without ties to “hard” property, such as land, such persons travel light, instantly shifting assets whenever they please by electronic transfer. They do not need to work to build community, or to insure their family reputation for generations, because they are an absentee owner who can dispose of their property in an instant through computerized “program trading” if it does not offer an immediate payoff. The key for them is not stability but liquidity. Leveraged buyouts turn America into a vast junkyard of corporate spare parts instead of companies that will pay any price to maintain their integrity. Everywhere the cash culture triumphs: in sports, where free agents float from team to team in response to the highest bidder; in ministry, where the electronic media divorce religious services from congregational loyalty; in politics, where public office provides an opportunity to profit from “special interest.” Now nothing is stable because everything is measured by its immediate cash value on the world market.

Second, this “cash culture” fosters an individualism that erodes a sense of corporate responsibility. Key executives are essentially self-employed. They hop about from company to company in order to accelerate promotion. They are ready to exchange
loyalties whenever a “better offer” comes along. Unlike a family business, their “name” is not on the company. The primary concern is for annual bonuses, stock options, deferred compensation, golden parachutes, and personal perks. Constant mergers and takeovers obscure the identity of those in positions of responsibility. To illustrate: The key actor in the E.F. Hutton case was George L. Ball, who had already jumped to the presidency of Prudential-Bache by the time trouble surfaced. This loose affiliation at the top puts inordinate pressure on middle management o “produce” as a way to “promote” their careers, but the bosses who exert that pressure are nowhere to be found on judgement day.

Third, the rise of technology substitutes impersonal process for personal responsibility. When the E.F. Hutton case was analysed by Institutional Investor, the hanky-panky that got this venerable brokerage house in trouble was described as follows; adjusting the “multiplier formula” that calculates how to achieve “target balancing” so as not just to “recapture the float” but to create a float by manipulating transfers between the firm’s “concentrated account” and its “zero-balance disbursement account.” Simple enough? Of course not! This whole scam required WATS lines, electronic transferring capabilities, computerization, and a host of other techniques which have been available only in recent years.

Fourth, when E.F. Hutton really got into deep trouble, senior management resorted to the dirtiest trick of all: passing the buck on its hard-working field force. First they went uptown, from Wall Street to Madison Avenue, and hired an ad agency without previous involvement or continuing commitment to the company and paid them to contrite a campaign that would put the best face on a growing mess. In other words, the real culprits simply hired a moral proxy to expiate their sins, a bought mouthpiece that could walk away unharmed a few weeks later when the media campaign was over. What strategy did this “ethics-for-hire” approach take? I quote the ad that appeared in The Wall Street Journal for July 24, 1995. Notice how unfair it was to implicate local stockbrokers who had nothing to do with the scandal in this buck passing exercise.

“E.F. Hutton Talks...Thank you.” That’s the most important thing We can say to our 17,500 employees and our thousands of customers and clients. The loyalty and support of our clients and commitment to commitment to excellence and integrity of our employees is what built our reputation over 81 years and what has seen us through the trying times of these past few weeks. You are the best. To those in government and industry who look on with concern, we simply say, if you judge us on our merits, we are confident of your Conclusions. We will continue to meet the investment needs of our clients in more
Than 500 local communities and we are proud to say
“When E.F. Hutton Talks, People Listen”

How can we cure a corporate culture of all of this corruption? For example, the perpetrators who arranged for a kickout in the machine-processing of checks by bending their corners, rubbing Vaseline on parts of the check, and tampering with the micro-eroding line by putting staples in it, since hand processing would add a day to the float! The Four-Way Test replies: Ask only one simple question. Is that kind of chicanery really fair to all concerned? What if E.F. Hutton had been willing to ask themselves that one question and then abide by the answer that was obvious?

**Strategies for Challenging the Moral Malaise**

Finally, how may we formulate some strategies that will contribute to a cure? Clearly we need to mobilize all of the great structures of society to shore up our sagging ethics. I suggest four allies that need to work together in this regard.

**Education.** The moral tradition in central to Western civilization, both Graeco-Roman and Judeo-Christian. It is high time for our schools to declare a student uneducated who lacks the basics of moral decision-making. Business schools, especially, need to offer case studies in ethical practices. We need campus forums on moral discourse, sessions on ethics in professional association meetings, and greater attention to ethics in the graduate programs that train our future teachers.

**Religion.** Churches have been intimidated for far too long by changes of legalism, pietism, and “holier than thou” posturing. Pastors have been pressured into preaching sweet salvation without any ethical starch. Believers need backbone to live in the world and not just some emotional goose pimples when they go to church. Some say that ethics are not competent in business ethics, but it is obvious that business leaders aren’t very smart in this field either! We need forthright declaration and honest dialogue, rather than a conspiracy of silence, from the pupils of our land and this will happen only if ministers, priests, and rabbis are encouraged to be prophetic by their members.

**Politics.** More and more the mass media create “representative figures” who model morality, or the lack of it, for the multitudes. This makes it urgent to have political icons who incorporate, the best values of society. In Alabama, for example, we do not need one governor after another going to court in an effort to clear his name and stay out of prison!

**Rotary.** We were founded as a voluntary association, a mediating structure designed to encourage informed debate. In the present climate, we are going to have to contend earnestly for our most cherished virtues. The urgency of this issue was underscored by Walter Lippmann many years ago when he said, “Men have been
barbarians much longer than they have been civilised. They are only precariously civilized, and there is a propensity, persistent as the force of gravity, to revert under stress or strain, under neglect or temptation, to our first natures.” In other words. The jungle is never far away, be fair, or risk becoming a moral savage!

Test III
Will it build Good Will and Better Friendships?

Life is a ceaseless quest to achieve balance, and The Four-Way Test offers a beautiful balanced series of probing questions. The first two tests on truth and fairness are primarily negative in force. They clear away the weeds, as it were, by attacking deception and exploitation. The last two tests, by contrast, are positive in force, offering a relationship identified as “friendship” and a result characterized as “beneficial” as goals toward which to strive.
Like many of the great words in the human language, “friendship” is easier to describe than to define. Most dictionaries begin with the concept of closeness, Webster interpreting it in terms of “affection, respect, esteem.” The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines friendship as “joined to another in mutual benevolence and intimacy.” But Rotary helpfully sets its meaning in a less subjective and emotional context by defining it in terms of that which “builds goodwill.” This emphasis makes friendship more a verb than a noun, more a matter of behaviour than a status. It focuses on friendship as something we are to do.

**The Versatility of Friendship**

Indeed it important to define friendship apart from the concept of “love,” in order to preserve its versatility. Rather than being simply a mild form of affection or “watered-down love.” Friendly is in itself a unique form of human bonding and belonging. Consider that it is one of a few major relationships not regulated by law as are marital relationships, parental relationships, and business or commercial relationships. The root of the word “friend” is akin to the Old English *freo*, meaning “free.” Its voluntarism is the secret of its versatility.

Like love, friendship is selective but, unlike love, friendship need not be either exclusive or excluding. Each person may have only one true lover but a limitless number of friends. A friendship may be either superficial or profound. The relationship may begin as a mere acquaintanceship, then move on to steady companionship, before ripening into an enduring friendship. Rotary recognizes that friendship is built on “goodwill,” which as Aristotle pointed out, requires neither intensity nor desire. Whether casual or close, friendships should never be cloying or compelling, thereby enabling us to find relief, for example, from the limitations of a domineering family or an unhappy marriage. Indeed, friendships can wax and wane and even die a natural death, such as from a prolonged separation, without any tragic consequences. C.S. Lewes once said, “Lovers are normally face to face, absorbed in each other; friends side by side, absorbed in some common interest.” Freed from the heavier responsibilities imposed by love, friendship can transcend sexual stereotypes and avoid pathologies of passion that are eating like a cancer at the American libido. Sexual harassment is best overcome, not by cold detachment, but by genuine friendship. In the sexual dance, men fear engulfment while women fear evasiveness, but in friendship there is only the sharing of what both parties wish to give and receive. Love need not flower out of friendship, but by love not undergirded by continuing friendship is in danger of decay. If your spouse is not your best friend, the marriage may be in trouble. In our erotically overheated culture, if a man is said to love another man, he is immediately suspected of being gay, or if a
man loves a woman other than his wife, he is thought to be a cad. But friendship is not circumscribed by gender. It requires neither constant proximity nor false restraint.

This very freedom allows a wide diversity of bases for friendship. Classically, it may be based on need, on pleasure, or on virtue. It may even be based on pity or nostalgia. But whatever the occasion, it must be free, voluntary, and uncoerced. Friendship is the most democratic of human relationships. It is available to the elite and the masses alike, to the wise and the foolish, to the wealthy and the pauper, to the powerful and the helpless. There is universality in its very nature.

It is the “light touch” that permits Rotary to flourish as a partnership of those who scarcely know each other than when they enter into this voluntary association. As Anne Morrow Lindbergh put it eloquently in her Gift from the Sea:

“A good relationship has a pattern like a dance and is built on some of the same rules. The partners do not need to hold on tightly, because they move confidently in the same pattern, intricate but gay and free, like a country dance of Mozart’s. To touch heavily would be to arrest the pattern and freeze the movement, to change the endlessly changing beauty of its unfolding. There is no place here for the possessive clutch, the clinging arm, the heavy hand ... Because they know they are partners moving to the same rhythm, creating a pattern together, and being invisibly nourished by it.”

When a friendship is forged, that act of bonding weaves another strand in the “safety net” undergirding life in all its vulnerability. Friendship means that we are attached to somebody, that we belong to a common bundle of life. In one sense, friendship offers us a nonprofessional approach to self-help. In Rotary, we do not pay experts to advise us on our problems, but rather we barter the common wisdom of life in a simple act called sharing.

J.A. Sparks tells of Gordon Bliss, dying from a brain tumour that made him unable to remember names, who would stumble into his weekly Westside Rotary Club, greeting everyone with a hearty “Hope to see you again next week.” Those familiar faces, those warm handclasps, helped to affirm him as a person, and give him a reason to continue living. His friends kept him human for as long as his body survived. Rotary became for him a privileged place where he mattered to others just because these Rotarians were his friends.
With so magnificent an opportunity, it is dismaying to find friendship much neglected today. Daniel Levinson, in his longitudinal study called *The Seasons of a Man’s Life*, found friendship largely absent in middle aged American males. At least four factors contribute to a “friendless society”:

First, the impersonality of modern urban life withers friendship. No longer do we have to work together with our neighbours as in earlier rural life. The computer allows more isolation and remoteness than ever before. Note how the hope of bonding offered through a host of consumer products, as if to buy a beer after work will get us a friend. The corporate culture encourages a pyramidal structure with a lonely executive at the top who cannot have friends down the hierarchy because he would lose “control” of the organization. Howard Hughes became the symbol of a huge financial success without a friend in the world.

The back-porch philosopher Jess Lair, in “I Ain’t Much Baby... But I’m All I’ve Got,” once said “Montana is the Howdy’ state. You walk down Main Street in Miles City and if your hair too long everybody will say ‘Howdy there’ real friendly. Twenty years later you are seeing the same cat on the street and he’s still saying ‘Howdy.’ real friendly. In twenty years he’s refused to tell you anything more than ‘Howdy.’ And that’s why Montana has one of the highest suicide rates and divorce rates in the whole country. That’s what that beautiful isolation and alienation does for you. It’s “Howdy there” while life goes to hell in a hand basket.

Second, our restless wanderings compound a sense of isolation. We have become a nation of nomads. Migrancy withers friendship because the availability of just “being there,” is one of its hallmarks. It is not simply that we travel about from place to place. Rather, life is viewed as one endless transition. For example, prospects delay joining a church because they “don’t know how long we’ll be here,” offered not just as an excuse but as a mindset. Students jump to bigger and better schools. Business leaders move “up the ladder” by repeated transfers to earn promotions. We must be prepared to exchange one set of friends for another as the price of upward mobility even within the same city. Just to move from one side of town to the other is often to exchange one world for another.

The third and fourth factors seem paradoxical, or at least ironic. One is a rising self-interest, the New Narcissism of the “Me Generation,” an intense preoccupation with personal fulfilment at the expense of meaningful relationships, where autonomy is prized more than reciprocity. With the coming of the Enlightenment, both rationalism and romanticism eroded the classic understanding of friendship. An incident from the life of Samuel Johnson illustrates the traditional view that we have largely lost. Johnson had a friend named George Strahan, who feared that he had behaved in such a way as to end his relationship with the great Doctor. Johnson’s
reply of July 14, 1763, demonstrates in equal measure the classical virtue of magnanimity and the Christian virtue of forgiveness.

“You are not to imagine that my friendship is light enough to be blown away by the first cross blast, or that my regard or kindness hangs by so slender a hair, as to be broken off by the unfelt weight of a petty offence. I love you, and hope to love you long. You have hitherto done nothing to diminish my goodwill, and though you had done much more than you have supposed imputed you to my goodwill would not have been diminished.
I write this largely on this suspicion which you have suffered to enter your, because in youth we are apt to be too rigorous in our expectations, and to suppose that the duties of life are to be performed with unfailing exactness and regularity, but in our progress through life we are forced to abate much of our demands, and to take friends such as we can find them, not as we would make them...
When therefore it shall happen, as happen it will, that you and I have Disappointed the expectation of the other, you are not to suppose that you have lost me or that I intended to lose you; nothing will remain to repair the fault, and to go on as if it never had been committed.”

Finally, reinforcing the retreat into privatism, perhaps fuelling it, is the growing collectivism of mass culture. Bureaucracy seems to be everywhere: Big Government, Big Business, Big Education, Big Entertainment. Forces beyond our control conspire to keep us from living and working on a human scale. A vast impersonality smothers intimacy. Social engineering results in the triumph of the structural over the relational. Life has many connections but few companions. We build a huge Rolodex but have few relationships that really matter.

**How to Build Relationships**

In the face of these threats, how may we “build goodwill and better friendships”? To have a friend, we must be a friend. Four interrelated strands contribute to this goal: *Mutuality*. The very word for “fellowship” in the ancient Greek language implied having something in common with others. Aristotle defined a friend as :another self,” the alter ego or mirror in which I may look to understand myself and thereby escape the trap of subjectivity. Some people do not make friends because they do not search for areas of similarity in others. This does not require a lowest common denominator blandness, but it does suggest that we offer others more than our self-centered
idiosyncrasies. Pride is fatal to the discovery of overlapping interest because it stresses one’s own uniqueness or superiority rather than one’s common humanity with others. No matter how different another person may be, we need to discover ways in which we are alike and not just how we are different.

Reciprocity. Once we locate common ground, we must share it with one another at an even deeper level. Friendship begins with doors yet to unlock. To believe in a person is to trust him or her with your secrets. Francis Fukuyama reminds us that without that kind of implicit trust, even free-market capitalism begins to calapse. To be sure, such openness makes us vulnerable, but there is no substitute for taking this risk. We cannot ask or expect others to confide in us more than we are willing to confide in them. If all of the giving is one way, relationships quickly become uneven and unhealthy.

Loyalty. Our guard against being misunderstood or even betrayed is a trust level that inspires confidence. What this commitment signifies is that the relationship is uniquely meaningful to the two persons involved. Neither party is willing to compromise it for the sake of some external advantage. It is “not for sale.” It will not be sacrificed to some impersonal ideological loyalty. For example, in this time of social polarization, do we trade our friends because just they happen to be on the other side of some ideological issue? There is an unconditional quality of friendship according to which neither party is required to pass a “political correctness” test in order to be acceptable to the other. Indeed our partisan positions are clarified and strengthened when we allow them to be challenged by the contrary view of someone whom we truly trust.

These three pillars of friendship may be cultivated by any two persons. But in American life, voluntary associations such as Rotary exist as a fourth way to facilitate and support such relationships. Aristotle spoke of “civic friendship,” not as a privileged or preferable bond, but as a search for “unanimity,” by which he meant the achievement of consensus regarding the common good. Rotary is, in effect, a “holding company” designed not only to broker a host of personal friendships but also to help clear that common ground so desperately needed in America today.

The test of automatic friendship as understood by Rotary is whether or not it “builds goodwill.” Friendship is forever constructing a house of trust in which we can be confident of one another. A measure of competition is perhaps inescapable in a world where we aspire to be and do our best, but we can avoid the suspicion which competitiveness breeds by becoming the best of friends with our business rivals. It is a terrible curse for any life not to be sustained by the goodwill of a host of friends. We make so many foolish mistakes that our clumsy efforts will succeed only if we enjoy the forgiveness and encouragement of others. One of my great joys in attending Rotary on a weekly basis is to occasionally sit back, survey the room and watch friendship at work. Through Rotary we become available to share our best gifts.
of life generously with a host of friends, believing that we can never give away as much as we receive in return. If the only thing that we give and receive is goodwill, that alone makes the Rotary experience of surpassing importance.

Test IV

Will it be Beneficial
To All Concerned?

The last of our tests contains three words that are crucial to it meaning: “beneficial,” “concerned” and “all.” Let us look at each of them in turn as we seek to discern what they are inviting us to discover.

“Beneficial”

Beneficial comes from beneficium, a “kindness” or “service,” which is based on the Latin root bene + factum, from which we also derive the word “benefit” meaning “to
do/make/create that which is good.” The word is not negative or neutral in force, such as “stay out of trouble,” or “don’t get caught,” or “keep your nose clean.” Rather, it is entirely positive. So live as to leave something good where there was no good before. This test invites us to produce goodness as a net gain, as the “rent” we pay for the privilege of living on planet earth. The question, Is it beneficial?” prompts self-examination: Will the way I live every day leave behind certain benefits as my gift to others because I was privileged to pass this way?

This key word “beneficial” has been carefully chosen. The test does not ask if our decision will be “advantageous,” thereby emphasizing the choice of one thing as more desirable than something else. Rather, that which is “beneficial” is intrinsically good within itself and need not be compared with any other option in order to define its worth. Nor does the test inquire if our decisions will be profitable,” which suggests a pleasing return that focuses on the recompense expected. Instead, “beneficial” points to the simple fact that something has been created which is good in and of itself regardless of reward. In other words, the key term “beneficial” asks whether our lives contribute to the common good, offering personal fulfilment to individuals and social betterment to the groups.

Almost at once, this test forces us to think about a fundamental philosophy of life. At the bottom, life is a set of relationships, an “exchange of value” with everyone we meet. And there only three bottom lines resulting from these transactions: taking, keeping, and giving. The issue is fairly simple: Does the world exist to bless me, or do I exist to bless the world? Do I live to see how much I can get from others, or do I live to see how much I can get from others, or do I live to see how much I can give to others? Do I dodge the issue by trying to “break even” on the balance sheet of life, or do I go out of my way to add net worth to what Robert Putnam has taught us to call “social capital”? To summarize: for those who take, life is entitlement: for those who give, life is stewardship; for those who keep, life is reciprocity.

Think how many people leave our world diminished because of the way they have chosen to live. To them life itself is “entitlement,” thus they feel free to squander, even exhaust, whatever has been placed at their disposal, whether it be a family fortune earned by the hard labour of frugal forebears, or a fine education given to them by the toil of dedicated teachers, or a religious patrimony passed onto them by godly believers. Such people sneer at those who try to make their lives “beneficial” by calling them “do-gooders” or “bleeding hearts” Careless of the “benefit factor,” they foul the air, pollute the waterways, defoliate the forests, raping and pillaging nature as if it somehow “belonged” to them to use as they please.

By contrast, there are those for whom life is not entitlement but stewardship. They live to “add value” to every situation, determined to leave behind more than they received, investing richly in the lives of others and taking quiet satisfaction when their investment earns compound interest. All of us know people like this, those who
leave behind for others far more than they ever take for themselves. Make your own list of servant leaders and never forget how “beneficial” their lives have been as you strive to emulate their example.

To be sure, some try to straddle the fence, satisfied to “break even” when the books of life are balanced. But to be “beneficial” means literally to contribute something good that was not there before. Jesus once told a “parable of the talents” (Mathew 25:14-30) according to which two persons entrusted with the vast resources managed to double them while a third person buried his talent and returned to the owner exactly what had been entrusted to him. The man who failed to multiply his talent was severely condemned precisely for his failure to return no more than he had received. Merely to “break even” in life is to live under the curse of that one talent coward who risked nothing but gave only what he got, no more and no less. Always I must ask: will the place where I work be a better institution because I worked there? Will my city be a better community because I lived there? Will my church be a better fellowship because I worshipped there? To put it plainly: if we are successful enough to get into Rotary, then our lives should be successful enough to have a “multiplier effect” on others, so that it can be said of us that we live the “value-added” life.

“Concerned”

This lifestyle is reinforced by the second key word in this final test: we are to live benefit-producing lives because others are “concerned.” John Donne voiced the underlying premise, namely that “no man is an island.” We do not live in a vacuum. Every act has consequences, like a rock dropped in a pond that sends out its ripples to the farthest shore. We are all interdependent, therefore we are rightly concerned about what others do that may affect our lives.

Lying behind this second word is the fundamental assumption that people do care about how our decisions impact their lives. I am not free to act only on the basis of self-interest, or in accordance with my self-imposed policies, or even on the basis of my self-selected religious principles. Always as a Rotarian I must ask, “Who is concerned about this? For whom does this bell toll besides for me?” The Rotary ethic is not theoretical but relational. It asks us to add value, not just to our own reputations, but to other people because they are concerned.

In one sense, our generation has tried everything possible to evade that concern. In the name of privatization” we have retreated into an existential cocoon. We have talked about “What’s in it for me?” or about “getting in touch with my depths,” or about “feeling good about myself,”
as if others were the same vast impersonal mechanism to be ignored, rather than viewing them as thinking, feeling, caring persons to be enriched. Think how many commercials blatantly justify selfishness by appealing to the “you’ve earned it” line as if we have the inalienable right to be indifferent to others. Think how many bureaucratic barriers we build, how many restricted memberships we seek, how many escapist strategies we pursue, all in a futile effort to abdicate our membership in the company of the concerned.

But these stratagems are not finally satisfactory, for the relationality is built into the very fabric of life. The old Latin proverb is right: One man is no man at all.” Life is a symphony, not a solo. Think how profoundly we have been impacted by the labours of earlier generations in every field of endeavour. Or by events halfway round the world, such as when nuclear waste from Chernobyl entered this room. For good or for bad, we are all inextricably interconnected and the things that connect us most closely are our common concerns.

Of all religious groups, the Quakers have been especially helpful in teaching us to search for the concerns of the human spirit. A friends worship service may include a lengthy period of silence until someone, in touch with their depths, is ready to stand and voice a concern. This suggests that our deepest concerns often lie buried behind the formalities of daily existence and are seldom put into words. Which means that we must be sensitive to the concerns of others that have not yet found a voice. So often we respond to the squeaky wheel” that gets our attention, or to the protester who is “in our face” with a strident demand, but this test bids us to care about the consequences of what we do to those who may feel unable to talk back because they have been disenfranchised or marginalised by life.

How hard is it for executives to think about what is beneficial for hourly workers, or for research professors to think about what is beneficial for freshman students, or for powerful politicians to think about what is beneficial for little children. Half of the battle of being beneficial a cultivated sensitivity to the deepest concerns of others. People have concerns because they want to be automatically human, because they are struggling to be free, because they have an urge to grow, because they yearn to throw off the failures of the past, because they desire to make a difference in the world that never seems to notice whether they are there or not. Our task is to do those things that will benefit the ceaseless struggle for dignity and meaning in life.

“All”

The fact that there is no way to limit the community of the concerned is underscored by that little word, “beneficial to all...” It is fairly easy to identify those most immediately impacted by what we do, but the word “all” cautions us not to set
arbitrary limits on the eventual reach of our influence. The reputation of the phase “all concerned” in tests II and IV emphasizes the universality inherent in the moral imperative: the greatest good for the greatest number. “All” roots beneficence, not in our preferences, but in the intrinsic worth of every person and in the legitimacy of their deepest concerns.

We like to draw boundaries that would limit the concerns to which we respond, but that little word “all” will not allow it. In one sense, we spend an entire lifetime discovering just who the all might be. Men once thought that women were not “concerned” to have the vote. Whites once thought that Blacks were not “concerned” to be well educated. Americans once thought that Russians were not “concerned” to be free of totalitarianism. But the truly authentic concerns of life are not bound by gender or race or nationality. The “all” may include those who are not ideological opposites in the struggle between liberals and conservatives. Others may differ from us in the conclusions they reach and yet share our same concerns. There is a challenging comprehensiveness to that little word “all” because it leaps over our inherited acquired stereotypes.

I have had to learn that much of life involves living for those who can lay no direct claim on me. When my departure from Shreveport was announced, following twelve years as pastor of First Baptist Church, I began to receive an unexpectedly large number of farewell letters, some from within my congregation but even more from the wider community. Many of them were from people who I knew only slightly or not at all. In ways far beyond my ability to describe, they sought to thank me for what I had sought to do for our city during my ministry at First Baptist Church. From those hundreds of letters, I discovered my “invisible congregation,” that multitude who had been “concerned” but had never before found a way to express it to me directly. From the experience of pondering those poignant letters, I learned that the “all who were “concerned” about my efforts to be “beneficial” was a much larger group than I had ever realized.

We in Rotary are beginning to discover our “invisible congregations” as well. Two illustrations: Our member, Les Wright, gave the last energies of his public life leading the worldwide Polio Plus campaign that helped to eradicate that dread scourge from areas of the earth. Dr. Wright never knew or even met the vast majority of those whose lives he helped to save, but he was impelled by the vision of doing something “beneficial” for the great host who were “concerned” for a quality of life not hideously disfigured by the ravages of disease. Another Alabamian, Dr. Robert Hingson, cut a swath through Africa with a jet-pressure inoculation gun that administered the smallpox vaccine without the terrors of a needle. I have seen his slides of smallpox hospitals filled with patients so hideous that I had to turn my eyes away from the screen. But those pictures were followed by scenes of the same
hospitals with all of the beds staked on the same back porch waiting to be moved because the smallpox plague had been eradicated. Closer to home, here in Birmingham, our club has begun to build “Rotary roofs” where the youth of our inner city can gather to channel their restless energies in clean sport rather than in destructive violence. In response to the inspired leadership of Past President Jim Todd, we have sought to be “beneficial to a host of kids, some of who may be saved from a criminal career because we cared for their “concerns” to compete and excel. Let us keep searching for opportunities to enlarge the circle of “all” who can benefit from what we do.

What, then, is the deepest meaning of this fourth and final test? Some live only for a few, but this test calls us to live for the many. Some live only for the moment, but it calls us to live for the ages. Some live only for success, but it calls us to live for integrity. Some live only for appearances, but it calls us to live for reality. Some live only for themselves, but it calls us to live for others. Some live only to get what is good, but it calls us to live in order to give what is best.

Conclusion

Now that we have examined each part of the test in some detail, it is time to ask just how enduring and relevant is a guideline that is more than seventy years old for the rapidly shifting ethical landscape of the twenty first century. I suggest that we examine this question both at the personal or local level as well as at the corporate or global level.

I. Personal

As our world faces unprecedented ethical challenges, each of us is deeply concerned about a crisis of character. Why do young children become promiscuous killers on school grounds? Why do teenagers rape and rob and maim the helpless merely as a gang initiation prank? Wistfully we wonder whatever happened to old-fashioned decency? One of the great quests of our day is to rediscover a catechism of character. Somehow we seem to have misplaced the great moral tradition that for centuries was handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation. Now that so many women have moved from home to the work place, who will teach the young what we used to learn at our mother’s Knee? Rotary has a simple answer that has stood the test of time. Even though of limited scope with only twenty four words,
it is a good place to begin in rebuilding our battered sense of integrity and putting some stamina in our moral resolve.  

The workplace also offers an important moral challenge to Rotarians. Here it is interesting to observe that the strategy of adopting a simple statement of core values that can be put on a card and memorized, rather than adding an elaborate code of ethics or behavioural policies to a bulky personnel handbook, is coming into its own today as never before. The Quality of Movement, for example, has insisted that every organization define its core values so clearly, and root them so deeply in the corporate culture, that workers at every level will know instinctively how to act even in time of crisis. Only as an organization norms its culture with commonly accepted behaviours does it achieve a secure identity, a strong sense of cohesiveness, and a distinctive niche in a marketplace crowded with competitors.  

And so the questions come: Do you know The Four-Way Test by heart? Do you explain it to your children and grandchildren? Do you display it in your workplace? Do you constantly apply it to every business decision? Do you take time to share it with your associates? Do you insist to superiors and subordinates alike that they hold you accountable to its criteria? Do you request your Rotary club to schedule programs that probe the most serious ethical issues of our day? What an incredible impact it would have on the moral climate of our communities if a million-plus Rotarians could answer questions such as these in the affirmative!

II. Global

A rapidly growing dimension of vocational life today is that of business relations in a global economy. When society was largely decentralized, direct competition between local businesses was the dominant challenge. But now the technology revolution is teaching us how to work across regional and national boundaries. The internet has linked us in immediate and intimate fashion with a host of networks unknown a decade ago, requiring new patterns of cooperation even among traditional competitors, such as several airlines learning to share their frequent flier plans. In this climate, The Four-Way Test fosters win/win rather than win/lose outcomes. The Rotary culture is one of creative collaboration rather than of destructive competition. It seeks ways to build good will rather than bitter rivalries. It tries to be beneficial to all rather than making enemies of some.

As never before we are forced to live in a pluralistic world characterized by deep historical, ideological, and cultural cleavages. My contention is that The Four-Way Test is ideally suited to make an invaluable contribution in just such an environment. For the one thing that Rotarians have in common with business and professional leaders around the world is that we all have to work for a living! Even when we may
not agree on politics or religion, it is possible to reach a consensus regarding the core values which we cherish on the working days of the week.

Although The Four-Way test originated in the United States, notice how remarkably free it is of controversial ideology, of partisan jargon, of triumphalistic claims – in short, of those polarizing concepts that arouse hostile passions. As we toil at our daily tasks, could anyone, regardless of their political orientation or religious persuasion, take offence at the thought of striving to be truthful, fair, friendly, and beneficial to all? Remember that the Four-Way Test does not decree how we are to honour these four criteria but only puts them in the form of questions which we must answer for ourselves. In the pluralistic world of the twenty-first century, differences run so deep that the best place to begin a dialogue is not by discussing our conflicting answers but rather by seeking to agree on what are the right questions! One way to do this is to enlist the best representatives of the world’s vocations as Rotarians, organizing them into what Edmund Burke called “little platoons” committed to the principles or The Four-Way Test. To be sure, this will not finally solve all of our global tensions, but can you think of a better way to begin?

What new claims does the worldwide situation lay on our observance of The Four-Way Test? Let me remind you of a statement on the “International Responsibilities of a Rotarian” which has never been more relevant than it is now. Slightly revised to be gender-inclusive, here is the statement with an introduction by Cliff Dochterman:

“As an international organisation, Rotary offers each member unique opportunities and responsibilities. Although each Rotarian has first responsibility to uphold the obligations of citizenship of his or her own country, membership in Rotary enables Rotarians to take a somewhat different view of international affairs. In the early 1950’s, a Rotarian philosophy was adopted to describe how a Rotarian may think on a global basis. Here is what it said:

World-minded Rotarians:

•  Look beyond national patriotism and consider themselves as sharing responsibility for the advancement of international Understanding, goodwill and peace;

•  resist any tendency to act in terms of national or racial superiority;

•  seek and develop common grounds for agreement with peoples
of other lands;

• defend the rule of law and order to preserve the liberty of individuals so they may enjoy freedom of thought, speech and assembly, and freedom from persecution, aggression, want and fear;

• support action directed towards improving standards of living for all peoples, realizing that poverty anywhere endangers prosperity everywhere;

• uphold the principles of justice for humankind;

• strive always to promote peace between nations and prepare to make personal sacrifices for that ideal;

• urge and practice a spirit of understanding of every other person’s beliefs as a step toward international goodwill, recognizing that there are certain basic moral and spiritual standards which will ensure a richer, fuller life”

All eight of these guidelines are supported by The Four-Way Test and thus are mandated for serious Rotarians. The more we can plant these values among those who do not yet appreciate the Rotary way of life, the more likely we are to fashion a world where all humanity can live together in peace. This is obviously the task of many lifetimes. But it is a task which we can begin today!
About the Author

William E. Hull

The most organized mind I ever knew,” is the one of Dr. Hull’s close friends colleagues characterizes the minister, seminary professor author-speaker, and university provost. Whose commentary on Rotary’s Four-Way Test has attracted international attention. Born in Birmingham, Alabama, and educated in its public schools, Dr. Hull was graduated from Samford University, and earned graduate degrees at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he served as professor and administrator for more than two decades. Temporarily leaving the formal classroom in 1975, he became pastor of the historic First Baptist Church of Shreveport, Louisiana, where community leaders still remember his call for civic engagement and renewal.

Returning to academia in the city of his birth in 1987, he was elected University Professor and Provost at his Alma Mater, Samford University, where he is now Research Professor. Dr Hull is a Past President of the Rotary Club of Birmingham (2002-2003). He is author of many books and articles and is frequently invited by the media to comment on issues of our day. A guest preacher in churches around the world, and guest lecturer and visiting professor in educational institutions, His speeches and lectures have covered many venues. He is married to the former Wylodine Hester. They have a son and a daughter, both of whom are ordained ministers, and two grandchildren.
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