History of the 4-Way Test

The following was taken almost verbatim from website www.rotaryfirst100.org, a website worth looking at.

Webmaster

The simple and straightforward Four Way Test was written by Chicago Rotarian Herbert J Taylor in 1932. It is not necessarily a catechism but rather a purely subjective form of self-analysis. Truth is, of course, relative.

The test was primarily written for his bankrupt Club Aluminium Company in 1932. Herb actually gave up his job in 'packaged groceries; house to house sales' (his classification in #1 club) to join 250 other employees onboard the so-called *sinking ship*.

Taylor retold the concept of the test in his own words:

"To win our way out of this situation, I reasoned we must be morally and ethically strong. I knew that in right there was might. I felt that if we could get out our employees to think right they would do right. We needed some sort of ethical yardstick that everybody in the company could memorize and apply to what we thought, said, and did in our relations to others.

So one morning I leaned over on my desk, rested my head in my hands. In a few moments, I reached for a white paper card and wrote down that which had come to me – in twenty-four words."

The Four-Way Test

of the things we think, say or do

First

Is it the *TRUTH?*

Second

Is it *FAIR* to all concerned?

Third

Will it build *GOOD WILL* and *BETTER FRIENDSHIPS?*

Fourth

Will it be *BENEFICIAL* to all concerned?

When a company advertisement was placed before Taylor, declaring his aluminium product as "the greatest cooking ware in the world," He simply stated "We can't prove that." The ad was rewritten simply stating the facts.

Taylor's heads of department belonged to different religions and all found no incompatibility with their respective faiths. Thus, the test was "for any man to take as arises."

The most significant and practical example of the test in action concerned an incident involving a Printing contract. One local printer won an order from Taylor's company, beating all other tenders. The printer, however, soon realised that he had underestimated his quote by $500. Legally, Club Aluminium could ignore the printer's appeals and compel him to fulfil his side of the contract. Club Aluminium was deeply in debt and had acted in good faith, but Taylor asked his board to reconsider and pay the printer the extra $500. Remember the second line of the test, he told his fellow directors, — "is it fair to all concerned?"

Club Aluminium's future grew brighter and brighter, and in five years had pulled itself out of the red. Perhaps, the test had real, practical benefits.

As Oren Arnold explains in his book on The Rotary club of Chicago entitled *The Golden Strand*, the club first learned of the test in 1939[1] when Taylor was President.

Taylor's enthusiasm was described as *contagious*, and members quickly and with fervour took up the Four-Way Test, embraced it and spread the word.

Japanese Rotarians used to have the 24-word test embossed onto umbrellas at Railway station waiting rooms. Very few ever disappeared. And countless Rotarians have placed the test in their workplace to remind themselves and others of Rotary values.

Rotarian David Shelley Nicholl in his book *The Golden Wheel* accuses Taylor of violating one of the first principles of Rotary as established by Paul Harris. Rotary was neither a religion of a substitute for a religion. Another Rotarian author, Roger Levy in Rotary International in Great Britain and Ireland describes the test (with typical British cynicism) as "a piece of home-spun morality with which RIBI Rotarians were never fully comfortable".

Yet this brings us back to the beginning— the Four-Way Test is an entirely subjective analysis with no prescriptive answers.

Rotary International officially adopted the Test in January of 1943. Herbert J Taylor would additionally serve the movement as RI President in 1954-55.

[1] The Rotary orientation booklet entitled Adventure in Service states the year as 1933.