

RID Paul A. Netzel in

# Conversation

with RID Ashok Mahajan



## **Why do Rotarians find it so difficult to practice Vocational Services' most important constituent — Ethics ?**

If we can define ethics in the context of the “Four Way Test” then I believe the vast majority of Rotarians do work to maintain high ethical standards in their vocations. Rotarians are faced with the same kind of pressures as non-Rotarians in their business and professional lives. While it may be true that some do not live up to the standard we expect from Rotarians, the Four Way Test gives many an ethical compass or road map to guide them in making the right or most ethical decisions. The more Rotary clubs emphasise the Four Way Test, the more likely an even greater number of Rotarians will take it into account in both their business as well as personal lives.

## **Should Rotarians be more transparent in all the financial dealings with Rotary? How?**

Of course. We are living in a time when transparency is becoming increasingly important. Transparency helps ensure Rotarians that they have access to how Rotary’s finances are being handled. I believe that proposals adopted at the last several Councils on Legislation requiring a greater openness of finances at all levels of the organisation have proven to be positive steps in achieving this objective. Further, last year, the RI Board adopted a Conflict of Interest Statement that must now be signed by candidates for district governor. This was another step taken to underscore the point that each Rotarian and Rotary leader has an obligation to work within Rotary in an ethical manner.

## **Can Rotary be accepted by the community if honesty is sacrificed?**

It’s been said that “one’s actions speak louder than words.” Clearly if Rotarians are perceived in the community as not practicing the high ethical standards we say we stand for, e.g., the Four Way Test, it will reflect negatively on all Rotarians.

## **How can we be more relevant to the community?**

As Rotarians, we need to conduct our personal, business and professional lives in a manner that says “Rotarians can be trusted; they can be counted on

to treat us fairly and with respect.” This also means we need to lead by example. How we treat our clients, customers, vendors and our employees will reinforce the perception that Rotarians care and practice what they say they stand for.

## **In all the “messages” of Rotary propounded by RI Presidents, why is Vocational Service ignored?**

This may have been true, to some degree in years past, but I see a significant shift developing. RIP Wilf Wilkinson and RIPE DK Lee have both addressed the issue of Vocational Service. This past October the RI Board authorised reinstating the RI Vocational Service Committee and renewing Rotary’s commitment to Vocational Service. It may take 12–18 months for the work and benefits of this new committee to become more evident around the Rotary world, but I believe we are moving in the right direction. Because Rotary is a “bottoms up” not a “top down” organisation we see many vocational service projects (e.g., microcredit, vocational training programmes, business and management training programmes, etc.) taking root and flourishing at the club and district levels.

## **Can RI institute and “award” on the lines of “Service above Self Award” recognising the honest, the ethical and the “clean” Rotarian?**

Of course it could, but I don't believe it would be a good idea. While the concept is appealing, in reality it would be difficult to make such a determination as to who is "the most ethical." Unlike other awards that are presented, there could be a stigma associated with all of the other Rotarians who do not receive the ethical award. The very fact they weren't selected, does that mean they "weren't ethical enough?" to qualify? Or, worse yet, does it mean they might have done something unethical that disqualified them from consideration? In short, establishing such an award would likely reflect negatively on everyone else for not being selected. In this instance, it would not be "fair to all concerned."



**With multiple immunisation drives by Government of India promoting National Immunisation Days every year, the involvement of Rotary is decreasing. Your comments.**

This is an inevitable consequence of Rotary's remarkable success in helping to reduce the number of new cases of polio to less than 1,000 in 2007. Further, this is why the Gates Foundation grant of \$100 million is perfect in its timing and why TRF's recently announced "Rotary's \$100 Million Challenge" campaign is so important. Both will motivate Rotarians worldwide by reminding them that we need to fulfill our promise to the children of the world and that we are, at long last, in the final stages of eradicating polio from the face of the earth.

**Do you believe that greater emphasis be placed on literacy, ecology, water conservation, global warming etc., whilst we continue to promote Polio Eradication?**

While I agree that we cannot take our eyes off Rotary's number one corporate priority – Polio Eradication – until we have finished the job, I am confident Rotary clubs not only can handle other responsibilities at the same time, they must and they will! The needs in

the world are many and urgent. For example, RI President-Elect DK Lee recently reminded us of the staggering child mortality rate: 30,000 children under five years die every single day due to preventable causes. Simply said: Rotarians can't delay in helping to reduce this number.

**With excellent contributions being received in these last years, do you think that new "pilot projects" must be started in various countries to address other acute needs of the community?**

Of course. In fact, this is the genius of Rotary: new projects are being developed every year around the world of Rotary, thanks to the generosity of Rotarians to The Rotary Foundation. In most instances, they're probably not called "pilot projects" when, in fact, they may prove to have been just that when other Rotary clubs learn about what is being done.

**What is the future of TRF?**

The future of TRF is very bright. I see TRF continuing to grow and prosper and to take on an even more significant role in addressing some of the world's most pressing issues and needs. Having the Rotarians of the world contribute over \$100 million to the Annual Fund this past year was a critical mile-

stone underscoring our own potential. Further, the recent \$100 million Gates Foundation grant to TRF was another significant milestone. And I believe TRF will be a strong candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize by the time the world is officially declared Polio Free! In 25 or 50 years from now we will be able to look back and see that each of these were major milestones in TRF's journey to greatness.

**What new areas can be incorporated in the programmes of TRF to make it more relevant?**

The Future Vision Plan has enabled TRF to better understand the need to increase the discretion of districts in using a greater portion of their DDF funds for use in addressing local needs, if they choose. In the short term, this will prove to be a significant step in enhancing TRF's relevancy.

**Will Polio be eradicated from the face of this earth in the next 10 years?**

Without question. The world is on the verge of becoming polio free within the coming five to six years, allowing for a period the mandatory two to three years with no new cases of polio being reported. Rotary and TRF is committed to fulfilling its promise to the children of the world ... and it will!

### **What role has India played in the promotion of the Vision of TRF?**

India has provided inspiration and leadership in the development of TRF's Future Vision Plan and so many of TRF's programmes. Indian Rotarians have provided strong financial support to TRF. Equally important they have demonstrated just how effective the programmes of Rotary can be when local Rotary clubs and Rotarians are partnered with others from around the world. It's the strength of the Indian Rotarians support and their leadership in a myriad of projects that will help convert the Vision of TRF into reality!

### **If misuse of funds of TRF given to Clubs under "grants" heading is so disturbing, have you a blueprint which can reduce the incidence of this misuse? Should Rotary Clubs be "punished" for their dishonesty?**

Frankly, I haven't been sufficiently close to the experiences you are alluding to so that I can feel qualified to comment. However, from what I know I believe the problems that existed within India a few years ago have been addressed and, indeed, clubs and districts that abused the privilege and the trust of TRF have been dealt with in a proper manner.

### **If Rotary has to remain relevant in this century, what changes do you recommend?**

The world is rapidly changing at all levels — in commerce and industry, in technology, education and in the lifestyles of our youth. The world is becoming a global community in such a way that we can no longer ignore the implications of these changes.

To effectively meet its potential in this century Rotary will need to become more flexible and adaptable to change more quickly. We must increase numbers of younger Rotarians, expand the number of women in our membership. And we will need to develop a membership retention and development that places greater responsibility into the

hands of each Rotarian. In a sense, we need to develop a programme for membership much as TRF has succeeded in doing with its "Every Rotarian Every Year" programme. We've seen the success of the EREY programme and I'm confident a comparable programme can be established for membership development. Rotary has a unique genius in re-inventing itself to meet new and pressing needs. It has over 32,000 entrepreneurial enterprises — individual clubs!

Perhaps what excites me most about being in a senior leadership position at this time in Rotary's history is my deep belief that no other NGO is as well positioned as Rotary to impact the world for good. The opportunities are awesome! Only our lack of vision, boldness and courage can hold us back from doing remarkable things to achieve Rotary's mission and objectives — whether it be in the area of promoting peace and international understanding or addressing the root causes of poverty and helping ensure that all children have a fair chance to grow into productive and responsible adult citizens.

### **Your "Message" to the Rotarians?**

India will be one of the powerhouses in the world economy during this century. I believe that it's entirely possible for India to become the largest nation of Rotarians in the world. It would not surprise me if India had over 500,000 Rotarians by 2025, for certain by 2040. With this kind of growth potential, India's Rotarians should take great pride in their capacity, individually and collectively to make a lasting impact on the world through Rotary's programmes and projects. With this potential goes incredible responsibility. This is why I urge each Rotarian to lead by example — to practice ethical behaviour in our vocations and personal lives, to recruit at least one new member each year (it is the life blood of Rotary), and to share your talent, time and treasure through the programmes of TRF.

## **Microcredit Programmes get a Fillip**

The Rotary International Presidential Conference on Microcredit, held in Chennai on December 12, 2007 has opened up new vistas of cooperation. The conference which was chaired by PDG P T Prabhakar, RI District 3230, has been widely appreciated by the members of the Rotarian Action Group for Microcredit (RAGM). Chair of the Group PDG Steven Rickard has said that they are ready to help in co-ordinating Rotarians and clubs to achieve microcredit goals.



The aim of the Action Group is to mobilise Rotarians and provide leadership to address world poverty through microcredit.

Rotary clubs interested in microcredit programmes may visit [www.rotarianmicrocredit.org](http://www.rotarianmicrocredit.org) to get more information about the activities of the group. An association with the group can bring about good projects in the area of poverty alleviation.

RAGM will be setting up a booth at the RI Convention at Los Angeles from June 14–18, 2008. The booth will be open from 9 AM to 6 PM. RAGM invites Rotary volunteers to man this booth. Rotarians who are interested may contact Rtn. Robin Knudsen at [rsknudsen@hotmail.com](mailto:rsknudsen@hotmail.com)