

## ROTARY VOCATIONAL CLASSIFICATIONS WE ARE ALL SUPPOSED TO HAVE ONE

The classification principle dates back to the inception of Rotary in 1905. Paul Harris and his co-founders envisioned a diverse membership representing various vocations. They wanted a cross-section of society, ensuring that Rotary did not become a narrowly focused self-interest group.

**Each Rotarian must belong to a specific vocational classification, which reflects their profession or occupation.** This diversity enriches Rotary clubs by mirroring the broader community's business and professional landscape.

For most of Rotary's existence, the assignment of a classification to each new member has been a defining feature of their membership. The rule was that everyone had to have a classification but there could be no more than one person in a club with their unique classification.

I remember how creative clubs could be, using different words to describe similar jobs in different ways.

Nowadays, many clubs do not assign a classification to new members. This steadfast Rotary imperative has drifted into obscurity and disuse in many clubs. As clubs individually elect to discard a variety of Rotary traditions (Toasts, Rotary Grace, Sergeant-at-Arms Session, National Anthem etc) – all appropriately, in line with the wishes of members – the Vocational Classification seems to often find its way into the archive box too. It seems to happen frequently when clubs renew their dinner or name badges and opt to omit the classification.

Assuming your club maintains an updated Constitution in accordance with changes directed by the RI Board, you should have a clause that reads something like this:::

### **Standard Rotary Club Constitution**

#### **Article 9 Club Membership Composition**

**Section 1 — General Provisions.** *Each member shall be classified in accordance with the member's business, profession, occupation, or community service. The classification shall describe the principal and recognized activity of the member's firm, company, or institution, the member's principal and recognized business or professional activity, or the nature of the member's community service activity. The board may adjust a member's classification if the member changes positions, professions, or occupations.*

Therefore, from the perspective of Rotary International, your club's compliance with the standard club constitution as a condition of your Club Charter still calls for the assignment of a unique classification to each new member as they are inducted into your club's membership.

If this revelation has you concerned, wringing your hands or gasping "Oh No!" – please relax. I am not aware of any initiative by RI to police this and the likelihood that any remedial action is going to be demanded is probably quite small. It is certainly not on my radar. But it gives rise to discussion about the value of assigning vocational classifications and why some clubs no longer do it – despite their constitutional obligation.

This was, indeed, the subject of discussion at a session of District 9510 DG Talkback in February. Many of the Rotarians present were from clubs that don't assign classifications and some, who had been members only a few years, had never heard of them. So it is clear that this foundational pillar of Rotary membership hasn't just recently begun to gather dust. In many clubs it has been drifting into obscurity for some time.

**WHAT?** Its worth noting here that initially, the discussion was focussed on making sure everyone on the Zoom was brought up to speed on what, exactly, is a Vocational Classification and how it is applied. As all this was revealed, there was thread of 'What's the point?' in and out of the discussion.

**WHY?** With everyone now able to contribute, there was a lot tossed around about the value to a club of making a member's vocation a visible and prominent feature of their membership. Of course, this discussion also included consideration of the positive and negative aspects of mandating classifications for all members.

The immediate question was:

*"What purpose is served by limiting a club's membership to one teacher, one lawyer, one welder, one bus driver and so on?"*

Good question! The original reason was to ensure diversity and guard against Rotary becoming a narrowly focussed interest group or dominated by specific interests. This concern seems to have been overtaken by attitudes and events over 119 years. In fact- specifically focussed and cause-based clubs are now authorised and encouraged. So while this feature of vocational classifications may have served a purpose in various places over time, perhaps there is little need for it now, at least in this district.

The responses to the second basic question are a little more instructive. That question was:

*"Why bother with this?"*

Here's what people thought:

- Wearing a classification on your name badge facilitates a means of members getting to know one another better. A starting point for introduction and engagement.
- It provides a baseline for understanding what sorts of projects a club might approach, knowing the internal skills it is able to turn to. A useful Skills Register.
- Clubs can use their list of members' classifications as a trigger for targeting new members. 'What sort of things might the club be able to do if we had a carpenter or a sparky or a clergyman or a local councillor or a business guru or a mechanic or an IT specialist etc etc etc?'
- It's a consistent acknowledgment to members of the continuing respect Rotary has for the value of what they do.
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The consensus at the conclusion of discussion was that:

- The reason that Rotary International originally mandated the assignment of vocational classifications has been outgrown and, by itself, not particularly relevant to clubs in District 9510 in 2024.

- The assignment of vocational classifications does, nonetheless, offer some useful tools to clubs. Enough advantages to warrant the effort of doing it.

So – that was what a diverse group concluded at DG Talkback. What do you think?

If you have a view on this, please let me know. Remember, it is still required in your club's constitution and the way to get this changed is detailed in Article 59 of the Rotary International Code of Policies <https://my-cms.rotary.org/en/document/rotary-code-policies>

Happy reading!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Craig" with a small "2" written below the "g".

**Craig Dowling**  
District Governor 2023-24

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