

Case Study in Conflict Resolution

In the large Rotary club of Riverton, club members get 60 seconds at the microphone on their birthday weeks. Some members tell a joke, some make their annual “Paul Harris” contribution to the Rotary Foundation, some reminisce and say thanks.

One club member gets up and says: “You’re not going to see me for 3 months—I’m going over to Eye-RAC, and bomb the hell out of them A-rabs.” The one Arab club member requests an apology. The club board decides “not to make a big thing out of it” and the Arab club member, who holds a district chair position, resigns from the club and from Rotary.

On the first anniversary of the 9/11 calamity, the same fighter pilot and his partner are the program and, laughing, show vivid strafing from their aircraft of cars and homes in Afghanistan. Then he says: “Of all the insanity that is Islam, the most insane are the Taliban.” A veteran club member is shocked, and later calls the club president, suggesting that the fighter pilot apologize to the club. The club president says: “Why don’t you go talk to him?”

The veteran club member does just that. He suggests that it is not in the spirit of Rotary to defame one of the world’s great religions, and an apology would be appropriate. The fighter pilot is irate. He says: “Look, Hawkins, I do not have a problem—it’s **you** who have the problem! Club members told me that it was the greatest program in the history of the club.” The veteran member and 3 others resign from the club. The club president raises the incident with his board. Here is a role-play enactment of that board meeting—

Board member 1, will make these “**Con**” points (and others):

- This is a terrible loss to our club—losing 4 members.
- Freedom of speech from a guest speaker, but not from a Rotarian from the podium—it’s a violation of all that Rotary stands for, especially the 4-Way test.
- What did our visitors that day think? And our Youth Exchange student?
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Board member 2, makes these “**Pro**” points (and others):

- This is America, and Freedom of Speech is a birthright
- This man is a patriot, serving his country. How dare we question his remarks?
- Hey, he had lunch with Hamid Karzai. He knows what he is talking about.

One of our colleagues, Joe Sweeney, will play the role of the club president. Mike Flores will be board member 1, and Dan Coons will be board member 2. Ruth Tan Lim will join in with 1 or 2. Others in attendance will serve as the “Jury.”

Club President, ...take it away.