

# The Way “Robot Corps”

by John P. Juedes

The Way Corps is the trained leadership of The Way International (TWI). In fact, President L. Craig Martindale noted that the Corps must meet higher standards of ability and training than even TWI headquarters staff. Corps members are graduates of a four-year training program, which includes a candidate year (in which they work with Corps grads), an apprentice year (which includes a term serving as Way Disciples) and two in-residence years (including teaching by top Way leadership).

However, there is irony in the fact that the Corps lead very little — mainly they follow the detailed, extensive rules and laws dictated to them by President Martindale. Leadership literally controls even the minute details of Corps members' personal lives and ministry. There is no room for personal decision-making or freedom and no allowance for differences of circumstance, people or region. Corps members are no longer leaders but rule-followers and rule-enforcers.

Martindale's letters and Way manuals prescribe and control every part of Corps members' lives, from the most important issues to insignificant matters.

## PROGRAMMING THE CORPS

While TWI does not necessarily arrange marriages for Corps mem-

bers, it enforces the rule that Corps members must only marry other *active* Corps members. This policy forces them to look for spouses in a very small pool of candidates, since there are probably 10 or fewer singles of the opposite sex who graduate each year (and many grads from previous years are removed from active status). This rule likely results in many poor marriages (and divorces).

Martindale recently made a “sanctioned exception” to the policy of active Way Corps grads marrying only active Way Corps grads” in the policy statement “Single Way Corps Graduate Women Marriage Parameters.” He allowed female Corps members to marry devout Advanced Class graduates who are willing to go through Corps training (this is because there are more female graduates than male, and there aren't enough Corps men to go around). Of course, this requires the women to go through Corps training a second time with their new husbands. Any Corps members who marry non-Corps members are removed from Active Corps members (some ex-members estimate that TWI lost 300-400 active Corps members when they first enforced this rule). When they are not active Corps members, responsibilities are reduced and they can't go to the

Corps meetings or receive Way correspondence to Corps members.

TWI also forbids many Corps members from having children, or prescribes when and how many children to have. The “Emergency Expense Cutting Measures” of March '98 to Sept. '99 emphasized that the “Pregnancy Policy” which began in 1996 was still in effect. The policy stated that wives under 35, couples who already have two or more children, Corps members in training, or Corps members in new assignments were forbidden from having children. In addition, any other pregnancies must be approved by their immediate overseers beforehand. Couples have been removed from the Corps for having forbidden pregnancies.

TWI forbids Corps members from having debt of any kind. Corps members may not get loans to purchase a house, car, or cover emergency expenses. A May 1994 letter from Martindale stated that at that time “...over 100 Corps members have been ‘busted back’ from their responsibilities, basically due to debt,” because, he said, “Debt is sin.”

To enforce this, Corps members must have their overseers approve their budget and actual family expenses (not just the ministry expenses, but their *personal* expenses). Since the Corps is paid by TWI headquarters,

no matter where they live or serve, TWI also controls Corps members' incomes. The "Emergency Expense Cutting Measures" also stated that for at least 18 months starting March 25, 1998, salaries for all staff would be reduced by 10%, leaving them less to live on. The Trustees also determine Corps members' job assignments, which commonly change every three to five years. Corps members are also required to have their weekly schedules approved by their overseers in advance. The rule "The Framework for Planning and Stewarding of Time for The Way Corps" prescribes that Corps members must fax a "proposed" schedule to their overseers by 5 p.m. each Friday and will receive a response by Monday morning. At the end of the week they submit "an 'actual' report of what they accomplished in that week, of both ministry and personal time." Note that leaders want accounting of *personal* time as well as ministry time.

Leadership also sets parameters for where Corps members may live. Usually this includes the requirement that they must live near their overseers, if at all possible.

Staff must also submit a "Headquarters Staff Vacation Contact Sheet" for approval three weeks before a vacation. This includes filling out a detailed "Vacation/Weekend Itinerary" which includes details about when, how, and with whom they are traveling, as well as accommodations and who they will visit.

Corps members also must follow "The Way Corps Dress Code" which details how they will dress at different occasions and times of day. It also notes that leadership may designate dress codes for specific occasions, which Corps members must obey.

Martindale also insists that Corps members not make teachings for fellowships on their own. Instead, they are to re-teach articles from *The Way Magazine* and teachings from the Sunday service at headquarters. The terms and words they use are tightly controlled. It is an absolute must to use current Way jargon, while use of older Wierwille-like terms are sure to

draw "reproof." Corps members must forward all donations ("abundant sharing") to headquarters, and may not retain any funds for local use. Leadership approves all ministry expenses.

Trustees also define how many new students must be recruited before Corps members can have a Way of Abundance and Power class. "The Way of the U.S.A. Class Information 1998-99" reduced the minimum to three new students in smaller branches of 15-30 disciples and five in larger branches. Classes must have at least 10 participants, including grads who attend additional times. Average class size is probably about five new students. It is likely the minimum number was reduced because recruitment had fallen off due to the decline in size of TWI.

Martindale used a March 1997 letter to the Corps members to command them not to receive gifts or honoraria, because these constitute bribery and greed. However, this rule seemed hypocritical because Way members were expected to send gifts to Martindale whenever they held The Way of Abundance and Power classes. The class coordinator's manual included section "H. Gifts Presented to Rev. Martindale from The Way of Abundance and Power Classes." The two-page section included seven points detailing how to collect money and what kinds of gifts to buy for him. It discouraged cash gifts because "there are legal limitations in the way they must be handled." It recommended books, sports-related merchandise, cuff links, ties and especially "gift certificates to selected stores, catalogs and restaurants." Section "H." was recently removed from the manual.

Gifts for "the man of God" and some lesser leaders was an entrenched practice in TWI (apparently founder Victor Paul Wierwille loved receiving gifts and accolades) but only recently has Martindale revoked the privilege. Martindale said: "I enjoy honorariums and special gifts. ... but I will certainly slam my privileges shut also if this is what it takes to ... straighten out some of your gnarled-up minds." Even though Martindale

lives a lifestyle much plusher than any Corps member, (his President's Home, once called "The Way Corps Chalet," and private office are said to be worth millions of dollars) he has reduced the small staff salaries and gifts and is said to still receive gifts privately on occasion.

The "Emergency Expense Cutting Measures" also prescribed the "New Pet Policy" which read: "Effective March 25, 1998, larger pets ('serious pets') such as cats, dogs, horses, reptiles, and some birds will not be allowed for full-time Staff. Smaller pets such as fish, hamsters, small turtles, etc. are still acceptable." It seems that the Trustees had reduced staff salaries so much that they decided staff couldn't afford to feed pets and didn't allow exceptions for those who had access to free pet food. Some staff report that Trustee Rosalie Rivenbark's two cats are apparently exempt from the no-pet policy.

Overseers wield two important weapons to achieve their goal of keeping Corps members in line: "confronting" and "mark and avoid." "Confronting," (also called "reprove" or "admonish") is when leaders criticize and accuse those beneath them of error, mistakes, not using current jargon, not obeying the many rules, etc. It may include yelling, berating, or not allowing the subjects (victims?) to leave the room until leaders feel that they will obey on even the smallest of matters. Ex-Way followers report that sessions can last hours.

Overseers also threaten to purge, mark and avoid those who disobey leadership. They "mark" (publicly label them as erring) and "avoid" all contacts and conversations with them. Such fallen leaders are labeled as "unsalted." They use "avoid" as a means to prevent current Corps members from talking with or reading the writings of ex-Way members, thereby controlling what Corps members read and hear.

Since Corps members are used to being scrutinized and criticized by overseers, they treat Way followers beneath them in the pecking order in the same way. This creates a manipu-

lative, controlling atmosphere at all levels of TWI. Since all decisions must be approved by overseers, TWI has become much like the communist USSR was: they assume that if something is not specifically allowed, then it must be forbidden. As a result, The Way "Robot Corps" lives and works in a lockstep, robotic fashion. While founder V.P. Wierwille established "The Way Tree" as a means to control everyone and everything related to TWI, even he probably never imagined how manipulative the tree would become.

This is much different from most pastors and leaders of Christian churches, who are free to direct their own ministry, decide how to best use their personal income and time, choose from many potential Christian life partners, and adjust their dress and ministry to fit local needs and circumstances.

### WHAT DOES THE "ROBOT CORPS" SUGGEST ABOUT THE TRUSTEES?

The Trustees who make all decisions and are the only legal members

of TWI are L. Craig Martindale, Rosalie Rivenbark and John Reynolds. Since they make all policies, the way they treat the Corps members gives insights into the character and nature of the Trustees.


First, the rules imply that the Trustees do not trust the Corps members. The Trustees legislate, control, and approve every aspect of the Corps members' personal and work lives. Apparently, they think that the Corps members are completely unable to lead themselves or others. And if the Trustees, who know Corps grads well, don't trust the Corps members — then why should believers trust Corps grads who oversee them?

Second, the Trustees must provide poor leadership training if grads are unable to lead themselves or others, take initiative, evaluate their own work, design their own teachings and be self-starters.

Third, these policies suggest that the Trustees consider manipulating and micromanaging Corps members lives to be one of their main functions. They seem to guide the Corps mem-

bers by inspecting rather than by inspiring and setting an example.

One thing the Corps members policies do *not* mention is *freedom*. The New Testament, on the other hand, emphasizes freedom. Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32). Of course, TWI spends very little effort studying Jesus' teachings, since it ridicules them as being meant for people long dead rather than for themselves. Galatians 5:1 also warns us, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." These are passages for Corps members to reflect on as they seek approvals and fear reprovals.

**Editor's Note:** The Corps policies cited above and other letters from Way President Craig Martindale to the Corps can be viewed in their original form at The WayDale Document Archive web site. Additional information of The Way International may be found on Dr. Juedes' web site: [www.empirenet.com/~messiah7](http://www.empirenet.com/~messiah7). 

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### GAMES MORMON PEOPLE PLAY

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*omitted), that intentionally fights against it by publishing a web site for that purpose. The same may be said for those who publish anti-Mormon (ism) pamphlets, books, articles, or who attend LDS gatherings to picket, oppose, ridicule, attack, pass out their literature, and the like."*<sup>4</sup>

Thus, for this particular LDS, there appears to be no substantive difference between criticizing the doctrines of the church or attacking the Mormon people. If you do one, then you are guilty of the other. This, in his estimation, is especially true if you publish anything against his beliefs. If you do this, then you are "anti-Mormon."

Moreover, a quick way for LDS members to find themselves excom-

municated from their church is to "speak out" or "preach" anything the church authorities consider false doctrine. In a recent appearance on *Larry King Live*, Gordon B. Hinckley, the current "Prophet" of the LDS church, had this exchange with the popular talk show host:

**King:** "Are people ever thrown out of your church?"

**Hinckley:** "Yes."

**King:** "For?"

**Hinckley:** "Doing what they shouldn't do, preaching false doctrine, speaking out publicly. They can carry all the opinion they wish within their heads, so to speak, but if they begin to try to persuade others, then they may be called in to a disciplinary council. We don't excommunicate many, but we do some."<sup>5</sup>

### WHO'S ATTACKING WHOM?

Closely related to the "anti-Mormon" labeling strategy is the question

from Latter-day Saints as to why Christians openly criticize and discredit their church. Observations again expressed during my conversation with the Mormon apologist bear this out:

"Mormons are not on a campaign to destroy any particular religion. Indeed, we are aware that the major religious leaders have been inspired by God to give various peoples a degree of light and truth, and we know their religions will not likely disappear regardless of how successful our missionary efforts are. Thus we say, we are positively preaching our message which of course includes statements such as that we have the fullness of the gospel and other religions do not. In that offer we invite people to keep the truth they have and accept the additional truth we offer. If we are rejected, we honor that decision."