

The Twelve Concepts

"AA's Twelve Concepts of Service" and the "AA General Service Manual," which together form a kind of constitution and a governmental structure of A.A. The AA Concepts don't have the elegance of AA's Twelve Steps or its Twelve Traditions, nor are they well known to many AA members.

The Twelve Concepts represent a unique and fascinating set of principles that derive the right of AA's leaders to speak and act for the fellowship while establishing written guaranties for individual freedom and minority rights.

The Concepts were conceived to protect the fellowship from becoming a top-down rather than a bottom-up organization.

What purposes do the Twelve Concepts for World Services serve?

"The Concepts to be discussed in the following pages are primarily an interpretation of AA's world service structure. They spell out the traditional practices and the Conference charter principles that relate the component parts of our world structure into a working whole. Our Third Legacy manual is largely a document of procedure. Up to now the Manual tells us how to operate our service structure. But there is considerable lack of detailed information, which would tell us why the structure has developed as it has and why its working parts are related together in the fashion that our Conference and General Service Board charters provide.

"These Twelve Concepts therefore represent an attempt to put on paper the why of our service structure in such a fashion that the highly valuable experience of the past and the conclusions that we have drawn from it cannot be lost.

"These Concepts are no attempt to freeze our operation against needed change. They only describe the present situation, the forces and principles that have molded it. It is to be remembered that in most respects the Conference charter can be readily amended. This interpretation of the past and present can, however, have a high value for the future. Every oncoming generation of service workers will be eager to change and improve our structure and operations. This is good. No doubt change will be needed. Perhaps unforeseen flaws will emerge. These will have to be remedied.

But along with this very constructive outlook, there will be bound to be still another, a destructive one. We shall always be tempted to throw out the baby with the bath water. We shall suffer the illusion that change, any plausible change, will necessarily represent progress. When so animated, we may carelessly cast aside the hard won lesions of early experience and so fall back into many of the great errors of the past.

Hence, a prime purpose of these Twelve Concepts is to hold the experience and lessons of the early days constantly before us. This should reduce the chance of hasty and unnecessary change. And if alterations are made that happen to work out badly, then it is hoped that these Twelve Concepts will make a point of safe return."

(GSC, 1960)