

AA Grapevine, April 1946
Twelve Suggested Points of AA Tradition

Nobody invented Alcoholics Anonymous. It grew. Trial and error has produced a rich experience. Little by little we have been adopting the lessons of that experience, first as policy and then as Tradition. That process still goes on and we hope it never stops. Should we ever harden too much, the letter might crush the spirit. We could victimize ourselves by petty rules and prohibitions; we could imagine that we had said the last word. We might even be asking alcoholics to accept our rigid ideas or stay away. We never stifle progress like that!

Yet the lessons of our experience count for a great deal -- a very great deal, we are each convinced. The first written record of AA experience was the book "Alcoholics Anonymous." It was addressed to the heart of our foremost problem -- release from the alcohol obsession. It contained personal experiences of drinking and recovery and a statement of those divine but ancient principles, which have brought us a miraculous regeneration. Since publication of "Alcoholics Anonymous" in 1939 we have grown from 100 to 24,000 members. Seven years have passed; seven years, of vast experience with our next greatest undertaking -- the problem of living and working together. This is today our main concern. If we can succeed in this adventure -- and keep succeeding -- then, and only then, will our future be secure.

Since personal calamity holds us in bondage no more, our most challenging concern has become the future of Alcoholics Anonymous; how to preserve among us AAs such a powerful unity that neither weakness of persons nor the strain and strife of these troubled times can harm our common cause. We know that Alcoholics Anonymous must continue to live. Else, save few exceptions, we and our fellow alcoholics throughout the world will surely resume the hopeless journey to oblivion.

Almost any AA can tell you what our group problems are. Fundamentally they have to do with our relations, one with the other, and with the world outside. They involve relations of the AA to the group, the relation of the group to Alcoholics Anonymous as a whole, and the place of Alcoholics Anonymous in that troubled sea called modern society, where all of humankind must presently shipwreck or find haven. Terribly relevant is the problem of our basic structure and our attitude toward those ever pressing questions of leadership, money, and authority. The future way well depend on how we feel and act about things that are controversial and how we regard our public relations. Our final destiny will surely hang upon what we presently decide to do with these danger-fraught issues!

Now comes the crux of our discussion. It is this: Have we yet acquired sufficient experience to state clear-cut policies on these, our chief concerns? Can we now declare general principles which could grow into vital Traditions -- Traditions sustained in the heart of each AA by his own deep conviction and by the common consent of his fellows? That is the question. Though full answers to all our perplexities may never be found, I'm sure we have come at least to a vantage point whence we can discern the main outlines of a body of Tradition; which, God willing, can stand as an effective guard against all the ravages of time and circumstance.

Acting upon the persistent urge of old AA friends, and upon the conviction that general agreement and consent between our members is now possible, I shall venture to place in words these suggestions for an Alcoholics Anonymous Tradition of Relations -- Twelve Points to Assure Our Future.

Our AA experience has taught us that:

1. Each member of Alcoholics Anonymous is but a small part of a great whole. AA must continue to live or most of us will surely die. Hence our common welfare comes first. But individual welfare follows close afterward.

2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority -- a loving God as he may express himself in our group conscience.
3. Our membership ought to include all who suffer alcoholism. Hence we may refuse none who wish to recover. Nor ought AA membership ever depend upon money or conformity. Any two or three alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an AA group.
4. With respect to its own affairs, each AA group should be responsible to no other authority than its own conscience. But when its plans concern the welfare of neighboring groups also, those groups ought to be consulted. And no group, regional committee, or individual should ever take any action that might greatly affect AA as a whole without conferring with the trustees of the Alcoholic Foundation [now the General Service Board]. On such issues our common welfare is paramount.
5. Each Alcoholics Anonymous group ought to be a spiritual entity having but one primary purpose -- that of carrying its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.
6. Problems of money, property and authority may easily divert us from our primary spiritual aim. We think, therefore, that any considerable property of genuine use to AA should be separately incorporated and managed, thus dividing the material from the spiritual. An AA group, as such, should never go into business. Secondary aids to AA such as clubs or hospitals which require much property or administration, ought to be so set apart that, if necessary, they can be freely discarded by the groups. The management of these special facilities should be the sole responsibility of those people, whether AAs or not, who financially support the. For our clubs, we prefer AA managers. But hospitals, as well as other places of recuperation, ought to be well outside AA -- and medically supervised. An AA group may cooperate with anyone, but should bind itself to no one.
7. The AA groups themselves ought to be fully supported by the voluntary contributions of their own members. We think that each group should soon achieve this ideal; that any public solicitation of funds using the name of Alcoholics Anonymous is highly dangerous; that acceptance of large gifts from any source or of contributions carrying any obligation whatever is usually unwise. Then, too, we view with much concern those AA treasuries which continue, beyond prudent reserves, to accumulate funds for no stated AA purpose. Experience has often warned us that nothing can so surely destroy our spiritual heritage as futile disputes over property, money, and authority.
8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever non professional. We define professionalism as the occupation of counseling alcoholics for fee or hire. But we may employ alcoholics where they are going to perform those full-time services for which we might otherwise have to engage nonalcoholics. Such special services may be well recompensed. But personal Twelfth Step work is never to be paid for.
9. Each AA group needs the least possible organization. Rotating leadership is usually the best. The small group may elect its secretary, the larger group its rotating committee, and the groups of a large metropolitan area their central committee, which often employs a full time secretary. The trustees of the Alcoholic Foundation are, in effect, our general service committee. They are the custodians of our AA Tradition and the receivers of voluntary AA contributions by which they maintain AA general Headquarters and our general secretary at New York. They are authorized by the groups to handle our overall public relations and they guarantee the integrity of our principal publication, the AA Grapevine. All such representatives are to be guided in the spirit of service, for true leaders in AA are but trusted and experienced servants of the whole. They derive no real authority from their titles, Universal respect is the key to their usefulness.
10. No AA group or members should ever, in such a way as to implicate AA, express any opinion

on outside controversial issues -- particularly those of politics, alcohol reform or sectarian religion. The Alcoholics Anonymous groups oppose no one. Concerning such matters they can express no views whatever.

11. Our relations with the outside world should be characterized by modesty and anonymity. We think AA ought to avoid sensational advertising. Our public relations should be guided by the principle of attraction rather than promotion. There is never need to praise ourselves. We feel it better to let our friends recommend us.

12. And finally, we of Alcoholics Anonymous believe that the principle of anonymity has an immense spiritual significance. It reminds us that we are to place principles before personalities; that we are actually to practice a truly humble modesty. This to the end that our great blessings may never spoil us; that we shall forever live in thankful contemplation of him who presides over us all.

May it be urged that while these principles have been stated in rather positive language they are still only suggestions for our future. We of Alcoholics Anonymous have never enthusiastically responded to any assumption of personal authority. Perhaps it is well for AA that this is true. So I offer these suggestions neither as one man's dictum nor as a creed of any kind, but rather as a first attempt to portray that group ideal toward which we have assuredly been led by a Higher Power these ten years past.

P.S. To help free discussion I would like to amplify the Twelve Points of Tradition in future Grapevine pieces.

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