

GROUP INVENTORY: HOW ARE WE DOING?

The Twelve Steps point the way to an ever richer personal sobriety. They are intended to be practiced principally by individuals, each in his own way, but they should also have a bearing on group thought and action. Should we not "practice these principles in all our (group) affairs?"

The Twelve Traditions, while they have certain implications for the individual apply with special emphasis to the group and to AA as a whole. Five of them make specific reference to the group. They constitute a charter that enumerates objectives, powers, and restrictions. Their proper application is essential to the success and growth of AA and indirectly of the alcoholic who still suffers.

Like an individual, a group has abilities and limitations: an overall attitude that may or may not be healthy; and a drive that may be strong or wavering. A group can become smug and lazy or can increase in vigor and spirit. It can succeed, do a so-so job, or fail, as some have.

To fulfill its responsibility and achieve success commensurate with the sum total of its members' talents, a group should practice those Steps and apply those Traditions which are obvious guides to group endeavor. For example, just as periodic inventory is essential to personal growth, so also is group inventory vital to maximal group success.

Periodically a group should ask itself, perhaps in a closed meeting, "How are we doing?" The question can be rephrased in many ways. Here are a few variations. Each group can doubtless add to the list.

1. (a) Are we experiencing a normal growth for a group our size and for the population density of our area?

(b) Are we getting a cross section of our population, male and female, or are we getting men only? Does our membership consist solely of the upper crust to the complete neglect of those on the other side of the tracks? Or, are we failing to reach a fair share of those in the higher income brackets?

(c) The Eleventh Tradition states that, "our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion..." Do we construe that to mean that we are relieved of all active effort? That, therefore, there is no meaning to the Fifth Tradition which declares without qualification, "Each group has but one primary purpose--to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers." Have we ever reflected on the meaning of the words "to carry"? Do they mean merely to sit back and wait for the telephone to ring? Is that the way Bill and Dr. Bob got the first hundred?

(d) Do we have the best meeting place available, taking into account all relevant factors? Or is it the same as when our group was started, a bit on the crummy side with little appeal for new prospects? Do we continue it because of necessity, deliberate choice, or through sheer inertial with no one undertaking the task of finding something better?

(e) Do we maintain an adequate supply of literature and do we keep it on a table near the door where members and visitors can see it both on arriving and leaving? Or do we keep it on a table in the front of the room even though we know that only a minority will come forward to browse through it?

Just what have we done about carrying the message?

2. (a) How effective is our sponsorship system? Do our sponsors have a real sense of responsibility and unending perseverance? Do we see that each new member has a sponsor, or at least someone responsible for getting him to a meeting during that early period when he so easily may have a change of heart? Or do we say, "He knows where we are. If he wants is, he can come and get it"?

Do we ever analyze the reason for failure in our sponsorship efforts? Of do we always excuse ourselves by saying, "He isn't ready for it"?

How can we be so sure he was not ready for it? Can we be certain that some other sponsor might not have succeeded? If that be the case, who is really responsible for the failure? Did we really do our best?

(b) Without our knowing it, could a scared newcomer drop into one of our open meeting and slip out again, perhaps never to return? Do we make a point of visiting with newer members and strangers at the meetings or do we tend to hang together in impenetrable cliques?

3. (a) Do we lend support in proportion to our means to our intergroup office and to the Foundation [now the AA General Service Office]?

Intergroup and [GSO] do our Twelve Step work on a national and international basis, respectively. Do we expect them to do this broader type of Twelve Step work for us but withhold our enthusiastic cooperation and support?

(b) Have we made a sustained effort to interest everyone in subscribing to the Grapevine? Our international journal is the clearing house for ideas. Thoughts arising in Los Angeles, Dallas or London are channeled to every member. It would be interesting to compare the success of various groups with Grapevine circulation, not that the Grapevine produced the success, but that subscriptions may be evidence of vigor and activity which result in success.

(c) Do we have men or women in the group who by education and experience are capable of writing Grapevine articles of high quality, and if so do we encourage them to produce such articles so that the group can make some creative contribution to AA as a whole? Or do we just "let George do it"?

4. (a) Do we select our officers with care? Or do we haphazardly bring the matter up in a meeting and if someone nominates Joe Doakes the nominations are closed and Joe, regardless of his lack of qualifications, becomes the goat -- or does the group and the alcoholics who still suffer? Should a nominating committee of responsible and experienced members give serious thought to the selection of the best possible slate of officers and present it to the group for its consideration?

Do we regard an officership as a chore to unload on some unfortunate member not present in the election, or as an honor, challenge, and a unique opportunity to do Twelve Step work of a high order?

Here are four questions (with subdivisions, perhaps), but should not each group raise them from time to time? There are numerous others which can be asked by any group that wishes to take an inventory that is both searching and fearless. It would be interesting to devote a closed meeting to a review of the Steps and the Traditions to see how each of them applied to the group.

Groups in different stages of development will, of course, ask different questions. Perhaps in rare instances a group of long standing, like some individuals, may have to start at the beginning ... with the First Step ... admit that our group life has become unmanageable. Then what? Naturally, the Second Step.