

A UNITED MESSAGE OF RECOVERY

The long form of Tradition One states, in part, that "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 must come first." We are then given eleven other Traditions that show us what we must do in order to accomplish the goal of unity allowing recovery. We are shown that our membership is open to all who suffer from alcoholism--the only requirement is a desire to stop drinking. Another Tradition tells us that we have but one purpose--to carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers. Other Traditions relate the things we need to watch for so we don't get diverted from that primary purpose--problems of money, property, prestige, authority, controversy, sensational advertising, and personalities. All these guidelines come to us from our founders and past members who experienced firsthand the consequences of what happens when these principles are not respected--the chaos, heartbreak, and confusion that results when the suggestions are not followed.

When Bill wrote "Problems Other Than Alcohol" in 1958, he made clear our singleness of purpose: "Sobriety--freedom from alcohol--through the teaching and practice of the Twelve Steps is the sole purpose of an AA group. Groups have repeatedly tried other activities and they have always failed. It has also been learned that there is no possible way to make non-alcoholics into AA members. We have to confine our membership to alcoholics and we have to confine our AA groups to a single purpose. If we don't stick to these principles, we shall almost surely collapse. And if we collapse, we cannot help anyone."

Our singleness of purpose has really been put to the test with the growth of treatment facilities which lump all addictive disorders together, with the subsequent visits of large numbers of treatment graduates to our groups, and with the mandatory sentencing of drunk driving offenders to AA meetings. Meanwhile, our own AA members aren't always aware of our Traditions.

Many areas have designed plans to meet these situations. "Information" meetings have become a good workable solution. Information meetings are informal discussions and sharing about what AA is: what it does and does not do. These information meetings have helped keep our regular AA meetings tied to AA's singleness of purpose and to the principles of our other Traditions.

A group conscience will get exactly what it demands, no more or no less. Our experience today still bears out the experience of our founders. Some groups, where the alcoholics became outnumbered and the primary purpose was lost in problems other than alcohol, have had to close their doors.

What can we do about singleness of purpose? What is our responsibility to AA? What can I do individually? What about my group? How do we carry a united message of recovery from alcoholism--the only message we are given to carry?

Following are some solutions many groups have found to work.

1. Read one or more of the following at the beginning of an AA meeting: the Preamble of Alcoholics Anonymous, the Twelve Traditions, or the blue primary purpose card. All state our primary purpose. The primary purpose card was born out of the frustration of members needing something concrete to reflect the overall consciousness of Alcoholics Anonymous. It is a service piece and available upon request from GSO.

THIS IS A CLOSED MEETING OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

This is a closed meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous. In support of A.A.'s singleness of purpose, attendance at closed meetings is limited to persons who have a desire to stop drinking. If you think you have a problem with alcohol, you are welcome to attend this meeting. We ask that when discussing our problems, we confine ourselves to those problems as they relate to alcoholism.

(The 1987 General Service Conference made this available as an A.A. service piece for the groups who wish to use it.)

This is an open meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous. We are glad you are here - especially newcomers. In keeping with our singleness of purpose and our Third Tradition which states that "The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking," we ask that all who participate confine their discussion to their problems with alcohol.

(The 1987 General Service Conference made this available as an A.A. service piece for the groups who wish to use it.)

2. Try to have a strong chairperson or discussion leaders who establish and adhere to a policy of how to respond to problems other than alcohol.
3. Have information available on other Twelve-Step programs--names and telephone numbers to contact.

4. Hold closed discussion meetings--for alcoholics only. Most agree it is better to avoid embarrassing an individual publicly and to speak to him or her privately either before or after the meeting, remembering that a spirit of understanding should accompany firmness.
5. Keep lines of communication open with court officials, treatment facilities, and employee assistance programs, always informing them what AA can and cannot do. Strong PI and CPC committees and temporary sponsorship programs are helpful.
6. At workshops and meetings, the emphasis should be on our entire program--recovery, unity, and service. Reading of Conference-approved literature is helpful.
7. Stress home group membership. The home group is where we have a sense of belonging and a growing knowledge of how the program works--and where the understanding of service begins.
8. A group that periodically inventories itself is generally a group that reflects strong singleness of purpose.
9. Carry the message of singleness of purpose through your sponsorship.
10. Take on the responsibility of being informed as to what our Traditions are all about. The story is told in our literature. Read it. Become a responsible sober member. Be part of the solution, not part of the problem.
11. Be aware of the following positions of other Twelve-Step programs on their own singleness of purpose. These are as strong as those of Alcoholics Anonymous:

From the trustees of Narcotics Anonymous: "One of AA's greatest strengths is its single-minded focus on one thing only: By limiting its primary purpose to carrying the message to alcoholics, avoiding all other activities, AA has done that supremely well--and they have paved the way for Narcotics Anonymous by freely giving us their Steps. The simple fact is that both Fellowships have a Sixth Tradition for a purpose--to keep from being diverted from our primary purpose. Each Twelve Step Fellowship must stand alone, unaffiliated with everything else. We each have a separate unique primary purpose."

From the trustees of Cocaine Anonymous: "We at CA look for guidance from AA and learn from its experience. As we look to AA for guidance, we feel separate because each Fellowship has a unique primary purpose. Both of us have an enormous amount of work to do and each time someone recovers, we help each other."

From the Fellowship of Al-Anon: Al-Anon is so focused on its primary purpose that members cannot serve as a GR (comparable to our GSR) or work higher in the service structure if they are members of another twelve-step fellowship.

In AA Comes of Age, we find this powerful statement: "We think we should do one thing well rather than many things to which we are not called. Our society gathers in unity around this concept. The very life of our fellowship requires its preservation. Together we have found a substantial remedy for a terrible malady. As a fellowship we know we must not be diverted. It is our experience as alcoholics that makes us of unique value on our sector of the total alcoholic front. We can approach sufferers as no one else can. Therefore, the strongest kind of moral and ethical compulsion is upon us to do this and nothing more. We shall direct our energies where they count most. Most emphatically, then, AA has but one single purpose: To carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers. This is our basic objective, our real reason for existence."

It's our only reason for existence.

AA Grapevine, May 1994