

INPUT TO SELECT COMMITTEE

HISTORICAL DATA:

Inclusion of this material is not only interesting but necessary to understanding the application of our principles to our structure. The current form of the "GUIDE" unfortunately leaves some important information out.

Comparisons to AA are inevitable and valid. When we adapted the Steps and Traditions we had no need for an elaborate structure; besides, theirs was still evolving. It didn't stabilize until the early Sixties. Our efforts at a world service structure didn't really begin until the Seventies, and possibly our greatest weakness in those early efforts was our failure to adapt AA's Twelve Concepts to our purposes. The concepts of right of decision, right of participation, right of appeal, leadership and others are particularly applicable to our needs.

When we decided, presumably for the sake of distinct terminology, to use the term "group" service representative instead of "general" service representative, we set the stage for a complete ignorance of the concept of general service which we are only now beginning to correct. We also gave credence to the seemingly logical progression of "Only GSR's represent a 'group conscience'; therefore only GSR's should vote; therefore only ASR's should vote; therefore only RSR's should vote." This has been one of our greatest sources of controversy and a tremendous hindrance to our understanding the application of our Traditions to our structure.

When we decided that an assembly of GSR's in NA would be too "chaotic", we were saying in effect that somehow we couldn't work together as well as AA does in that setting. The anecdotal evidence for this was compelling at the time, but are we now to base supposedly spiritual guidelines on expected immaturity and irresponsibility in our GSR's?

Removing the vote of any elected member of our service units is not a step to be taken lightly. When we removed the votes of the GSR's at the region we further separated them from our world service branches, creating the potential for disunity. Our "fund flow" idea, while seemingly logical, served to separate the groups even more. This separation does not exist in AA where world services depend directly on the groups for contributions, which their budgeting policy calls for amounting to about half of their entire budget for world services. This of course gives the groups a direct, practical authority over world services -- holding the purse strings. In NA we depend on markup on sales for over 90% of our budget.

It is unclear where or why the "only GSR's vote" idea took root. Again, all we have is anecdotal evidence, however emotionally compelling, of irresponsible trusted servants at an area or regional level voting as a block and outnumbering the GSR's. While we need a mechanism to protect the groups' right to issue flat directives to service boards or committees they create, we don't need to ignore spirituality or sound administrative practices because we fear disease. After all, we've got a loving God in charge here, no less than in AA, who will provide us with the necessary leaders and workers to get the job done.

We need some historical explanation for the contradiction of our failure to apply the concepts of participation and decision at the area and regional levels while continuing to use them (thank God) at the world level.

There is no mention of the "Green" service manual. The changes in wording in the first thirteen or fourteen pages didn't seem significant at the time; at least not as compared to the radical changes proposed for world services. However, this service manual was designed out of whole cloth, with the WS changes the point of the whole work. Some of us felt the color green signified bile, and the WS changes were rejected by the WSC, but the bile remains -- rooted in ignorance or rejection of the concepts of participation and decision.

Some mention of the fact that some of the early literature and policy committees were largely self-appointed, with almost no elective base in group conscience, ought to be made. These committees were the source of some of our greatest controversy and disunity.

As we try to re-invent the wheel according to our experience, we need to carefully examine that experience in accordance with our Tenth Step. Many changes that seemed to be a good, or at least acceptable, idea at the time have turned out to have disruptive long-range effects. We ought to note this in our historical material in the "GUIDE".

CONCEPTUAL PROBLEMS:

As previously mentioned, terminology changes have in some cases created misunderstanding and controversy that out weigh the benefits of distinct terminology. In addition to eliminating the concept of general service from the GSR's title we eliminated the concept of delegation of authority from the RSR's title. Also, AA's idea of a "District Committee Member" (having a vote, naturally, as a member of an "area" committee), contributed to their understanding of how group conscience is expressed in their service structure. Using the word "representative" for our equivalents (ASR's) distorts the understanding that those elected by GSR's or ASR's (or RSR's) are also representatives of our group conscience. Substituting "RSR" for "Delegate" was a great loss for us.

This is not necessarily suggesting a change in titles now, only an observation that many of our attempts to be "different" need very careful, mature consideration. Also, because of misunderstandings fostered by terminology, we need to apply extra effort to overcome these problems, through thorough exposition of the missing concepts, at every level of service.

Chapter Two probably has more contradictory material in it than any other chapter, along with leaving a few questions unanswered. The following references to paragraphs are counted from the first paragraph or partial paragraph at the top of the page (or section, where noted).

Ch 2, p 14, ¶2, last sentence: Please omit this sentence, or clarify that it is only talking about voting at the group level. It could be misconstrued to deny participation at other levels.

¶3 adds to the confusion and controversy. While it is obviously contrary to our principles for a member or group of members to try to control the "group conscience" by going from group to group, it may also be contrary to Tradition to try to restrict someone from joining a group simply because they belong to another group, or to restrict their participation in that group by suggesting that they don't vote.

¶3, 2nd sentence: change "will" to "may"

¶3, 3rd, 4th, 5th sentences: These sentences are currently being used to justify denying participation (voting) to trusted servants not in the misunderstood "representative" category (GSR, ASR, RSR). The reasoning behind these sentences, if the intent is to avoid attempts at manipulation of "group conscience", again seems to be based in fear of our disease rather than faith in our recovery, and faith in the One who presides over us all. In trying to eliminate the hangnail we are cutting off our hand. This solution is worse than the problem, which is again based largely on anecdotal evidence of isolated instances of attempts at manipulation. The language of these sentences is being interpreted in a way that leads to our being more open to manipulation. It is much easier to manipulate a largely uninformed, minimally experienced group through emotionalism, innuendo, and misinformation; that's the situation we face if we remove the votes of our most experienced members. Please omit these sentences; if you believe a real problem exists, write something more in line with our principles than with the largely repudiated, close-minded, disunifying "purist" philosophy of some of our more zealous, misguided members. Most of that disruptive influence was generated by our early failure to explain important concepts of service.

P 15, ¶4, last two sentences: Omit or alter to avoid fabricating reasons to deny participation. In the example given, the perceived problem would actually be lessened if it occurred in an ASC that understood the value of the broader-based group conscience available through allowing their elected trusted servants to participate by voting.

The idea of "disproportionate influence" is a red herring based on the concept of "equity", which only occurs at the individual group level. As soon as the group is in a position of having one vote, as at an ASC, the individual member's "equity" is lost in the differences in size of the groups. Further, unless the group's philosophy is one of close-minded, rigid instruction of the GSR, the GSR may vote contrary to the group's opinion if he/she gets information that warrants such a vote.

Trying to legislate spirituality through some rigid mathematical voting formula would be laughable, if it weren't so tragic that a supposedly spiritual fellowship lacks the faith in God and our own principles to give up such a futile effort.

P 15, ¶5: We cannot dictate to an NA group that they cannot sponsor a Beginners' Discussion, Basic Text, Step and Tradition, or any other kind of meeting within the Traditions, if they choose to sponsor one of these in addition to their regular meeting. Some groups also sponsor H&I meetings. Once again our fear is leading us to a restrictive solution that is contrary to our spiritual principles.

P 16, ¶4: More restriction based on rigidity. If members of the Select Committee are really so fearful and adamant about this issue, which is kind of a disturbing thought, there are better ways to express it. There is no government or enforcement agency within NA (thank God) anyway, so realistically members and groups are free to interpret our Traditions as they choose, guided by their conscience. Of course, we hope they will also be guided by our collective experience and the experience of members who are living our Steps and Traditions. The key to uninformed or misguided groups choosing to conform is attraction, not dictation.

Another example of this: while it is almost always a bad idea for a group (or area or region) to rigidly, narrowly instruct their representatives how to vote on particular issues, thus thwarting the ability of a loving God to express Himself through votes based on the widest possible discussion and broadest base of information, we do not dictate to groups (or areas or regions) that they cannot instruct their representatives. We should merely point out the problem and suggest the solution (which is trust God, our principles, and our trusted servants).

P 17, ¶2 and 3: The word "participation" is used to describe the format of a meeting known as a "discussion" meeting in many parts of the country, including several where the concept of participation as it applies to voting in service meetings is largely unknown. Better to use the word "discussion" instead, or at least in addition to "participation".

P 18, ¶2, 6th sentence ("To use ...addicts."): We will never be able to completely eliminate some members' practice of taking something in our literature out of context and twisting it to some end contrary to our principles. However, it should be noted that some particularly closed-minded folks are interpreting this sentence to mean that NA members who read outside literature are somehow acting contrary to our principles, or are somehow less than "real" or "good" NA members.

Ch 2, P 18, ¶3, 6th sentence "We cannot be misled...stake.": This sentence makes me uncomfortable, perhaps because of some negative experience with being manipulated by flattery. Is this sentence necessary? Can the word "flattery" be given a more positive connotation?

P 19, top, 1st complete sentence: delete "can and do find", insert "have found"; delete "the", insert "AA's"; delete period, insert comma; add "as we did. Just as AA groups direct people with drug problems other than alcohol to us, we can do likewise for people with problems other than drug addiction, without contradicting our Sixth Tradition."

After all, our use of the Steps, Traditions, sponsorship, etc., amounts to an implied endorsement of these concepts, without diverting us from our primary purpose.

This would go a long way toward clarifying our special relationship with AA and other anonymous twelve step fellowships, and help to reduce the fear and hostility generated by misunderstanding of our history and the concept of cooperation, not affiliation.

P 19, MEETING LOCATIONS: This is a perfect place to address the issue of making our message available to those with additional needs. Wheelchair accessibility is a great spiritual plus for a meeting site. The possibility of some groups being able to afford interpreters for the deaf could be inserted. If not here, let's show our concern by addressing these issues somewhere in this chapter, and perhaps others.

P 20, ¶2, last sentence "Regardless...only.": Delete this very questionable idea. For instance, if the pastor of a church, or one of its trustees, visit a group meeting in their church wishing to express their congratulations or support, it would certainly contradict our principles to be so rigid as to shut them up. We should discourage rigidity, fear, narrowness, hostility, and resentment of society and its institutions wherever possible.

Comparative note: At AA's 20th Anniversary Convention in 1955, two clergymen and a psychiatrist were among the featured speakers. They were great friends of AA, as were many other non-alcoholics, and AA greatly benefited from these relationships.

Our unity and recovery are enhanced by a cooperative rather than competitive relationship with non-NA friends in our society. Addiction narrows our experience until what remains can scarcely be called life; recovery should broaden our world and relationships. As long as we adhere to the spirit of our Traditions we have nothing to fear -- all will be well.

At WCNA 13 in New York some controversy was generated around featuring Father Dan Egan as a spiritual speaker. This great friend of ours made it very clear in his beautiful message that he was not a member and that he deeply regretted this. His message contained inspiring historical

material and heartfelt admiration for our Steps and Traditions. Despite his obvious dedication to his faith, the "religious" content of his talk was almost nil, as he expressed himself in terms compatible with the universal spiritual principles embodied in the Steps and Traditions. The controversy over his talk was saddening; indicative of closed-mindedness, fear and resentment of religion or anything else outside NA, and other decidedly unspiritual principles.

The omission in our literature, especially service materials, of the idea of being friendly with our friends outside NA, has the effect of promoting the natural tendency of our disease to isolate us. Again, we have nothing to fear if we keep to our Traditions, which were certainly not designed to isolate our Fellowship.

A closed, rigid interpretation of Tradition is almost always wrong. Anything that feeds aspects of our disease rather than the values of our recovery should be eliminated.

It is interesting to note that many of the members upset by Fr. Egan's talk were also upset by Jimmy K.'s talk. This was part of the general anti-oldtimer, anti-California attitude prevalent among the "purist" faction. While we need to listen carefully to these members in accordance with the concept of leadership implied in the Second Tradition, we ought to dispel some of their more misguided notions. Most of these ideas grew out of the lack of information on concepts of service and our Traditions, and through inertia we now have some long-standing MISinterpretations of our principles. Merely providing the correct information may not be enough to dispel these ideas, which some members cling to as dogma, with almost fanatical religious zeal.

One of the most important messages in "spiritual, not religious" is that NA must never become a religion, with attendant dogma, enforcement of conformity, and the possibility of isolating, close-minded, exclusionary fanaticism through misinterpretation of our basic principles.

Ch 2, P 21, ¶2: Is an additional requirement for membership in NA that one not be institutionalized? Do they have any voice in the development of group conscience, in line with the idea of "equity"? Should the H&I Chair have a vote at the area level to "represent" these members, if they are members? Would this foster the idea that only groups have a conscience, an idea which denies the concept of participation? This is a sticky issue, which is easily resolved through application of the concept of participation, based in our First, Second, and Fourth Traditions.

P 25, GROUP SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE (GSR): Again raises the terminology problem, which fostered the misunderstanding of group conscience and denial of the concept of participation. Material on the delegation of responsibility and authority needs to be included, as well as how a GSR goes about carrying the conscience -- or views and opinions -- of their group. The reasons why it is almost always a bad idea to rigidly instruct a GSR how to vote on particular issues should be given some exposition here.

Ch 2, P 26, ¶2: Additional responsibilities -- since the GSR's duties include actions which can affect other groups or NA as a whole, thorough understanding of our principles is required, including the ability to see beyond the sometimes narrow opinions of the group. GSR's are sometimes called on as a source of guidance on the Traditions. They also need a thorough understanding of our structure and concepts of service. Leadership is an important issue here, and the ability to listen carefully. As the primary communication link between the group and the rest of NA, a GSR needs good communications skills. (In those areas/regions that don't trust their ASR/RSR to vote in the interest of our common welfare; that think that "group conscience" only happens at groups (an idea that has "group conscience" thwarted at the regional level by having only areas vote, with different numbers of groups in each area) the GSR's job necessarily includes a thorough background in and understanding of issues facing us in the WSC Agenda Report. This also assumes that the group doesn't trust their GSR to vote for them at the area level; that issues not thoroughly discussed and voted on at the group level are not group conscience decisions. Once again these ideas are natural out-growths of our disease and our failure in the Seventies to include adequate historical background and the foundations of our spiritual principles and concepts of service in our early service materials.)

GSR's should seek accurate information; squelch rumors; promote unity, trust, respect and other spiritual principles especially as they apply to service.

GSR's, like any other trusted servant, are expected to provide leadership as defined by our principles, and this concept needs considerable exposition in our "GUIDE". This concept cannot be exercised, of course, when our trusted servants are reduced to merely clerical, delivery, or messenger roles; few qualifications of good judgment, experience, understanding, spirituality or anything else are necessary for a servant if the groups are considered experts on all matters which come before them. Docile, unquestioning order-takers without vision are easy to find; it is more difficult to find qualified leaders who have a deep understanding of our principles.

P 29, ¶2, 2nd sentence "Frequently...level": Insert "to" after "prior". Omit "work...represented", insert "be well informed of work".

P 29, ¶2, last sentence "This...committee.": Omit "helps...committee", insert "provides the opportunity for members to express their views on service issues, and to vote on those which the group believes are best handled at the group level."

These two sentences in their present form can be construed to imply that rigid instruction of the GSR is necessary, which is false and a bad idea, limiting our ability to develop a true group conscience based on broad information and deep understanding. Rigid instruction isolates the groups from each other and denies the basic NA principles of sharing, "more will be revealed", seeking experienced guidance from the Fellowship as a whole, trust, responsibility, respect, etc.

Ch 2, P 29, ¶3, 2nd sentence (When...meetings.): Very clumsy; delete, insert "The group should have the ability to hold special meetings whenever problems arise, such as Tradition problems or difficulties related to the conduct of the meeting, the meeting place or unusual needs." Note: Many problems can be resolved without calling a business meeting. Responsible trusted servants and other experienced members can be a great benefit to us by eliminating the need to call a business or "group conscience" meeting every time someone thinks there's a problem. Calling too many business meetings turns off many members, especially in those areas where the groups are taught that they must discuss and vote on every issue at the area, regional, and world levels. Too many and/or too long business meetings are unattractive and drive many people away from getting involved, limiting attendance at these so-called "group conscience" meetings to those either very dedicated, very obsessive, or very much into trying to control the group, area, region, or whole Fellowship.

The steering committee concept is very useful for dealing with many problems that arise between regularly scheduled group business meetings, and should be expanded in this chapter.

¶4, 2nd sentence (Unfortunately...servants): Correct the grammar

P 30, top: It is usually suggested that all funds above a prudent reserve be donated to the next level of service. Also, the need for a three month reserve at the group level is questionable -- what does the Treasurer's Handbook say?

P 30, ¶4 under GENERAL SUGGESTIONS, 1st sentence ("Some...time."): Bad syntax and grammar, please revise

Overall, Chapter Two in its present form potentiates all the difficulties we set ourselves up for by our early omissions in developing a service structure for Narcotics Anonymous. Classical Greek philosophers were aware that those who participate in decisions feel more responsible to and for those decisions, and behave accordingly. This basic principle is a fact of human endeavor, and is born out in modern studies of philosophy, sociology, business administration, religious studies, political science, psychology, and other disciplines. For NA to ignore this, and the experience of our predecessors in their Twelve Concepts for World Service, is to possibly set the stage for our demise as a Fellowship through disunity, lack of leadership, and misapplication of our Twelve Traditions.