

SOUTHWEST REGIONAL FORUM

FINAL REPORT

**September 29-
October 1, 2023**

**LAST NAMES OF CLASS A (NONALCOHOLIC) TRUSTEES
AND NONALCOHOLIC EMPLOYEES ONLY APPEAR IN THIS REPORT**

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INTRODUCTION

The 2023 Southwest Regional Forum was held on September 29-October 1, 2023. Registration for the Forum was **246**. This included **163** members attending their very first Forum.

Dear A.A. Friends,

Please mark your calendar for the upcoming 2024 Regional Forums:

2024

Western Canada Regional Forum: May 10-12, Prestige Vernon Lodge, Vernon, B.C., Canada

Pacific Regional Forum: July 12-14, Westgate Resort & Casino, Las Vegas, Nevada

Eastern Canada Regional Forum: August 23-25, Delta Hotels by Marriott, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Southeast Regional Forum: December 6-8, Golden Nugget, Biloxi, Mississippi

UNANSWERED ASK-IT BASKET QUESTIONS

Q. When will the service piece "Bridging the Gap" for professionals be available? It seems like BTG is always placed on the back burner.

A. We understand that it might seem like some items get put on "the back burner." While it is true that sometimes there are more projects in the pipeline than can be accomplished in a given year (because both budgets and staff time are limited) in this case, the Bridging the Gap for Professionals draft has been given thoughtful consideration by both the trustees' committee and the Conference committee. The results of recent discussions included the following:

In July 2023 the trustees' CPC/TA Committee Bridging the Gap pamphlet for professionals: The committee agreed to table and ask Bridging the Gap committee chairs what they need before moving forward with creating a service piece for professionals.

In summer 2023, a GSO staff member asked for sharing from trusted servants on this topic. She received very few responses (the survey went out as part of an Activity Update to all Delegates, Treatment Chairs and chairs of BTG and H&I committees that are listed with GSO). She also attended the 2023 BTG Workshop Weekend and asked attendees to also consider responding to the survey. Of approximately 80 attendees, only three completed the survey.

The revised pamphlet "Bridging the Gap" (P-49) is on the agenda for the 74th General Service Conference for review.

Q. I am hearing rumors of unaccounted money at GSO. Can we get an amount, and an explanation?

A. Yes, there was some confusion on the proper disposition of funds related to the Insurance Recovery from the cancelled 2020 International Convention.

All delegates in June 2023 received a communication addressing this topic. Please reach out to your delegate or regionalforums@aa.org for this communication.

It is also noteworthy that the financial audit for 2022 was "clean" and though there were a few recommendations to further enhance financial procedures, there were no concerns raised with respect to Internal controls related to Finance or IT.

Q. From the AAWS board presentation, is the quarterly internal audit report once approved then shared with the GSB and/or the Fellowship or is it a confidential document?

A. With respect to the quarterly financial statements, these will be widely distributed on an ongoing basis after review and acceptance by the Board(s).

Q. As members we are not properly informed about the financial status of A.A. If we are not informed, then how are we to have an informed group conscience to then inform the Conference about how to spend money? We would love to help.

A. Thank you for the feedback. Communication is truly the hardest part of working the upside-down triangle. The Trustees' Finance and Budgetary Committee is working diligently to refine the quarterly financial reporting package and also looking at more modalities to share (Box 459, GSO Quarterly, etc.). We have nothing to hide and know the Fellowship has also provided the funding needed to support our general services.

Q. What is the cost to the Fellowship for World Service Delegates in 2024?

A. Thank you for your inquiry. The budget for the upcoming 28th World Service Meeting (WSM) is currently undergoing revisions and adjustments. We anticipate that a preliminary budget will be approved after the January General Service Board weekend. However, due to the unpredictable nature of international delegates' travel, including potential issues with visas to enter the U.S., we cannot determine the exact attendance and associated travel expenses at this time.

It's worth noting that post-pandemic hotel and travel costs have changed since the last in-person WSM in New York in 2016. Our team is diligently working to manage the AA dollar prudently, implementing measures such as hotel room sharing and restricting meals and reservations exclusively for WSM delegates.

The World Service Meeting Policy, Admissions and Finance Committee reviews WSM finances carefully. At the last WSM committee proposed a delegate fee increase to \$2,000 for the 28th WSM and that GSO U.S./Canada communicate with countries about the relationship between WSM expenses, delegate fees, and country contributions to the WSM to ensure maximum participation at the meeting.

For more information on the WSM, I suggest reading the [2022 WSM Final Report](#), that includes the WSM accounting history (page93) and the Policy, Admissions and Finance Committee report (pages 66-69) The report is available in the AA Website section "AA Around the World": www.aa.org/aa-around-the-world

Q. Who is writing the "Plain Language" book and why has it been such a secret?

A. The writer's identity has been protected to guard against undue influence and ensure the integrity of the translation process. The project has not been a secret however the distribution of the draft text has been restricted to help ensure the integrity of the translation process.

Q. Is the translation of the Big Book a done deal or is there an approval process?

A. The draft translation will be subject to approval by the General Service Conference.

Q. Do we still have the option of not doing it? Are we too invested to not go ahead with it?

A. Yes. The General Service Conference could decide to not proceed further with the project.

Q. Who's responsible for the FAQ on the AA.org website? Do they test it multiple times?

A. The Frequently Asked Question feature on aa.org was a content collaboration across multiple departments in the office (Staff, Archives, Finance, Publishing and Grapevine) based on the questions received most often in their communications with the Fellowship. The function on the website was developed by our web team in Communication Services alongside our developer, following industry standards and best practices for FAQ functions. The feature was tested over multiple weeks. We continue to review and refine functionality for this and the rest of aa.org on a regular basis. If anyone experiences issues or wishes to share feedback, please email websiteservices@aa.org.

Q. Is the Meeting Guide App part of A.A. or not? If not, why is it on our website and literature?

A. The Meeting Guide App is a digital property of AAWS. In the fall of 2018, AAWS, Inc. licensed Meeting Guide from the original developer; an updated version was released in summer of 2019.

For more on the history of how the App was acquired and evolved, there is a great article in this edition of Box 459 https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/en_box459_fall19_p1-2.pdf.

Here's more information on the App on our website <https://www.aa.org/meeting-guide-app>.

Q. What's the first month cash flow on Grapevine app?

A. Approximately \$28,000.

Q. Please explain the fancy accounting that reduced the GV Liability fund and removed money from the Reserve fund to cover app development resulting in a budgeted surplus of \$68,414 instead of a deficit of over one million dollars?

A. The \$500,000 from the GSB draw on the reserve fund went to App development (\$400K) and to help pay for services provided by Grapevine that we provide at no charge: Podcast, Instagram, YouTube (\$100 K).

The \$670K that Grapevine took from its Subscription Liability Fund is for normal operating expenses: printing, mailing, payroll, etc., to get us through our low print subscriptions in 2023 while app subscriptions build.

Q. Online and mobile app subscriptions decreased 27.6% in 2022. How are you figuring an increase of 1500 subscribers with the new app in 2023?

A. As of October 4, 2023, the Grapevine apps have 1832 new subscribers.

Q. Please discuss this year's engagement strategy for GV/LV and the app?

A. We are adding additional staff who going forward will work with Grapevine Chairs from 93 Areas to help Group Grapevine Chairs share information about the benefits of the apps. The paid staff will also be in the field attracting subscribers and content creators. They will vet app exclusive content and curate event schedules to make the apps more useful and attractive. We've strengthened our in-house digital publishing staff and are training other staff in digital content creation. Our attraction efforts include ads in Grapevine and La Viña

magazines, consistent mentions on the podcast, spots on Grapevine and La Viña News, banners on our websites, banners on the Daily Quote emails, Instagram posts, email blasts, YouTube Channel videos, extra efforts to attend forums, assemblies, conferences, roundups, etc. AAWS is helping us with an article in Box 459 and with an article on the Meeting Guide App news. The most important way to spread the word about the new apps is AA word of mouth, so we are asking all members we are in touch with to spread the news in their groups and to their friends.

Q. What strategies are in place to increase GV revenue?

A. We are making a strong push to attract members to subscribe to the Grapevine and La Viña apps, while also increasing subscription efforts for the magazines. We've increased book prices for additional revenue as well.

Q. What is the cost to the Fellowship to support La Viña?

A. In our recent reforecast, we project the 2023 cost will be \$842,412. We expect that number to come down as more members subscribe to the apps.

Q. How much will the Grapevine app cost to maintain?

A. That will depend on what improvements we ask the developers to make and what funds we have available from app subscriptions. The hourly cost is \$200.

Q. In our Area (38) there are districts that are upset about the changes to the Twelve and Twelve and the plain language book changing our original message and directions for recovery. There are also groups disappointed with the behavior of the GSB. Between these two issues, many groups have stopped sending the 7th Tradition money to the GSB. Are you receiving letters and tracking how many groups have stopped contributions.

A. We have received letters, but the Finance Department is not tracking how many letters we have received or how many groups say they have stopped contributing.

Q. What is the status of the 8th floor renovations, and do we need that space?

A. The status is that these renovations were completed in 2019/2020 and came in within the budget of \$967K. We currently have an ad hoc committee, Location Plus, that is working with a consultant to get an accurate and objective assessment of our space needs as well as complete an analysis of various location options throughout the United States as associated costs. We have fully utilized the space on both the 11th floor and the 8th floor, but there may be opportunities to reduce or find other savings and we will have a report at conference.

Q. CFO and Controller facilitates day-to-day business including vendor payments. Why are we behind on rent & vendor payments yet still doing employee appreciation days and traveling so much?

A. You are correct that the day-to-day operations are the responsibility of management. The decision to not seek a reserve draw and focus on collection of accounts receivable, payment prioritization, and cash flow management was initially made by the AAWS Board, and further

discussed by the GSB. Travel reductions occurred, and these included affiliate boards holding their meetings virtually to reduce travel. We did not discuss cancelling any employee appreciation.

Q. Are there any recommendations for online meetings on the Concepts? Are there any future workshops on the Concepts or in the upcoming year?

A. There are many of these available and many are posted on Area, District and Intergroup events listings. I am sure your Delegate or DCM can help you find one.

Q. When were the A.A. directories removed from our catalog? Are they available online? Why were they taken away? Or when was that decision made? We no longer have access to a local phone number.

A. In 2019, the Conference Committee on Report and Charter considered the A.A. Directories (Canada, Eastern U.S., and Western U.S.) especially considering the new ERP System and the Meeting Guide App and requested that the General Service Office explore alternative methods of accessing and distributing the contact information contained in the A.A. Directories. The committee requested that a report be brought back to the 2020 Report and Charter Conference Committee. The report detailed the labor, print production, and distribution costs of directories, legal and societal changes around privacy, the diminishing use of directories by Central Offices, the growth of the Meeting Guide App and the increase in A.A. hotlines, many staffed 24/7 to answer a newcomer's call. In 2021, the Conference voted that the compilation and printing of the A.A. Directories (Canada, Eastern U.S. and Western U.S.) be discontinued.

Q. What is the budget for the Forum and the cost for GSO staff?

A. The cost for each Regional Forum varies depending on the location. The range can be from \$35,000 to \$50,000. The larger costs are hotel room rentals and AV support which can range from \$5,000 to 25,000 or higher. Please contact regionalforums@aa.org with any questions.

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WORKSHOP REPORTS

Who Is Not in the Rooms? Old-Timer

Moderator: Darin H., Area 25, **Reporter:** Sharon S., Area 57 - Policy & Procedures Chair

Where have old timers gone?

1. They are our pillars of hope in our program for continued growth.
2. We need their input and knowledge.
3. We need to encourage old timers to participate in G.S. structure.
4. Should we use "long timers?"
5. Some old timers drive and won't ask for help, how can we offer.
6. The longer you're here, the more loved you are. Old timers invite the younger to their events.
7. One 41-year-old asks what we could do for a 90-year-old, and he asked her to come read the book to him!
8. How do we get Past Delegates to our meetings? Colorado reimburses their Past Delegates gas to come to Area.
9. We need to be consider offering support to the old timers who don't use technology, who didn't know how to Zoom.
10. Culture differences may keep them away. Be inclusive.
11. We need to sit down and talk to them, encourage them to participate.
12. Old timer said A.A. is not getting watered down - brings members with him. The highest you can get is sober.
13. Past Delegates get to have input in their area. Encourage old timers to take a position. There's a lady in this workshop with over 50 years. Some members brought her to this meeting.

The Importance of the Role of DCM

Moderator: Eloy M., Area 46, New Mexico **Reporter:** Berna C., Area 46 Archives Chair

How do DCMs enter into an all-male A.A. meeting or an all-female A.A. meeting (of the opposite sex)? Communication! Contact before attending, state your purpose, give an introduction of your purpose.

Attend the group conscience portion of the meeting, join in on the "meeting before the meeting" or the after meeting. Send a trusted servant of the same gender "a liason" in to represent the district. Build rapport with the groups by communicating.

How do DCM's reach and engage "dark groups?"

Communication! Visit groups, inform them of their importance and how the District, Area, GSO can support them. Invite them to District meetings, rotating District meeting sites and times. Attend the groups consistently find out the history and imagination of the dark groups. Find out the needs of the groups, listen to Learn - Learn to Listen. Sparking an interest in participation by asking their opinions.

Managing the Language of the Basic Text: *Alcoholics Anonymous*

Moderator: Rick M., Area 67, Southeast Texas **Reporter:** Theresa S., Area 47, Alt. Chair, PI

This presentation consisted of a moderator and three panelists who shared about the role the Big Book played in their sobriety and how they use the BB when working with newcomers. Some shared that their sponsor took them through the BB line by line, paragraph by paragraph. A few stated that they didn't understand the content of the BB and needed their sponsor to explain it to them. One panelist explained that his sponsor was a high school dropout, so they did not read the BB together. Instead, they attended an intense BB study where the lead read line by line and then explained the meaning. In addition, his sponsor gave him a copy of the book, "The Anonymous Press Study Edition of Alcoholics Anonymous" (not A.A. approved literature), which has a glossary in the back of the book, which helped him understand the meaning of the words used back when the BB was written. It was also shared that the "Joe and Charlie" tapes were used as well. Another panelist shared how intrigued she was by her sponsor who did not tell her what to do but made suggestions that allowed her to "discover" herself and to realize that she was an alcoholic who needed to get sober. Some panelists shared that they also read the "Twelve Steps & Twelve Traditions." All panelists agreed that they use the same methods with their sponsees as what they learned from their sponsors. Many attendees shared similar experiences. Some shared that they use the book, "Back to Basics," especially in jails and prisons. Many shared they used the "Big Book Dictionary" to understand the BB.

Online (Virtual) Meetings

Moderator: Rick W., Area 65, Northeast Texas **Reporter:** Theresa S., Area 47, Alt. Chair, PI

3 kinds of virtual meetings brick-and-mortar, hybrid, virtual-only

Question 1: Is there anything in our Traditions that says we should not have a (non-geographical) virtual Area?

T 2 – Concern of ownership of the meeting (based on ownership of platform or account holder)

T 11 – Anonymity concerns (people worry about being tracked/recorded)

T 7 – Contributions – are we accountable with our money – where does it go (structure)

T 3 – Do we add a membership requirement of needing a device and internet access?

T 1 – Will this cause a split in the groups and hurt our unity?

Experience, Strength, and Hope: We rent Zoom so no account ownership, make a decision and be clear with all group members. People stay with the group when they move away, people join the group for accessibility, follow best practices from in-person meetings to aid with growing pains in T 7, etc. Use of free online literature. Some of these items are covered in the guidelines MG18.

Question 2: What is the best way to include virtual groups and online meetings into the US/Canada Service Structure

Experience, Strength, and Hope: must live in the Area to participate in the Area service structure (A 46), virtual groups have all the problems OG groups have, the groups self-determine where they choose to be geographically, the GSR and Alt GSR must reside in that geography, should we try a virtual area for groups that have never met physically? Make virtual Areas optional? Would electing new trusted servants move the group? Telephone groups have

been around forever indicating no need to change the current structure. Is this causing a split in our Fellowship, Virtual meetings are an accessibility tool, We all appreciate that our GSO is asking these questions and thoughtfully thinking through these issues.

Question 3: Are we in a position where we want to consider virtual participation in the GSC online? – How should members of online groups serve? What is the best way to fit these folks into the Service Structure? if we have these online groups do we have to turn our assemblies virtual, conference etc.

Question 4: Marita, Area 42 – Which structure do these groups belong to if they are international in nature?

PRESENTATIONS

The Responsibility Statement: A ripple effect-- Debbie H., Area 39, W. Missouri

I am Responsible. When anyone, anywhere reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there. And for that, I am responsible. The Responsibility Statement hung on the wall in my 1st home group. Early in sobriety, I didn't realize how unique it was in A.A. to start a reading with the word "I" instead of "we," but it was clear to me from the beginning that it was a "personal" call to action. Quite literally the hand of A.A. was my two hands, and the words "anywhere" and "always" were reminders of Bill's instruction in the Big Book to "not hesitate to visit the most sordid spot on earth." This declaration has remained an important guide, throughout my journey in service to A.A., offering new perspectives with each new delegated responsibility. As I celebrated a year of sobriety (again) my sponsor informed me that my new service job was Alternate GSR and she was appointing herself as GSR. Aside from tagging along on a couple of 12-step calls, my service history amounted to cleaning the ashtrays after the meeting. I hadn't even been a coffee maker! This group did not participate in the service structure, and I had no idea what adventures were ahead. At my first District meeting the PI/CPC committee was developing a District schedule to leave at hotels for travelers needing a meeting. This was my first experience seeing A.A.'s message carried into the community and I was excited to be a part of it. From that day on I have never been without a trusted servant position. Soon, I was distributing other A.A. literature (mostly free) with the goal of blanketing my community with our message of recovery. This was a perfect service goal for a newbie like me. As I was building a new relationship with a higher power, I imagined us working as a team. My job was to place the literature and leave the rest up to her. Because I would never know the results it was good for my ego. Each piece of literature left behind became the "hand of A.A." to be found by "anyone" in need of our message of recovery. They in turn could help someone else, and so on, causing what I called a "ripple effect." One small act of service, without any expectation or further attention could continue to carry a message of hope exponentially. Our Responsibility Statement was written for the 1965 International Convention. The convention theme was "Responsibility." The Chair of the General Service Board was Class A Trustee, Dr. John Norris, known throughout the fellowship as "Dr. Jack." These are a few sentences from his essay that appeared in the Convention program: "...We must remember that A.A. will continue strong only so long as each of us freely and happily gives it away to another person, only as each of us takes our fair share of responsibility for sponsorship of those who still suffer, for the growth and integrity of our Group, for our Intergroup activities, and for A.A. as a whole. It is in taking responsibility that real freedom and the enduring satisfactions of life are found." When I learned from our A.A. Membership Survey that 2/3 of our Fellowship is referred to us by a professional in their life, CPC work took on a new level of importance. Good service sponsorship, reading the literature (secret service manual) and more service opportunities provided lessons in our Service Structure, Traditions and Concepts. Knowledge that was important and allowed me to share A.A.'s message of recovery (and not my own) with professionals. Like the pieces of literature left behind, I saw that the hands of these professionals could become "the hand of A.A." and "anyone, anywhere" was multiplied many times over. "Dr. Jack" Norris is a perfect example. In the 1940s, as Chief Medical Officer of Eastman Kodak, problem drinkers were referred to Dr. Jack. He hated to see them coming. "I knew I was no use to them." He spoke. Then "Bert," a Kodak janitor he sent to A.A. as a last hope, sobered up. Bert and Dr. Jack became a team, working together with A.A.; helping thousands of Kodak employees get sober and launching one of the first industrial alcoholism programs. "Our success rate was astonishing," Dr. Jack recalled.

I am humbled that Area 39 has now entrusted me to serve as their Delegate. This shifting of focus from Area Service to Conference Service has not always been easy. Leaving the all-important "boots on the ground" work in the capable hands of our Area Committee and GSRs has not been a problem. Understanding my new responsibilities as a delegate has at times been more of a

challenge. As I relate it to the Responsibility Statement, “anyone, anywhere” is easily understood to be the Fellowship of A.A. “worldwide.” The words “Always to be there” serve as an urgent reminder to safeguard this precious gift for future generations. As for the “hand of A.A.,” it requires a more complicated description than “my hand,” a piece of literature, or the assistance of our professional friends. Perhaps it is best represented as the collective actions and efforts put forth by the Conference itself. There is no doubt this is a heavy responsibility. Our foundation: Bill’s well-conceived policies and procedures, the recorded history of our achievements and failures, and a willing collection of trusted servants who love Alcoholics Anonymous. Our common goal: growing our Fellowship with integrity, providing support and encouragement for our groups and members carrying the message and guarding our public image as a spiritual community in all our transactions. Our best solution: Making a commitment to work together in unity, always mindful of personal humility, respectful communication, principled actions, willingness to compromise, knowledge of our history and careful but continuous plans for our future. Above all, love for our cherished program of hope and mutual respect.

Transparency the Key to Unity-- Jeannie M., Area 4, Arkansas

Transparency is defined as being easy to perceive or detect. It is the quality of being open and honest, not hiding anything, and sharing thoughts and opinions honestly and respectfully. When being transparent, we can build trust even when delivering bad news, in my experience. The more Transparency there is, the more candid our conversations are. When I came to A.A., I was not transparent. I was proud that I could give you every fact and statistic of my life, and you would still never really know me. I would answer questions but never tell you what you really wanted to know, and you only wanted to know me. My own Step work revealed my lack of Transparency, which may be why I spot it so readily (especially in others) now. And what about Unity? Apparently, we knocked it out of the park way back in 1955, according to the forward to the second edition xix, which reads: “Today, the remarkable Unity of A.A. is one of the greatest assets that our society has.” There are also cautions in the same Foreword: “Could these large numbers of erstwhile erratic alcoholics successfully meet and work together? Would there be quarrels over membership, leadership, and money? Would there be strivings for power and prestige? Would there be schisms that would split A.A. apart? Soon A.A. was beset by these very problems on every side and in every group. But out of this frightening and at first disrupting experience the conviction grew that A.A.s had to hang together or die separately. We had to unify our Fellowship or pass off the scene.” xviii. This sounds of urgent importance to me and yet Unity seems elusive in recent days. Transparency plays a significant role in this (real or perceived). Transparency can come in many forms, often requiring admitting things you'd rather not, such as mistakes or bad results. It means disclosing ALL relevant information so that we can make informed decisions. I'll share an anecdote from my Area that I think is relevant. A committee in my Area asked for support for an event. The Area was thrilled to support the project financially and spiritually. At the close of the event, they reported an outstanding result but neglected to include the fact that they had a significant excess of money. Was it really any of the Area's business? They would plan how to use the funds best, all on their own. Word got out, and a sea of mistrust ensued, leading eventually, boisterously / confrontationally, to a direct question - how much money? and sheepishly, the information came fully to light. Of course, there was a huge upset. Misinformation abounded with hurt feelings on both sides that turned very vocal. Some folks made the mistake of confusing financial support with love. Imagine that. The cry of "Why don't you trust us to do the right thing without your input" went up. Each side became convinced they were victims of a betrayal. It was the most volatile session of my Area Assembly that I can recall in a very long time. Paradoxically, once complete information and a full accounting was given, accompanied by a recommendation on how to use those excess funds with broad input from the Area, everyone was delighted with the result. It was a Lovefest! What a great job we did! What a fantastic impact we had!

What great things we accomplished together! It wasn't the money that was the problem. The lack of Transparency, the ensuing mistrust, and hard feelings were the real problem. Transparency, indeed, was the key to Unity for us. So, why do we keep doing this sort of thing? Is it because it is incredibly hard to be rigorously honest? Aren't some things none of their business? In "This Matter of Honesty," Grapevine article, August 1961, Bill wrote: "The problem of honesty touches nearly every aspect of our lives. (There are, for example, the widespread and amazing phenomena of self-deception. There are those rather dreadful brands of reckless truth-telling, which are so often lacking in prudence and love.) Then there are those countless life situations in which nothing less than utter honesty will do, no matter how sorely we may be tempted by the fear and pride that would reduce us to half-truths or inexcusable denials." Bill closes the essay with: "Let us therefore continue our several searches for self-deception, great or small. Let us painstakingly temper honesty with prudence and love. And let us never flinch from entire forthrightness whenever this is the requirement." We in A.A. need to practice being open, honest, and authentic in our interactions with fellow members. We need to be accountable to ourselves and to each other. So, I do believe Transparency is the key to Unity in Alcoholics Anonymous. It's the glue that holds this remarkable Fellowship together. When we are transparent, we create an environment of trust, support, and understanding. Let us never flinch!

Our Service Structure at Work: Effective Communication Down and Up the Triangle--- Sarah M., Area 10, Colorado

As we all know, our service structure is an upside-down triangle. The A.A. groups are at the top, then the GSRs, districts, area assemblies, General Service Conference, and lastly our General Service Board and affiliate corporations. In practice, we are the opposite of a hierarchy. And why do we have a service structure in A.A.? To make Twelve Step work possible. It is the main reason for our existence – a society of alcoholics in action.

On a practical level, our service structure is about communication. It ensures the full voice of Alcoholics Anonymous is heard. Members have a voice and a vote at their home group's business meeting. Some members may have a voice and a vote as part of a service position, like at a district meeting or area assembly. I was taught not only do I have a voice and vote, I have a responsibility to that voice and vote. To be part of the collective group conscience that is A.A.

Now to be frank, I certainly didn't arrive at the doors of A.A. thinking about my personal responsibility to ensure communication for the good of the movement. My goal was to try to figure out how to get through a day without drinking, puking, losing my job, or taking myself off the planet. I was the newcomer who snuck in the back of the room when the meeting started and left as soon as it was over. I literally couldn't speak when I showed up to A.A. I'll never forget Motorcycle Ken, a tall, 6 foot something biker, who also sat in the back. He would invariably catch my eye as I tried to sneak out, gently shake my hand, and say, "Nice to see you, Sarah." I'll never forget that kindness. Gestures like that got me talking little by little - communicating.

Why does communication matter? I believe how we communicate matters to have trust and unity as a Fellowship. Our role in service positions is to listen, ask questions, and listen some more. Then, we are delegated the authority to use our voice and vote. Lastly, we report back what took place – what we saw, heard, and felt. In fact, the word "report" can be found 157 times in the A.A Service Manual and 12 Concepts for World Service.

When does communication work well? As usual, our Twelve Traditions and Twelve Concepts are our guideposts - lessons from our shared experience and history around how best to stick together.

Openness and honest disclosure are vital to mutual trust and unity, especially when we disagree. And mutual trust must be the foundation. This means walking shoulder to shoulder.

When I think about communication, some questions come to mind: What conversations do we want to have as a Fellowship and at our Conference? What do we care about in A.A.? Do our business agendas across the service structure truly reflect this? If not, what can I do to help? Are all voices at the table? Are we really listening to one another? Do members have the information they need? Are we open when asked for information, or have we fallen prey to insular thinking?

It's been a tough few years in general service in Alcoholics Anonymous. At times it has felt like communication has broken down. I believe how we do things in A.A. is as important as what we decide on any given matter at hand. The times when I've seen the most disunity in A.A. is when people feel they aren't listened to, or communication is fragmented, withheld, or otherwise goes off course from the tried-and-true usual track. Inevitably turbulence and upset occurs, and we must course correct to get back on track.

The good news is A.A. is self-correcting. One way or the other, with time, we self-correct. We must – we need one another. I heard it said once that A.A. moves at the speed of trust. I would also say effective communication moves at the speed of trust. This is our society in action and us at our very best.

To end, a quote from Bill's talk at the 1960 General Service Conference:

“When you think about it, A.A. is a unique means of communication: our lives have depended on communication; our unity depends on communication; our function depends on communication. Everything has hung on this business of communication. And I can think back on a time when there was virtually none. Lois and I were isolated, drawing further apart, each in retreat, no communication... My sponsor sits across the kitchen table on which there was no coffee – in those days it was gin – and then the unique communication starts, one drunk talking with another.”
Reprinted from *Our Great Responsibility*, pages 101-102, with permission of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.

“Roles and Responsibilities of each Service Position: How They Connect and the Impact on the Home Group” --- Shellia D., Area 66, NW Texas

Let's start at the very top of the triangle...that is you and me - the members...Get involved with your home group. Attend and participate in what your group has to offer.

Our first focus is on the newcomers and how better to serve them when they enter the rooms. Through the chain of positions, we know with whom to connect and gain information.

All parts of our Fellowship - group meetings, committees, offices, Conferences, and group jobs - share one common purpose: to help the alcoholic who still suffers. A.A. is made up of interconnected circles of people within the Fellowship, who work together to carry A.A.'s message of hope. But for A.A. to run itself without bosses or rules, in accordance with our Twelve Traditions, we need a system of communication for finding out how A.A. feels about its world affairs, and how it wants to operate. For A.A. to run its own affairs, each group needs to make its voice heard on overall A.A. policies.

This starts with a GSR (General Service Representative), who represents the voice of the group conscience and has the job of linking their group with A.A. as a whole. GSRs make sure their groups receive services from the GSO (General Service Office) and help groups stay informed about worldwide A.A.

For every District, the GSRs elect a DCM (District Committee Member) to communicate the district's conscience to the Area Assembly, which elects an Area Delegate to attend the annual General Service Conference for the US and Canada. (Other countries have their own separate structure.)

Every group in the Area is encouraged to send its GSR to its Area Assembly. The DCMs help make up the Area committee - a sort of steering committee for the assembly.

Each group sends its own ideas or problems to the assembly, where other groups can share their experience and provide help and support. From the assembly, each GSR can take back to their group the shared experience of the rest of the assembly.

Every area elects a Delegate to the General Service Conference, held each spring in New York. Delegates serve a 2-year term only, and like GSRs, DCMs, and Trustees, Delegates are never paid for A.A. service. The General Service Conference serves as the group conscience for the US and Canada. The Conference meets for 6 days a year, yet the 135 or so Conference members are active in Conference affairs throughout the year. Every A.A. group shares its experience with other groups through its area Delegate.

So that is how our positions in A.A. function. And indeed, it does come all the way back to the home group -- because that is where it started. Get involved in service...you never know where it might take you!

SELF SUPPORT-- Ryan F., Area 57, Oklahoma

Self-support is more than just covering the rent and coffee. It's also about group responsibility. Each group that claims the name Alcoholics Anonymous is responsible to A.A. as a whole. Our common welfare should come first; Personal recovery depends on A.A. unity, and each group should be self-supporting. Yet only 1/3 of A.A. groups contribute to GSB.

The General Service Board provides oversight for the two corporations of A.A. -- Alcoholics Anonymous World Services and Grapevine, Inc. AAWS is the arm of the two corporations that provide all the services such as Public Information or Cooperation with the Professional Community. They handle all the printing of our literature and are the custodians of our collective experience. A.A., as we know it, would not exist today if it weren't for the guidance and spirit of unity that they provide, and yet 2/3 of our groups do not financially support these services.

The problem is that when I came into the rooms in 1984, we were putting a dollar in the basket. Bill W. mentions a dollar in the basket in the 12&12, which was written in the 50s. Still today, we generally put a dollar in the basket. We have been deferring our financial responsibility for decades, and as a result, "the power of the purse" has shifted to AAWS by way of book sales. We need to get to a place where 2/3 of the annual budget is coming from the Fellowship rather than the literature sales.

There are many groups and individuals in my Area who are not happy with the current financial situation or the direction that the GSB has taken recently, and they have made the decision to flex "the power of the purse" by withholding contributions from New York. That is their right to do, however there is a problem with that. When so much of our budget comes from literature sales rather than members, we have watered down its effectiveness.

One group invited me to attend their group conscience as they were discussing withholding funds. I asked them how much they usually contributed and was told around \$300. I asked them if they thought their \$300 would be missed in the 18M budget. While I gave no opinion on whether they

should or should not, I did say that if they chose to withhold, they needed to send a letter to the GSB explaining to them why.

One gentleman asked me what each of us could do as individual members to have our voices heard. At first, I didn't have an answer, so I said a quick little prayer, and the next thing that came out of my mouth was, "contribute more." That is not something I would typically say. But it was suddenly clear to me that if the members were in control of 2/3 of all the money, our voices would be louder.

Imagine what the conversation would be like if 2/3 of our groups were contributing and we were putting \$5 in the basket instead of one. We wouldn't have the need to increase our literature prices, and maybe we could sell Big Books at cost or keep our offices in NY. I do know this: the conversations about how to spend the money would be radically different. I trust the spiritual process and those to whom we have delegated our authority.

There is no quick fix to the perceived issues we are currently facing at the bottom of the triangle. The lack of trust, transparency, and flow of information are a direct result of corporate boards governing themselves rather than the GSB providing executive oversight. You can't fault them for that; we have placed them in that position by allowing their budgets to come primarily from their own revenue streams rather than cash flows directly from the Fellowship.

The idea is simple: we can't change what others do. We must change ourselves first. We must stop blaming the board and take responsibility for our actions. Experience has shown me that when I make a change to my old behavior, God affects changes in those around me. I have stopped carrying \$1 bills in my wallet, I now have fives. That's what I put in the basket. And those who watch what I do have started doing the same. I have become an active participant in my home group, asking for financial reports and ensuring that we are making contributions as decided by our group conscience. We can affect the needed change, but it needs to start with us, each member, and each group, to be responsible stewards of A.A., both spiritually and financially.

THE NINTH CONCEPT OF SERVICE--- Rick W., Area 65, NE Texas

"Good service leaders, together with sound and appropriate methods of choosing them, are at all levels indispensable for our future functioning and safety."

I try to serve by being a personal spiritual example of good leadership – the keyword here is "try." I seek advice. I accept criticism and disagreement. I compromise. I take tough stands. I exercise vision. When preparing to study the Ninth Concept of Service, I've always found it helpful to examine my leadership capabilities. There are seven (7) questions I need to ask myself:

1. Am I willing to seek the advice of others, or do I try to solve all problems by myself?
2. Am I willing to surrender personal ambitions, feuds, and controversies, in order to serve others?
3. Am I willing to become accountable and criticized for my decisions without being defensive?
4. Can I approach differences with possible compromises or must solutions be done my way or not at all?
5. Am I willing to have others take my inventory and learn from it?

6. Do I refuse to take tough stands when it means that my comfort or security will be threatened?

7. Am I willing to develop attributes needed by a leader in A.A. like tolerance, responsibility, flexibility, and vision?

I prepare to be a good leader in A.A. by taking the 12 Steps, the 12 Traditions, and the 12 Concepts of World Service into my life. So, let's consider what specific personal qualities a world service leader ought to have.

The best place to find that is right from our literature... "A leader in A.A. service is therefore a man (or a woman) who can personally put principles, plans, and policies into such dedicated and effective action that the rest of us want to back him up and help him with his job. When a leader power-drives us badly, we rebel; but when he too meekly becomes an order-taker, and he exercises no judgment of his own – well, he really isn't a leader at all. Good leadership originates plans, policies, and ideas for the improvement of our Fellowship and its services. But in new and important matters, it will nevertheless be consulted widely before taking decisions and actions. Good leadership will also remember that a fine plan or idea can come from anybody, anywhere. Consequently, good leadership will often discard its own cherished plans for others that are better and will give credit to the source.

Another qualification for leadership is give-and-take, the ability to compromise cheerfully whenever a proper compromise can cause a situation to progress in what appears to be the right direction. Compromise comes hard to us all-or-nothing drunks. Nevertheless, we must never lose sight of the fact that progress is nearly always characterized by a series of improving compromises. Leadership is often called upon to face heavy and sometimes long-continued criticism. This is an acid test. There are always the constructive critics, our friends indeed. We ought never fail to give them a careful hearing. We should be willing to let them modify our opinions or change them completely. Often, too, we shall have to disagree and then stand fast without losing their friendship. Then there are those whom we like to call our 'destructive' critics. They power-drive, they are politickers, and they make accusations. They pitch gobs of rumors, gossip, and general scuttlebutt to gain their ends – all for the good of A.A., of course! We have at last learned that these folks, who may be a trifle sicker than the rest of us, need not be destructive at all, depending very much on how we relate ourselves to them.

"To begin with, we ought to listen carefully to what they say. Sometimes, they are telling the whole truth, at other times, a little truth. More often, though, they are just rationalizing themselves into nonsense. There are few better means of self-survey and of developing genuine patience than the workouts these usually well-meaning but erratic brother members afford us. This is always a large order, and we shall sometimes fail to make good on it ourselves. But we must keep trying."

So, in closing, I must ask myself what are the changes that need to take place in my life in the Ninth Concept in order to serve as a good leader?

I first need to surrender old ideas about leadership. I don't lead to govern; I lead to serve. I need to become a spiritual example. The Ninth Concept of service prepares me for this leadership style through the parallel Tradition and Step: having made all my amends, I am now in divine order, and am now capable of being a spiritual example of good leadership. My Ninth Concept prayer is this: "God, may I be an example of good leadership by seeking advice through you and your kids, welcoming corrections, taking tough stands, and

compromising as directed through exercising your vision! May I do all these things with a spirit of love! Amen.”

Trusting Our Trusted Servants – Using the Concepts in Homegroup, District, and Area-- Rebecca H., Area 38, E Missouri

Hello, my name is Becca H. I am an alcoholic and Area 38, Panel 73 Delegate. First, I want to express how grateful I am to be here! The first forum I attended, the delegate presentations were my favorite part. I couldn't wait to get back to my district and tell them everything I learned. This is by far my favorite A.A. event and it means the world to me to be standing here today giving a presentation. I am going to talk about using the Concepts in the homegroup, district, area and trusting your trusted servants. That is a lot of things to cover but they actually go together quite nicely. I want to talk about the Concepts for a minute. Please don't let the word "concepts" scare you or cause you to tune out, they are a beautiful extension of our third legacy of Alcoholics Anonymous. They were divinely inspired and just like the Traditions they were created from twenty years of mistakes and understanding what this life-saving Fellowship needs to continue indefinitely. They provide structure and checks and balances within our service structure. In the introduction on page C1 of the current Service Manual it states "The Twelve Concepts for World Service to be described in this manual are an interpretation of A.A.'s world service structure. They reveal the evolution by which it has arrived in its present form, and they detail the experience and reasoning on which our operation stands today. These Concepts therefore aim to record the 'why' of our service structure in such a fashion that the highly valuable experience of the past, and the lessons we have drawn from that experience, can never be forgotten, or lost." The first five Concepts are most commonly used in our homegroup, district and area. The introduction also states "There will also be seen in these Concepts a number of principles which have already become traditional to our services, but which have never been clearly articulated and reduced to writing. For example: the 'Right of Decision' gives our leaders a proper discretion and latitude; the 'Right of Participation' gives each world servant a voting status commensurate with his (or her) responsibility, and 'Participation' further guarantees that each service board or committee will always possess the several elements and talent that will ensure effective functioning. The 'Right of Appeal' protects and encourages minority opinion; and the 'Right of Petition' makes certain that grievances can be heard, and properly acted upon. These general principles can of course be used to good effect throughout our entire structure." In Concept One the final authority is given to the groups, part of the reasoning for this shift of authority is Tradition Two. The Service Manual page C4 states; "These reasons centered around Tradition Two, which declares, "For our group purpose, there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as he may express himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern." There is that term (Trusted Servant). Remember that! Concept Two makes the Conference the voice and effective conscience for our whole society. The Service Manual page C6 states, "But an ultimate authority and responsibility in the A.A. groups for world services – if that is all there were to it – could not amount to anything. Nothing could be accomplished on that basis alone. In order to get effective action, the groups must delegate the actual operational authority to chosen service representatives who are fully empowered to speak and act for them." That would be our trusted servants! So, let's put this all together in the home group. Probably the most important job in our home group is the coffeemaker, it's not a meeting without coffee! When the group is running out of coffee, we generally trust the coffeemaker

to buy more coffee and the treasurer reimburses them. If they waited to take all of the coffee options and prices to the group conscience for a discussion and a vote the group could be out of coffee for a month, actually knowing how us drunks like to discuss things to death it could be months!! You would have a lot of angry drunks! I have actually been at an area assembly when the coffee ran out and people were throwing things, it was not a pretty sight! The coffemaker is the group's trusted servant, and they have the right of decision from Concept Three to make the best coffee choice for the group. Now let's talk about the most vital position in the homegroup, your GSR. As the GSR for your home group you are the representative of your group at the district meeting and the area assembly. You have a vote at each of these meetings and you are responsible for reporting back to your group the information you received at these meetings. You are your group's voice in the affairs of the Fellowship, when you vote your group's voice is heard. You will bring some things back to your group conscience for discussion before voting but you will also use your "right of decision" to vote on other things. For example, the GSR votes on the trusted servants to lead the district and the area as well as the delegate to represent the area at the General Service Conference. You will bring back to your group proposed agenda items for the Conference and in our area for example, you will take the area budget back to your group for discussion before it is voted on at assembly. At the District you have the DCM who is the voice of the district. They also use the "right of decision" to elect district and area servants as well as voting on district and area business. Concept 5 gives us the "Right of Appeal." The Service Manual states on page C16 "In granting this traditional 'Right of Appeal' we recognize that minorities frequently can be right.... they compel a thorough-going debate on important issues. The well-heard minority, therefore, is our chief protection against an uninformed, misinformed, hasty, or angry majority." The minority opinion is very valuable. It is important to listen to those whom we disagree with because we can't always see every side of a situation until we hear someone express it. I have changed my mind after hearing something I had not thought of on more than one occasion. I want to wrap this up with circling back to the "trusted servant" Since most of us are here as trusted servants. In Concept 3, page C10 of the Service Manual it states, "This really means that we ought to trust our responsible leaders to decide, within the understood framework of their duties, how they will interpret and apply their own authority and responsibility to each particular problem or situation as it arises." The end of this Concept (page C11) sums all of this up perfectly, "Our entire A.A. program rests squarely upon the principle of mutual trust. We trust God, we trust A.A., and we trust each other. Therefore, we cannot do less than trust our leaders in service. The 'Right of Decision' that we offer them is not only the practical means by which they may act and lead effectively but is also the symbol of our implicit confidence."

PAST TRUSTEE SHARING

Jimmy D., past Southwest regional trustee, 2019-2023

I went to my first Regional Forum in Albuquerque around 22 years ago. I went with my sponsor. He has been my sponsor for the past 23 years—and my one sponsor, because he is well-versed in the three legacies of Alcoholics Anonymous. My sobriety date is August 25th, 1997.

There was a question posed from the floor during that weekend and it sold me on this A.A. deal. The question was about the difference between an open and closed A.A. meeting. A lot of you remember Valerie O. from the GSO—I think she was on the Regional Forum assignment. Valerie came to the floor with the conviction of her long experience as a sober A.A. member. She answered the question as a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. She said that the open meeting ought to be more about Alcoholics Anonymous than the closed meeting ever even thought about being. Why? Because *anyone* is welcome at an open meeting of A.A.

I've never forgotten that, and I have shared it hundreds of times with thousands of members of Alcoholics Anonymous. It began a journey that continues today.

Today I am thinking about why these Regional Forums exist. Dr. Jack Norris, chair of the board and great friend of A.A., and a lady named Cora Louise B., a long time GSO staffer, had been somewhere in the Pacific Northwest on a little journey. They were invited to a potluck—like we'll do (“Hey, come to the potluck, Dr. Jack!”). They went to the potluck and got eaten alive. It was about the problem du jour—whatever it happened to be. Dr. Jack came home and said, “Isn't it interesting, Bill set this deal up. We have been spending most of our lives in the Third Legacy of Service, talking about the fact that Bill W. gave A.A. away to me and to you.” The board was not supposed to be distinct or separate from the Fellowship they serve, and continue to serve. But somehow, there had been a disconnect between delegated responsibilities and authorities, implied delegated responsibilities and authorities, and assumed delegated responsibilities and authorities. So, at least for that little window at the potluck, Dr. Jack and Cora Louise figured it out. They figured out that A.A. belongs to you. And to me. Collectively, the board needs guides and advisors and the GSO needs guides and advisors. We elect people to represent us and carry the collective conscience of our groups and districts into these lower and lower pools with less and less water—and less and less of the oxygen of Alcoholics Anonymous. But we need more oxygen in order to make informed decisions and form a collective group conscience.

So Dr. Jack came back and said, “We've got to do something.” And thus began the Regional Forum. When I was new in Alcoholics Anonymous I was told, “This is where your board comes to you. This is where you get to put a face to a name, meet your regional

correspondent and know that y'all are both in the same deal." In my experience, that has been reinforced over the time that I have been in Alcoholics Anonymous. As a member of the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous, I had the best gig, ever. I was a regional trustee. I didn't have to wonder about how my "constituents" felt about everything.

In the short period of time since my rotation, I have taken some inventory. My inventory—not the other man's—about where I might have done better. Where, perhaps, I failed to respond in a timeline that might have been considered as acceptable. Where, perhaps, I might not have communicated as honestly or openly as I committed to communicate in 2019 when I began the journey. Failed, in certain aspects. I think that's important because it has made me a better home group member. Let's not forget that we, collectively, have the ultimate authority and the final responsibility. We are a society that is nimble and quick in our own local groups and districts. We can produce a public information postcard in a matter of days at minimal cost and share it with the entire Fellowship. However, if we request it through the normal channels that we have used in the past 20 years, it can cost \$15-20,000. It involves external consultants, it might get produced in a year. That's not their fault, it's just the way that's set up. So think about being nimble and quick. Think about using our local resources. Remember to engage with one another about the best way to carry A.A.'s message. And let's reduce some of the untenable overhead that you and I have helped to create.

Clayton V., past Southwest regional trustee, 2011-2019

My first Regional Forum was in 1991 in Tulsa, Oklahoma. At that forum, there was a fellow who was a Southwest regional trustee who had become the general manager of the General Service Office. He had resigned under protest or had been forced out. Was he pushed or did he jump? All of the Southwest region was up in arms. It was the most heated forum and the most antagonistic I've ever participated in. It was my first forum and I thought, "This is interesting, is love and tolerance our way?" But at that forum, on Saturday night, the delegate from the eastern area of Missouri put on a poker game in his room for a bunch of DCMs. Out of that room, 5 became delegates and two of them became trustees. One guy moved to Illinois and I had the pleasure of voting for him for the East Central region's nominee for trustee-at-large/U.S. I bring this up because you have all formed relationships at this forum. Stick with them and carry each other through service. Several of us are Panel 49 and we've gone through service together and have become trustees. These relationships are important. Whatever your dedication to A.A., you need to foster the relationships so you can pull each other through service.

On the way to St. Louis I bought a lottery ticket. I didn't win, I'm not a billionaire. My wife thinks it's like throwing money out onto the road. But I think if I don't buy a lottery ticket, I can't give God a chance to give me a G7 auto. It's the same as standing for offices. If you don't stand up and put your name out, you are not going to give God a chance to put you in these offices. I stood for assistant treasurer, the last available office in the eastern area of Missouri and I got elected. That is how I started on this journey. If I hadn't stood up, you

might have someone else up here, and wouldn't that be a tragedy! I'm happy to be here, thank you.

Nancy H., past Pacific regional trustee, 2011-2015

I was also a Panel 49 delegate. So, one way or another, I've served with everyone at this table. This is my fifth Southwest Regional Forum; I get sent all the time. In fact, I've left the Napa Valley and I now live in the Sonoran Desert, south of Tucson. So I am kind of edging your way, I just haven't made it yet. It's also wonderful to be on a panel with both men and women. Where I live, there are four past trustees in the state of Arizona, and we are all women. At assemblies, when we get up to introduce ourselves, I always say, "There *are* male past trustees." Now I can say, you see? I have been at a table with many of them.

All weekend, I have been thinking about when Covid came, my home group (Free at Last in Tucson) sprung into Zoom mode as quickly as possible. It took a couple of weeks, because the church where we met wouldn't let us come back. Luckily, it was like that when smoking or nonsmoking was a huge issue in A.A. and the state of California said, "You can't smoke in a public building." We all thought, "Well, no more packed business meetings." So, we went to Zoom and when the church allowed us back, we came back. It took a good 3-6 months to have people come back and now we are thriving. We are doing better than before the lockdown. We've got lots of new people, lots of young people. Several people who got sober with us during the lockdown had never been able to go to a live meeting until we reopened. I bring this up because I want to say I have extreme faith in the resiliency of A.A. to deal with the problems we tend to create for ourselves. I think we also have the strength and resilience to resolve those problems and move on to the next set that we will undoubtedly create for ourselves. That's part of the charm of general service. Thank you for your participation and renewing my faith in A.A.

Don M., past trustee, 2009-2013

Listening is a reminder to me how amazing it is that our limitations put us in a place where we are forced to practice spiritual democracy the best we possibly can. It's a complete exercise. It reminds me of the part in the Big Book where it says, "love and tolerance is our code." When I get around a bunch of us, I think, "Yeah, it may be, but it's not my default position." I have learned it being involved in service—and it's an acquired taste.

What I do in my life is related to what I do here: In the absence of purpose, I often find or create drama. Then I let that substitute for living. It seems entertaining. It seems like living. It *feels* like I'm actually living, rather than me actually living for some purpose. What I really love about Alcoholics Anonymous and the service structure is that I didn't get better in order to show up, I had to show up in order to get better. This whole thing has been about getting to a place where I was in Step 10—getting through some of my amends—just enough to

show up and be useful so I could rub up against people and then have to go back and do my inventory. What I am left with is this: Service is in addition to recovery, not instead of. That's a lesson I have to keep learning over and over and over.

A few weeks ago, a person said, "Don, why do you keep coming to meetings?" I said, "Well, as far as I can tell, I am in the process of becoming. Every time I think I have arrived I have a tendency to leave." Now, I don't know how you guys operate when *you* arrive, and you get to someplace and you think, "Everything is the way it is and I've learned as much as I possibly can." But that is usually a ticket for me to start exiting on the exit ramp. I have been listening to the "appeal" of our distractions. It is important to be stable, dedicated, and it's important to know where we are spending money and all those things, but sometimes they become distracting questions for me. Because they are things we can grab and leverage. The real vulnerability is sitting down and getting agreement on what we need to do in our own individual parts of the service structure to make ourselves available to the people who aren't here.

In particular, the more I look at it, we are a society that gets people referred to us. So what are we doing to create friends of A.A.? What are we doing in our local areas? Over the past 30 years, in our service structure, we tell people they are in charge. This is a very appealing message. I can sell that every day, "Hey! You're in charge!" But the thing is, we are responsible. And it matches my sobriety. I am responsible for a lot of things I can't control. And what you have trained me and allowed me to experience in A.A.—and it happens in the service structure, too—is that I am actually responsible for a lot of things I can't control and the way I deal with that is to find the right kind of participation. I have to participate in my recovery, my adult development, and all these other things. Otherwise, I won't grow. What I am asking us to do is take a step back and say, "How do we find the right participation to help the people who aren't here?"

I think the reason we have a Conference is to allow some of us to temporarily be the human part of our conflict resolution at the national level. So that the other 3.7 million members in A.A. don't have to do this. And our job is to listen and not make the group conscience, but find it. Discover it. In Concepts 3, 4, and 5, The Right of Decision, the Right of Participation, and the Right of Appeal and Petition, when properly executed, are a way of bringing in trial and error for that discovery process. I think it is absolutely beautiful because we rub up against each other and we end up in conflict. But, never in my life, have I been able to punish anybody out of bad behavior or be punished out of bad behavior. And I have never, ever, ever been able to get to unity without going through conflict. Not going around it, not going under it, not avoiding it. That's one thing that I am incredibly grateful that I have experienced in my recovery. I might sound like I am preaching a little bit, but it's funny, the reason they say, "You're preaching to the choir" is because they are singing for you! The other thing I learned here—and it is powerful—is change happens in the silence after the discussion. Not in the middle of it.

I want to thank everyone for my life. I have a level of peace, internally, that I did not have when I showed up. I didn't learn it, I didn't know it, but I experienced it. I want to give more people on our planet a chance to experience the opportunity to have inner peace, whether they have to go through a little bit of conflict to get there, or not. I'm happy to have done my part.

Conley B., Southwest regional trustee, 2007-2011

I'd like to tell you about what I saw when I was a first-year delegate.

I got to the Conference and I saw two trustees, Harold and Tom, squared off at each other, and ready to have a fistfight on the Conference floor. One had a long reach like a Globetrotter, and the other one had actually been a golden gloves champ. I knew the golden gloves champ would mop the floor with the other one.

I saw it, and wondered why the two were having it out in front of all the delegates on the Conference floor. It took me a few years, but it wasn't until I saw, as a trustee, what happens. The folks who are in the minority all year long (the board) get pushed down and marginalized quite a bit, but the Conference is the equalizer. It's where everybody comes on the same plane. Harold had been pushed down all year, and he got to the Conference and he wasn't going to take it from Tom and the rest of the board any more. I realized that then when I came on the board, I thought I would be walking the halls of the spiritual giants. Whoa, what an education that was. And I knew better.

My second sponsor was Wayne P., and he taught me to read the Service Manual and know the service structure, up and down. He said, "I don't care if you agree with me or not, but I want you to have an opinion and be able to defend it." I've done my best to live up to that. I didn't think it was possible—I interviewed for chair of the board as a Class B, the same time Linda interviewed as a Class A. I am grateful she got it and I didn't. I can remember one of the people questioning me. I said, "I think we need more board development. More interest in the principles. There are meetings that aren't well-attended and they are designed to help teach the Class As what our principles are." I also said that I hoped we could encourage the new folks who come in, who don't know anything about our principles, to get a better understanding of them.

We need to be recruiting Class As and inviting them to our home groups, districts, areas, and Regional Forums and SWAARSA to get exposure to the Fellowship. Jim E., from our region, had a Class A and a Class B sponsor who helped him learn and understand our principles, because those are what make us what we are. Without them, we may as well be the Kiwanis, or any Red Cross organization. Our principles are what make Alcoholics Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous. They are extremely important. There are always more

sides to a situation than what anybody knows. As my grandfather used to say, “you’d have to sleep three-deep in a bed to understand what a husband and wife’s problems are. And even then you are not going to know for sure.” I think that’s true for issues on the board level. I was a signee to the letter when Linda was removed, or resigned. In spite of the fact that we are not spiritual giants, I think we are better than this. The ways we treat people are fundamentally important.

I was tickled. The signees on the letter—we were a group of people who would not have communicated with each other when we were trustees together. But somehow this incident has brought us together. Who could have guessed? When the chair left the board that weekend, it was a couple of days before I was able to talk to her. I told her that she would probably have more impact once she was off the board. I’ve also visited with enough folks to know that there are two sides, maybe ten sides, to that whole deal.

I want to hit on one issue that I’m concerned about. In the last month, I have had occasion to look at some of the videos on our website for professionals. I’ve seen some that were made since I’ve served on the board. There is not a clear understanding that there isn’t a full face video anymore. I mentioned it this weekend. When the Hope Video was coming up, they’d stuck me in CPC as a member of that committee. We went around the room. The Conference had already approved it and money was spent on development. When sharing came around to me, I said, “Nope, I can’t vote to support that.” They asked why. I listed a bunch of reasons:

“We are showing full face videos to people in treatment centers. The very people that don’t understand what our Traditions are all about. Then, some of them do get sober, but some of them don’t. They go back out there, and even those who do get sober, they think, Well, what the hell is this anonymity business? We saw those videos with full faces when we were going through treatment.”

I would suggest to you that the same thing is true when we are showing these videos to professionals. Professionals don’t understand our Tradition of anonymity. The Tradition says, “Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our principles” and certainly all of our Traditions. So if we don’t hold it to the highest level, how can we expect everybody else to? Everyone wants this visual thing, and I saw the avatars out of the GSO in Great Britain. When I was growing up, there was this TV show with Marcus Welby as the doctor. There were some hundred thousand people in the country that would send letters into the show, asking Marcus Welby to take their case. If they couldn’t tell the difference between TV and reality, why would we expect anybody today to? We all have our cognitive biases, but I would ask the Conference and those members of the board to revisit that situation and look at that principle of anonymity. If we can’t have our fundamental principle, how can we have anything else? People outside of A.A. ought to be looking at that deal and asking, “Why

aren't they showing their full faces?" Then we'd have a chance to explain what our principles are.

Thank you for your love for this Fellowship. As long as you have that love, A.A. is going to be okay.

Beth R., past Southwest regional trustee, 1999-2003

Many times we are asked to do this and I think, what am I going to say? A lot of things came to mind this weekend. I came here with some preconceived notions about certain people and events. I am not sure that my feelings about the events have changed a whole lot, yet. My preconceived notions about the people have changed. A young woman said something yesterday about H.O.W.—Honesty, Open-mindedness, and Willingness. That's something that I have been told since I came to this program. H.O.W. It has served me well, as it has for a lot of other people I've met. This weekend has been interesting because this region and these people here have been beautiful to watch in applying the principles of this program. No matter what feelings or questions you had, you did it with grace and dignity, you were honest, open and willing to share in your group's feelings.

Out of my 45 years in the program, I've been in service 43 years, so I've seen a lot. I am so proud of this region. A lot of regions outside of here think that we can be troublemakers—and we can. But we also look for solutions. We have to constantly remind ourselves, and we do, to work the principles of the program. Like my first sponsor, Olga, told me a long time ago, "Your personal program is *not* your service work. Your service work is a separate thing, and only to the rate that you work your personal program to the very best of your ability will determine how good you are in your service work." They aren't the same. Sometimes it's hard or we forget or we use it as an excuse: "I went to a service meeting so I don't have to go to my home group this week." Really? Let's be healthy service people.

Before last night, I only knew of two Class As that had worked the Steps. Jim E. and Linda C. Hearing we had two more was a blessing. I hope any Class As that get recruited in the future have the benefit of somebody like Terry, who brought Kerry in, and helped her see all about us. That's our responsibility. We need to be on the lookout for good Class As. We've needed to do that for years. We have to go back to our groups and districts and areas and build and make them stronger and make them aware of what is going on and what we can do, as individuals, groups, districts and areas. Let's strengthen ourselves; it's not the General Service Office's job. It's our job, we really need to be aware of that and we need to be doing it. The more we do it, the more the Fellowship will be better off today and tomorrow. When Jim E. pulled my name out of the hat, I didn't think it could happen. We had just gotten custody of a four-year-old, I was working full-time, my husband had just retired and it was crazy. I thought, "God knows all that and it ain't going to happen." When I got the phone call, I almost fell on the floor. I believe God had to let that happen to let the Fellowship know that you do not have to be wealthy or retired. You just have to be willing. And was it fun and games? Sometimes. Was it a lot of work? Yes. I had a full-time job, a

four-year-old granddaughter and all kinds of stuff going on. But we made it through and we did it. It wasn't always pleasant.

Someone talked about how he used to think trustees were elevated humans.

My first year as a delegate there were also two trustees who almost had a fight on the floor at the General Service Conference. Right there, that told me they weren't spiritually elite. They were just people and just like us. I'm grateful for this program. I'm grateful my sponsor told me that I could never get out of service—until she told me I could. And she died. She died the year I got elected trustee. What does that tell you? I have the greatest respect for this region—for many reasons—and I hope to have it for years to come.

CLOSING REMARKS

Teresa J., Southwest regional trustee (current)

I was very nervous about this weekend because I didn't know what to expect. There had been some scary things said on a private Facebook group that made me kind of afraid about what might go down this weekend. But the love of A.A., the spirit that exists in this region showed through, and I am grateful for getting to serve as your regional trustee. There is a lot of passion and disagreement; if you put any two alcoholics in a room, you are going to get three opinions. That doesn't surprise me. What I am grateful for is that you came here and were willing to share your ideas and opinions. Passion is a beautiful part of what we have.

I've heard people say they don't like going to area assemblies because of the arguing. I'm like, "Arguing? We don't argue. We have lively discussions!" My very first area assembly helped me get over the hump of believing in a power greater than myself. I met my Higher Power at my first area assembly. I walked in and all I could see was chaos. I saw people having those lively discussions—but I saw them as arguments. I thought some of the things were trivial and it seemed like madness to me. At the end of it, I thought they might be right about one thing: I think God is in charge of A.A., because if God wasn't in charge of it, we would have ruined it a long time ago. I came to believe that there was a Higher Power running A.A. Through committee work, I came to believe that God is expressed through the group conscience. I saw many times, working with a committee, that we would come to a better decision through the committee than if I just took charge and used my right of decision to override (which isn't what "right of decision" means at all). So, I understand the concerns and fears about the turbulence in A.A. over the last nine months. I got elected in the middle of all of it. It doesn't concern me because God is in charge. I know we are in a financial crunch right now but we are going to get through it, because God is in charge. We just have to do the work. Someone asked me earlier, "When is the board going to be

straightened out? We haven't even done the inventory." There is still healing going on from the Fellowship and the board. I'm so proud to be from here and serving this region.

Mike L. Interim General Service Board Chair, (current)

This has been an amazing weekend! My professional background is in organizational management, and I am reminded about organizational development projects that I have worked on over the years. I've thrown out most of the textbook stuff but there was one concept that stuck with me because of A.A. It comes from the Blackfoot Nation. They call it the Breath of Life. Academically, it is referred to as "cultural perpetuity," and it is the understanding that we are here temporarily, but our principles and our culture must survive. And that is what Alcoholics Anonymous is. Years from now, they are going to forget all our names, but there are going to be alcoholics that need the spiritual principles that saved our lives. That is our role; we must keep it available for them. I've got nieces and nephews that are going to need this. I hope that if they get to the point where they need it, there are people like you, like us, who are there to carry it to them. Please channel that enthusiasm and make yourself available for service. It is our spiritual obligation to ensure that A.A. is here for the still suffering alcoholics, wherever and whoever they may be.

The one question my sponsor asked me, when I asked if he would help me, was, "What are you willing to do to stay sober?" I said, "Anything." His response was "Good. I am going to hold you to that." I can verify to all of you that has! Thank you for your participation, comments, and input. I look forward to our paths crossing here in the future.