

WEST CENTRAL REGIONAL FORUM

FINAL REPORT

August 25-27, 2023

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

A.A. World Services, Inc.
c/o General Service Office
P.O. Box 459
Grand Central Station
New York, NY 10163
(212) 870-3120
Fax: (212) 870-3003
E-mail: regionalforums@aa.org
GSO's A.A. Website: www.aa.org

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INTRODUCTION

The 2023 West Central Regional Forum was held on August 25-27, 2023. The total number of attendees was **291**. This included **175** members attending their very first Forum.

Dear A.A. Friends,

Please mark your calendar for the upcoming 2024 Regional Forums:

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.** I'm concerned about the changes in branding the A.A. name. Grapevine has moved to A.A. on the web, GV literature, etc. Secular Alcoholics Anonymous uses A.A. for themselves. Please explain why? Thank you.
- A.** Domain names are regulated and registered on the Internet. Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. (AAWS) owns and protects its copyrighted materials as needed.
- Q.** Why the "interim" General Service Board chair?
- A.** In the period of time between the resignation of former General Service Board chair, Class A Trustee Linda Chezem, and the election of a new chair (following the 73rd General Service Conference (GSC) in April 2024, West Central regional trustee Mike L. was appointed as interim chair.
- Q.** Narcotics Anonymous has a Conference-approved 12 Step study guide. Does A.A. have any plans for a similar piece of literature?
- A.** The AAWS Board does not publish or distribute study guides or workbooks for the Steps, expressing instead over the years the belief that the program of Alcoholics Anonymous offers guidance on working the Steps through sponsorship and meetings. Publishing a Step guide might imply that there is only one valid way of practicing the program.
- Q.** I'd like to know more about the GSB using an outside consulting firm to find and evaluate candidates for the open chair position, especially if you can speak to how much money was used?
- A.** At its July 2023 meeting the General Service Board authorized an increase in the Trustees' Nominating Committee budget, not to exceed \$15,000, for consulting services during the 2024 GSB Chair search. The consultant has agreed to perform all services requested and offered a contract for \$7,500, plus incidentals.
- Q.** How many readers does the Grapevine magazine reach from hand to hand?
- A.** Past research showed that the approximate pass-along rate of a Grapevine magazine is at least 2 ½ people.
- Q.** I recently received an email from a GSO staff member on GSO electronic stationery. The staff signed the message in a signature block style, adding their particular pronoun choice. I think this is in violation of Tradition 10. Is this a new policy? If so, why? This is an outside issue.

A. As you may know, employees of the General Service Office and the AA Grapevine reflect a diverse population including culture, language and gender. In support of that diversity, employees of the GSO and AA Grapevine were given the option of using their preferred gender pronouns in their email signatures. The use of pronouns in email signatures show how the email senders identify themselves and how they would like to be referred to in the third person, while recognizing that the company is inclusive of everyone.

Q. What were the safety concerns that warranted hiring security for GSC Panel 73 at \$5,000 a day? Was spending \$35,000 a good use of Fellowship contributions.

A. The decision to provide security at the 73rd GSC was in response to concerns expressed by several Conference members after learning of multiple alarming and distressing social media posts which threatened the safety of Conference members. The total cost was \$4,800.

Q. Why wasn't Concept 4 upheld at the GSC Panel 73? My understanding is trustees should not vote on activities they are involved in. Why didn't the trustees leave the room on motions related to them being recused?

B. This was an oversight, and an amends was extended.

Q. Is the Plain Language translation of the Big Book a done deal or is there an approval process? Do we still have the option of not doing it? Are we too invested to not go ahead with it?

A. The Plain Language Big Book project is moving toward final presentation to the General Service Conference in April 2024. The project was presented to delegates at the 73rd GSC who overwhelmingly responded positively to the sample sections provided for review. The course of the project will be further determined by the GSC in April 2024.

Q. "At the level of press, radio, & films." May we add "internet" for the needed privacy at in-person meetings? I really miss the anonymity of no tablet or camera in my face while pouring out my heart!

A. In the pamphlet "Understanding Anonymity" this information can be found: [Publicly accessible aspects of the Internet such as websites featuring text, graphics, audio, and video can be considered the same as publishing or broadcasting. Unless password-protected, a website requires the same safeguards that we use at the level of press, radio, and film/video. Simply put, this means that A.A.s do not identify themselves as A.A. members using their full names and/or full-face photos.](#)

It is suggested that when A.A.s gather as A.A.s or as an A.A. group on social media pages and other similar platforms that these pages are set to "private" rather than "public." For

more information on anonymity online, see the A.A. Guidelines on the Internet at www.aa.org, and the October 2010 issue of AA Grapevine on Preserving Anonymity in a Networked World.

Q. How much interest are we accruing on the past due balances on rent, our literature, and warehouses as described in the financial reporting memo from 8/15/23? How far past due are we on rent?

A. So far in 2023 (through August 31) we have paid \$9,788 in interest and late fees on past due invoices. I do not have information on how much of that amount is specifically attributable to rent, literature and warehouses. As of today (September 7), our rent is paid through July 31, so we are past due for the month of August. It's worth noting that this is offset (fully or partially) by the interest earned on the Reserve Fund assets that we did not draw to become current with payables.

Q. What is the current year (2023) and prior 5 years percent of self-support?

A. 2023 (Budget) 57% of op expenses; 2022 Actual 59% of op expenses; 2021 Actual 70.5% of op expenses and 142% of program service expenses; 2020 Actual 94.9% Cost of Program Services; 2019 Actual 69.8% Cost of Program Services; 2018 Actual 73% Cost of Program Services

Q. What's the process to rearrange Regions to make it more equitable as far as delegate count. So, voting on Trustee - at - Large US is a fair vote.

A. There is information in Appendix F (page 108) of the 2021-2023 version of The AA Service Manual regarding forming new/additional delegate areas which may be one approach. There have been previous proposals of this nature. Most recently at the 68th GSC the Conference Committee on Trustees discussed the voting in trustee-at-large/U.S. elections and one possibility discussed was that "the number of delegates voting from each region be equal to the number of delegates in the smallest region, and that the voting delegates in each region be drawn by lot". However, no proposed changes have yet carried at the Conference. Certainly an agenda item could be proposed for possible consideration by the Conference.

Q. Is it a requirement to be an alcoholic and identify as such to be of service in A.A.? If it is a requirement, where does it say so in our literature?

A. Throughout our history, Alcoholics Anonymous has been the beneficiary of incredible service by our awesome nonalcoholic friends. Think of the tireless support from Lois Wilson and Anne Smith. What about the contributions to A.A. by Dr. Silkworth, Sister Ignatia, Rev. Sam Shoemaker, Dr. Carl Jung, Father Ed Dowling, Henrietta Seiberling, Benard Smith, and on, and on? A.A. has been and continues to be blessed by our nonalcoholic friends. The by-laws of the General Service Board specify the number of both alcoholic and nonalcoholic trustees that serve on the board.

Q. What is the status of providing PSAs on streaming services?

A. Research into the feasibility of putting PSAs onto streaming services is ongoing and a progress report will be provided at the Conference Committee on PI at the 74th General Service Conference.

Q. As District DCM during district meetings should I be making motions and stating opinions?

A. In my experience, as a GSR, DCM, or Delegate, it is my responsibility to be a conduit of information and facilitate business meetings. If I have factual information that is relevant to the discussion, it should be shared. My opinion, however, is not really necessary. As a DCM, it's my job to listen to how my District feels and what they think so that I can carry that feedback to the Area business meeting. At the same time, it's my responsibility to encourage the GSRs to do the same from the Groups to District and Area and vice versa. I also refrain from making motions. If there's a piece of business that needs to be addressed, I might ask my own GSR and group to put a motion forward instead of doing it as the DCM. Ultimately, though, each District is autonomous. This question could be presented to the body of the district meeting to decide how that group of people wishes to conduct business.

Q. What changes have they made in the Fifth Edition?

A. There will be new stories in the 5th edition.

Q. I was wondering if it would be possible to publish a "Meeting in a Pocket" little booklet that could be used nationally?

A. Meeting lists are traditionally prepared by local central and intergroup offices.

Q. How do we help the less knowledgeable A.A. people with technology that are feeling alienated by all the advances?

A. "Love and tolerance is our code." When it comes to technology there are people in A.A. with very different capabilities. For those who feel uncomfortable with technology it might be helpful to search out another member who isn't and see if they can help.

Q. For the 2025 International. How long beforehand should members complete the Canadian process to enter the country? Is there anything not found on FAQs that we should know?

A. It is suggested that members who may have challenges entering Canada, begin the process as soon as possible. The FAQ on the aa.org website provides information for the Canadian government contacts who can provide detailed information regarding process and timeline. <https://www.aa.org/international-convention-2025-faqs>

Q. Does anyone have experience with having a group in your district that doesn't have a GSR but still wants information about events, district information, etc.? How do we share that information?

A. The District Committee Member would be a great resource in this case.

Q. Will you be able to share stories from the GV/LV apps with someone who doesn't pay for it? (Sponsees)

A. Yes. You can share it, but once the person receives the share, they have to subscribe to read it.

Q. When is the 5th edition of the Big Book due to come out?

A. We appreciate and share the excitement of the Fellowship about the publication of the Fifth Edition Big Book. There is no current release date scheduled.

Since these phases of development are subject to the process of the collective group conscience of A.A. throughout the U.S./Canada service structure, it is likely to be some time before a release date is announced. While the process might be considered slow on one hand, it is also thorough, and the participation of the collective A.A. membership has proven to be successful for producing literature that is as effective as we can hope to generate. By the closing of the deadline for story solicitation, over 2500 A.A. members have submitted their personal stories of experience, strength, and hope for possible inclusion in the Fifth Edition.

From the overwhelming number of submissions, a broad selection of 100-150 stories will go through the second round of evaluation. The subcommittee looks forward to continuing the story-reading process and other aspects of the development of a draft Fifth Edition and looks forward to presenting a progress report or draft in 2024.

It might be helpful to note that the development of the Fourth Edition Big Book involved four years and that 1222 stories were submitted for that project.

Updates on the process to develop the Fifth Edition will be posted on the What's New section of the A.A. website: <https://www.aa.org/news-and-announcements>, and the quarterly news bulletin about A.A. service, literature, events, sharing from groups, service committees and individual U.S./Canada A.A. members Box 459: <https://www.aa.org/box-459>

Lastly, your area delegate is also a great source of information on this process. To find your Area delegate contact information, you can use the Area Websites section in the A.A. Website, by clicking the link: <https://www.aa.org/list-of-general-service-conference-area-web-sites-uscanada>.

Q. What is the discussion about continuing or discontinuing the Equitable Distribution of Workload?

A. Year two of a three-year pilot was completed. There is one more year to go. At the end of the third year, which will be at the 74th General Service Conference, the 2024 Conference Committee on Policy and Admissions will discuss exactly that. This year, in year two of three, the committee reviewed a progress report. A summary of that review and discussion is below. This document was widely distributed to Conference members, including your region.

"The committee appreciated the improvements made to the joint meetings and the simplification of forms and processes. The committee requested that the trustees' General

Service Conference Committee (TGSCC) explore all possibilities for extending the deadline for submitting Proposed Agenda Items (PAIs) to allow areas more time to consider items at their Fall assemblies. The committee also requested that TGSCC conduct a survey of delegates to find out the effect EDW has had upon their areas, especially related to the submission deadline and the engagement of members and groups in the group conscience process. Finally, the committee requested that TGSCC consider creating a simple video or other communication that would reinforce the idea that PAIs can be submitted year-round, as well as help the Fellowship better understand the role of PAIs as a document to reflect the outcome of a group conscience rather than a petition or suggestion box.”

WORKSHOP REPORTS

Overcoming Barriers to Participation in A.A.

Moderator: Kacie N., Area 40, Montana

Reporter: Lisa C., Area 40, Montana

The group brainstormed a list of about twenty barriers to participation, then collectively decided to focus discussion on four of them:

1. Stigma/ Fear
2. Lack of exposure
3. Negative Experiences
4. Old ideas

Some members described personal experiences with these barriers and how they managed to overcome them. So, they “could come all the way in and sit all the way down” as we say. The group discussed how some of our own behaviors- forming cliques, ignoring/ avoiding those who are different from us in some way, grumbling about things like the Preamble change or the safety card- can become barriers for newcomers. We discussed how other behaviors such as having greeters, offering rides to meetings, welcoming people “home,” holding one another and groups accountable for the climate we create can reduce or remove barriers. It was a great discussion and a great workshop!

Anonymity as the Spiritual Basis of the Traditions

Moderator: Meg H., Area 76, Southern Minnesota

Reporter:

Comments from attendees

- We have to be anonymous among ourselves. Remain anonymous in public (social media, etc.).
- This question is a concern at home group. Member hospitalization d/t surgery, A.A. friends couldn't visit because didn't know the last name. The group decided to use last names periodically. If in public (with family) and see another A.A. member, do not break others' anonymity.
- Sponsor informed sponsee about family members/ kids present at home during visits. Just to be aware of who will see sponsee during A.A. visits.
- Didn't care who knew who I was when I was in trouble, when drinking “I don't care” who knows who I am.
- Dr. Bob literature, grocery store sees sponsor working, sponsor was a professional and stated “we will talk later” then explained later about anonymity and protecting others in public.
- Don't publicly set an example about saying last name. Remember newcomer being afraid of people knowing involvement in A.A.
- Anonymity does not belong to me. Put principles before personalities.

- Open meetings and closed meetings will share last names but will not put last names on the phone list because many people get those. Anonymity breaks on conferences like this - talks on flights, conversations. Provided last name at conferences/ workshops when people have same first name.
- At the level- not below or above press, radio, film has choice (Dr. Bob) to disclose. Protect others' anonymity. Cognizant of what you write / post, do not involve others in recovery. Concern because of pandemic. Careful with using last name at podium because it's being recorded. Be thoughtful.
- "I don't want any light shining on me." I am not afraid of saying my last name but careful not to promote myself. Hybrid meetings don't know who's out there and are a concern for groups.
- How I conduct myself in closed meetings is in the spirit of humility and modesty? Tradition 1- our common welfare, am I being mindful? A good inventory question.
- Tradition 12- "anonymity is real humility at work." Give up natural desires and take part in unity. Anonymity is the greatest safeguard we will ever have.
- Our purpose to be here is to be alcohol free. Not a big deal to say my first name.
- Speaker meetings- probation officer called looking for individual. Next week the person sent to prison; the person answering said that the individual is not there, member didn't know last name to confirm presence at meeting.
- Anonymity always changes. At first, I didn't want to be here, but now I don't care. Every situation is different. Always protect others' anonymity.
- Story of Bobby B.- Shared first and last name with everyone, very forthright with prohibition issues. Bil got involved- kept even temper. "The daily Jug"- person got drunk. I get to determine my own anonymity. It took time and explanation to learn about anonymity.
- Giving A.A. a bad name of being known in community then getting drunk again.

GSRs: How do we get home group members involved in the big picture?

Moderator: Mary M., Area 36, Wyoming

Reporter: --

- Traveling meetings / shut up and get in the car, express, and talk about the positive things that happen at these meetings. Ask the different groups to do little service jobs around the community.
- Sponsorship and home group, get a service sponsor, have business meetings, have a GSR, identify it's not *they* and *them*, it's *we* and *us*. Teach the Three Legacies of A.A., set requirements to be a sponsee. Just ask people in person to serve.
- Controversial topics.
- GSO agenda items, meet separately to form an opinion about items to be discussed.
- Lead by example. Show them that we do this for fun and for free, bring a newcomer with you to service events, have enthusiasm to serve, share about your experience of serving, start newcomers in service with small tasks for the group.

- Inviting newcomers to come along, spending time after the meeting greeting them plugged in, to business meetings. Find a way to get them interested by the way you ask them to come along.

Ways to Make General Service Accessible

Moderator: Rachel M., Area 52, North Dakota

Reporter: Janet D., Area 52, North Dakota

QUESTIONS

- 1. How can groups solve problems with attendance/participation in service at District level? What are other ways to encourage participation in general service, outside of sponsorship?**
 - Holding district zoom meetings has worked.
 - District reps visit/bring food to groups and network with members; share the spirit of service.
 - Create the same type of camaraderie at District meetings as at group meetings/bring enthusiasm for general service.
 - Members learn together about the service structure and the various positions.
 - Help members in new service positions to gain confidence in their new positions.
 - Build relations with sponsees and GSRs by email, text about meetings and events; get phone numbers.
 - Invite members to service events.
 - Invent group/meeting activities to make it more fun and encourage attendance.
- 2. What information could be provided to members about general service?**
 - Explain the service structure to members; clarify the various service positions.
 - Give highlights of service conference agenda items to meetings; don't overwhelm; have more detailed background information ready if members have questions.
 - Groups review GSC "hot topics" for a more informed vote at Area service conference.
 - At District meetings, assign agenda items to GSRs to discuss at groups.
 - Read service event flyers at meetings and explain what it's all about.
- 3. What are the deterrents that discourage participation in general service?**
 - Zooming was an obstacle during the pandemic in rural areas due to bandwidth/technical issues.
 - Cost- small groups within large Areas lack finances to send their GSRs to Area Assemblies.
 - Distance to travel to events.
 - Lack of handicapped accessibility at some locations.

- Short turn-around time to funnel GSC agenda items through group/district/area levels before conference; need to announce and pre-plan discussions according to meeting schedules.
- Service structure perceived as “politics” by some, lack of information.
- Consensus: Main deterrents seem to be lack of communication and cost/distance to travel.

PRESENTATIONS

Experience from a Pandemic --- Julie S., Area 24, Iowa

Before, During, After

Good morning family. I am Julie S., Area 24/Panel 73 Delegate. I would like to begin with a disclaimer that these are experiences as viewed through as broad a perspective as I can manage, but it is a midwestern lens none-the-less and am very aware there are many in this room who suffered demographic, cultural, economic, and very personal trauma and loss due to the pandemic before, during and after. I pray this presentation is sensitive to those traumas and losses.

This is a hindsight talk and not the talk I would have given in the early or middle parts of the worst of the pandemic. My life is A.A., though I work in healthcare and academics, so I experienced the pandemic from those angles as well. As alcoholics, we seem to do our best work when stripped of the delusion that we have power over reality. I remain duly impressed with the speed at which A.A. responded. We, who will never be broadly known for rapid action, moved A.A. groups, District meetings, and Area Assemblies online in a matter of days. Area 24 held our first virtual Area Assembly in March of 2020 with 2 weeks to prep and few people to manage, and honestly, it went well. We had orientation to the virtual platform used, tutelage on voting, breakout rooms for workshops, greeters to welcome and assign names, all of which is second nature now, but was new and awkward at the time. We truly moved with greater decisiveness and clarity in many ways than the hospitals and schools. As city, county, state and national guidelines and laws changed and then changed again and again and again, we became reluctant experts and champions of those guidelines (for the most part) and continued to find innovative ways to meet with each other. Hybrid and online meetings substituted for those groups whose meeting places were closed or restricted. Meetings were held in parks and parking lots with a laptop added to make it hybrid. Some meetings were able to stay in person with distancing. We got back together, separated, then got back together again, like an unhealthy relationship of sorts... Treatment Centers worked with us to bring our meetings in virtually. Participation was excellent, and we were able to tap into new A.A. members to participate and BTG and sponsor. Corrections took a hit. We were not able to get into most facilities and are recently just re-establishing there. We learned to meet with sponsees by phone, online, or in the parks. We ventured out onto new online meetings and met lifelong friends who joined our meetings and stayed from many states and countries including Canada, Australia, Sweden, Japan, Ukraine, New Zealand, Germany and Greenland. My homegroup now has pandemic "leftovers" from all coasts and Canada and I joined and keep a regular weekly meeting in Richmond, VA. Access to speakers was/is incredible. Once again, being passengers on a sinking ship it seemed, brought us together, but would not have held us as we are now

joined. My program really hit points of development and spiritual growth first due to necessity and desperation and then desire. I know I was not alone.

We squabbled over masks, distancing, hand sanitizers (alcohol-free!), who made who sick, what events to keep, put online, or cancel. We complained about everything, judged each other harshly, and feared the worst. We grieved the loss of the International Convention in Detroit. We saw our Delegates navigate and shoulder the difficulties and disappointment of a virtual General Service Conference. We grieved for the world and our country. We grieved the lost friends, family, and groups. We grieve for friends who still suffer from long-Covid and others who relapsed and who have not been back. We were taken into new levels and areas of powerlessness, which demanded a surrendered dependence on God. (Or live in that well-known suffering of self-reliance.)

I had to be on guard for my inner introvert's proclivity for taking advantage of opportunities to be asocial and have compassion for the pain the isolation was causing my extroverted friends. I learned (on my better days) to hold space (and tension) between safety and freedom, individual and common good, and tradition and innovation. Always feeling like we were shifting between very distinct and separate realities, and learning in fact, it is all one reality. As recovered alcoholics, we still had one common purpose. We still had one common solution. The sinking ship may have had a different name, but the solution was the same. Trust God. Clean House. Help Others.

Making Structure in A.A. --- Steve L., Area 35, North Minnesota

Good morning, ladies, and gentlemen,

I'm Steve L., an alcoholic and privileged to serve as the Panel 72 Delegate from Northern Minnesota, Area 35.

This is one of the few times I can give my opinion and not get my head chewed, I can't speak for A.A. as a whole, so anything I say is my own opinion. My topic this morning is "Making Structure in A.A." It's important to let all members know how they fit into the decision, and what a privilege it is to have a voice in the future of A.A.

People in A.A. are told all the time that the group has the final say in A.A. affairs. Bill states in "Our Great Responsibility" on page 64, "I think that we have developed almost a fetish that there is some terrific infallibility in the group conscience, and I would like to modify it to this extent: that when the group conscience is thoroughly informed, and when experience backs a decision or conclusion it has reached, and when it isn't too mad or too fearful, it can be (and almost always is) supremely wise as to the best interest of Alcoholics Anonymous."

Some of the General Service Conference post reports I have given have been a little contentious. People at my post report meetings have been complaining how the New York Office has made changes to the 12x12, the Preamble, and started work on the "plain and

simple translation of the BB”, while under the cover of darkness, in the middle of the night, and without the groups OK. I tried to explain to them these issues had been discussed for several years out in the open at Assemblies. When they pushed back by asking, “Don’t the groups have the final say in A.A. affairs?” I asked one question, “Did your group have an active GSR that attended Assemblies, District Meetings, and Meetings on Proposed Agenda Items then report back to their group on what was happening in Alcoholics Anonymous?” People quieted down after that.

Bill was a big fan of democracy. He expresses this in his essays on Traditions and in the Concepts. He mentions this in letters to Father Dowling. To me, this means that everyone is equal in A.A., whether you are sober 33 years or 2 weeks, have a service position like Trustee, Area officer, GSR or staff at the GSO, or no position at all. Everyone has an equal voice in Alcoholics Anonymous. The way we express our voice is through the A.A. service structure. In the perfect vision of A.A. all groups would have a GSR and send them to District and Area Meetings. Information between the groups and GSB/GSO would flow back and forth effectively. The GSB/GSO would know what the groups were thinking, and the groups would know what the GSB/GSO was doing. All would be swell. Just what does the voice in A.A. look like today? Let’s look at a few examples:

We have an A.A. member Jack D., and Jack D. attends different A.A. meetings, but doesn’t have a homegroup. Jack D. doesn’t think a homegroup is necessary because he is not really a joiner. Jack D. hears at meetings, “take what you want and leave the rest.” So, Jack D. remains on the fringes of A.A. because he leaves the rest.

John B. has a home group, but the group doesn’t have a GSR, the group has many opinions about what is happening in A.A., but only with hearsay information. John B.’s group is only concerned with what happens in their meeting because they think that what happens at the GSO way off in New York, their District or Area doesn’t affect their group, but the group members are abuzz about what to bring to the group picnic being held next month.

Sherry is a GSR. Her group believes it’s important to have an informed group conscious. The group gets informed by sending their GSR to District meetings and Area Assemblies. Sherry’s group hears about 12th Step opportunities at the district meetings and hears about topics that might be discussed at the GSC from the Delegate at Assemblies, Sherry brings this information back to her group where they have discussions on the topics and express their voice by voting on these subjects. Once her group’s voice is decided, Sherry brings the group conscious back to their District or Assembly meetings and expresses her group’s voice by joining in on the discussions and by voting.

From my vantage point, less than a quarter of A.A. members have any input or voice in the goings-on of Alcoholics Anonymous. We have many members who don’t understand the Traditions they think they are just a boring history lesson, which they think does not apply today. We have lots of A.A. members who think the service structure is nothing but A.A. politics. That is why Bill felt the need to write “A.A. Comes of Age” so when we become

sidetracked, Bill documented the necessity of having a Conference (hence the need for the service structure).

Bill fought tooth and nail to get the Conference structure in A.A. Bill wanted A.A. services that help promote 12-Step work to continue when he and Bob passed. Services that groups couldn't do alone but wanted, services like answering correspondence and phone calls about A.A., publishing books, also help groups find solutions to difficulties. Groups sent money to New York to support these services. The other side of the coin is that the GSB needed to hear what the group conscious of A.A. as a whole wanted, so they could keep providing these services and account for the money spent, not a willy-nilly ineffective voice from the groups or authoritative directions from New York, either one could produce chaos in A.A.

Our service structure is as indispensable as the Steps. If we don't implement the Steps into our lives, we get drunk and die. If our groups don't follow the Traditions, A.A. loses its singleness of purpose and ability to be a spiritual entity. If groups ignore the service structure, the danger is that a few will be deciding for the many what is best for A.A. If we lose sight of all these principles, groups will become isolated, A.A. will eventually perish, we will go the way of the Washingtonians, and drunks will be alone again. It is the informed, group conscious and our trusted servants working in unison that makes A.A. work, so we can carry hope to the suffering alcoholic in every hamlet, our message of recovery from alcoholism.

Leadership a Vital Need --- Cara G., Area 41, Nebraska

Leadership:

What is leadership? Why is it important? Why do we need it in Alcoholics Anonymous? Well, leadership -- the Webster's Dictionary definition -- is the capacity to lead and the act or instance of leading. Dwight Eisenhower said leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because they want to do it. The Service Manual, in Concept 9 describes leadership in an essay Bill wrote: "A leader in A.A. service is therefore a person who can personally put principles, plans, and policies into such dedicated and effective action that the rest of us want to back them up and help them with their job." So, in essence leadership is all A.A. is about. We are constantly trying our best to lead in a way that we are not bossing or dictating to a newcomer or a friend but showing them that doing uncomfortable work is worth it.

When I take a newcomer through the Steps, I never balk because I know it will be uncomfortable to talk to them about a higher power, because I know in my heart of hearts it works. When I walk with someone through service, I do not lie to them and tell them "It's always fun! We eat ice cream, tell jokes, and agree on absolutely everything!" No, I tell them it's cool because you get to meet some amazing people, see how big A.A. truly is and watch the Traditions and Concepts come to life. Not quite as effective as ice cream, but it's honest. SO why do we need it in Alcoholics Anonymous?? Because we need a steady stream of

able leaders to continue to replenish the well. We are how this continues. How am I effectively carrying leadership into my affairs?

Good leadership never passes the buck. That means I must stand up and say the hard things, even when it won't make me popular. That means I must bring up that point that will cause three more votes and make us late for lunch, because what we're about to do is neglect a major inconsistency that will cause problems down the road. Because as a leader we are here to serve the greater whole, not my ego. My ego tells me being a people-pleaser and always being the favorite is the best way to lead. Holding firm boundaries, taking accountability for my actions, and holding others accountable, that's what makes a strong leader.

Leadership is something we can do with integrity. A good leader should behave the same on the dais as they do behind a computer screen. Leadership does not involve keyboard warriors on social media or anonymous emails with threatening undertones. Leadership is taking the group conscience and adopting it as my own, even if I didn't vote for it. This means I stand behind and argue in defense of things I maybe didn't always agree with. This means putting my feelings and ego aside to be a voice for the body. It also means showing up when we are asked to; and even doing what we're asked to do while we're there.

As leaders we get to make our service positions look attractive and fulfilling, we get to include people to be a part of the journey. We never treat people like they don't belong, because the moment we exclude, we may be banishing the future voice that helps hold us together. We get the opportunity to serve this Fellowship and why would we want to keep that from anyone? I found as I came through service people saying things like "it's an officer thing, you wouldn't understand" or "maybe someday you'll understand" and that is a great way to discourage future leaders. When someone doesn't understand, my job as a leader is to teach. I get to offer guidance even to the point of annoyance. I have learned that stopping and slowing down is one of the greatest things I can do to help include the god-conscience in my words and actions.

So, am I a perfect leader? Absolutely not. None of us are. But I get to improve every day, and I get to continue to improve. As leaders, alcoholics, and humans, remaining teachable, open and willing is the best action I can take today. I have no authority really to speak on this topic, just picked it out of a list because I thought it was important. This last year in service has taught me the importance of attraction rather than promotion and how much we all have to do with that.

So, is leadership important? Do we need it in A.A.? Do we need it in service? I'd love to hear your thoughts.

As always thank you for the opportunity to serve.

Bringing Newcomers into Service --- Katie B., Area 63, South Dakota

In March of 2008 I was 7 months sober, 7 months pregnant, broke as a joke, quite lost in the world searching for something to do that didn't involve my old friends and didn't involve being around alcohol. I heard it announced at meetings for several weeks that "they" were going to Fargo, ND for a Conference. I didn't know what a Conference was, so I assumed it was like a round-up and they talked a lot about roundups and all the fun they had with dancing and ice cream and speakers and fellowship. I asked this lady, who scared the daylight out of me, about how much it would cost to go and if I could ride along. She said she wasn't sure on how much, but we could work it out, and they were carpooling and sharing a room, I was welcome to join them. So, for no logical reason that I can come up with, with very little money to my name, praying my rent check I dropped off before I left wasn't going to bounce after the weekend, and a carful of women I didn't really know.... I went. Six women slept in one double queen room, two per bed and two on one roll away (being pregnant is the only reason I wasn't one of the lucky two on the roll away). I survived the hospitality suite and found out two of the ladies were past delegates and... they snored. I kept waiting for the A.A. dance and the exciting speakers, but that's not where I was. I had arrived at the West Central Regional Alcoholics Anonymous Service Conference. I didn't understand what they were talking about. I didn't understand what they were doing. Why was that short lady from Minnesota so angry and why was that guy in the Bill Cosby sweater crying and who are these people on the dais? The scary lady who I had asked to come sat next to me, so did the even scarier lady. Both blonde, both past delegates, both stone faced, both silent. Silent until I asked a question: "Um, what exactly are they doing?" They looked at me, I swear upon all things holy, there was one of those Disney twinkles in their eyes and they started very simply, explaining what was being discussed. Some things they said not to worry about right now, others they gave me some history on, and a few items they explained why it was important. On break that first night I saw a familiar face from local meetings, it was my friend Jesse and evidently, he was our DCM, whatever that was. He reached into his bag and handed me a book with a big smile on his face. He said, "welcome to service.". He had handed me my first Service Manual.

By the time that Service Conference ended in March of 2008 I still didn't have a complete picture of what service was, but I saw those people on the dais, I saw the people in the seats and at the mics. I wanted what they had. The kind of scary lady was evidently sponsored by the really scary lady, and they became my sponsor and grand sponsor eventually. I was encouraged to go to my home group's group conscience meeting, and I was welcomed to attend our next district meeting. I didn't attend the Area Conference right away...they told me giving birth was an acceptable excuse to miss. That was the last time I missed an area event.

I've heard of people being told and railroaded and elected in absence, and I'll make the point-blank statement that is probably not the best way to bring a newcomer into service and

have them stay. What is the best way? I have no freaking idea, but I can tell you, my experience. I was invited. After I was invited, I was given a seat at the table. I listened while you taught me to listen. You were patient with me while I was impatient. You were humble when I couldn't even spell the word. You didn't kick me out when I made mistakes, you didn't ridicule, belittle, or laugh either.

I was taught that Traditions weren't just words read at the end of a meeting. You talked about them, questioned them, discussed them, and showed me what they look like both in practice and when ignored. You showed me sincere disagreements and debates in business meetings followed by ice cream, coffee and hugs. I had never seen that. Who were you people?! You didn't ask too much of me, you didn't ask too little. You let me experience severe frustration and helped me work through it when I asked for help. You allowed me to progress, smiled past the imperfections. You smiled when I felt the complete joy of being a trusted servant. You brought me in by being kind, patient, principled and steady.

I would like to close with a story I heard on the Grapevine podcast, because I think it defines how to usher a newcomer into service: A little girl was the daughter of two A.A.s. She went to a parochial school even though her parents didn't take her to or affiliate with any particular church. She got an assignment to write what her church was and the top 3 things it had taught her. When the girl told her mother about the assignment the mother said she was so sorry she hadn't raised her in a church, and what was the girl going to do. The child handed her mother her essay and it read "I was raised in Alcoholics Anonymous, and the top 3 things I have learned are:

- 1) Everybody gets a seat at the table.
- 2) Everybody deserves a second chance and
- 3) We're here to take care of each other.

PAST TRUSTEES SHARING

Ken B., past trustee, 2008-2012

A dozen or more years ago, a Class “A” suggested during a conversation among board members that A.A. ought to begin planning for our centennial. It struck me as too far off and a bit promotional. “There is never need to praise ourselves. We feel it better to let our friends recommend us,” came to mind from Tradition 11.

But, years later I reflected on Bernard Smith’s thinking found in *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* (p. 280) which reads, “we are granted the use of this legacy (of Service) for our lifetime upon the condition that we will not only look after it but increase its spiritual content for the generations that will follow us.” Smith tells us to “pass it on to the next generation with an enriched spiritual content.”

In recent history “enriched spiritual content” has meant editing of Bill and developing control mechanisms. Contrary to Tradition 10, outside issues and social concerns have driven our decision-making.

In the case of the General Service Conference, in 2016 censorship of Bill took place by removing two paragraphs of his Concept XI essay. Interestingly, those paragraphs describe interpersonal connections and “good working relationships.” In 2021 the Conference edited or censored Bill’s essays on Steps 6 and 12.

The General Service Office in 2017 produced the Service Material on Safety: SMF-209. Just this year the GSC continued to discuss this document in its many iterations. How many pages does it take to say, “We welcome all” (Tradition 3) and “It’s okay to call police if a crime is being committed”?

The General Service Board in 2019 introduced a Code of Conduct. That document even contains a Confidentiality Statement which includes a "Procedures" section on “how conduct that may violate the Code may be reported, investigated and resolved.” Remember when Bill wrote in the Big Book (p. 84) that, “Love and tolerance is our code”?

A famous long-time friend of Bill W. called him “the greatest social architect” of the twentieth century. We know our society was built on spiritual principles. But presently, Areas—some within our Region—are caught up in in-fighting/disharmony: what Bill in his Concept IV essay (p. C14) termed “demoralizing nonsense.” Since January of this year, the GSB has caused two vacancies through self-inflicted wounds.

Now it is less than a dozen years until 2035 and our 100th Anniversary. Our next generation of leadership is already within our rooms (including this one this weekend).

Might we honor and celebrate our century mark by committing ourselves to enriching our spiritual content?

Thank you.

CLOSING REMARKS

Kerry Meyer

I would like to thank the host committee and volunteers for all of your service this weekend. Thank you to all the attendees who spent a beautiful summer weekend in the hotel. I hope you found it to be time well spent and are reinvigorated to service. Thank you everyone who shared meals and conversations in the hallways. Please remember to take the literature from the displays in the foyer.

Bob W., Current General Manager

I want to mention the trust I have felt building here throughout this weekend. In fact we've all heard it expressed. I feel your support. I want you to know that I am here, and we all are here to support you so you can do the important work you and your groups do to carry the message!

One thing that often comes to mind at Forums is the massive amount of clarification that happens. I feel this is important for all of us to remember when we find ourselves forming conclusions before we have that clarity.

Another thing that renews my spirit here is witnessing how we respect our differences of opinion. At the end of the day "we always come together and respect our structure and the General Service Conference.

I would like to close this talk with these words from a Tim McGraw song:

"Don't take for granted the love this life gives you.
When you get where you're going don't forget turn back around
And help the next one in line.
Always stay humble and kind."

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.