

SOUTHWEST REGIONAL FORUM

FINAL REPORT

October 11~13, 2019

Houston, TX

LAST NAMES OF CLASS A (NON-ALCOHOLIC) TRUSTEES
AND NON-ALCOHOLIC EMPLOYEES ONLY APPEAR IN THIS REPORT

Dear A.A. Friends,

Please mark your calendar for the next Southwest Regional Forum, which will take place in El Paso, TX on the weekend of October 8-10, 2021 at the Radisson El Paso Airport Hotel.

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INTRODUCTION

The 2019 Southwest Regional Forum was held in Houston, TX. Registration for the Forum was **443**. This included **218** members attending their very first Forum—many were welcomed at the Forum Orientation on Friday evening. In addition, the Southwest Regional Forum marked the **214th** Regional Forum since their inception in 1975.

DELEGATE PRESENTATIONS

Tomorrow's World — Courage to Be Vigilant

Scott M., Delegate Panel 69, Area 10 Colorado

A former chair of the General Service Board, Terry Bedient, commented that our Fellowship is blessed with an unlimited number of opportunities cleverly disguised as insurmountable problems. That has never been truer as we look to the future.

Alcoholics Anonymous is seemingly beset on all sides by challenges to who we are and how we operate. Being unabashedly unique, it is difficult for us to exist in a society that desires to label and categorize everything for convenience and certainty. The world we live in fully suffers from the delusion that it can wrest satisfaction and happiness out of life if only it manages well.

As a society we are confounded by our relations to the world around us. Courts send us potential members while also wrestling with whether we are religious or not. The medical community, wanting evidence-based studies to support what they do, question the efficacy of referrals to A.A., where there are no double-blind peer-reviewed studies proving the phrase "Rarely have we seen a person fail ..." Federal law requiring insurance coverage for alcohol rehabilitation has spurred the growth of an industry that will seemingly overwhelm us. Social media commentators submit that A.A. cannot address its issues of anonymity and safety with its currently unorganized non-structure. And finally, but not exhaustively, banks, regulators, governments and the like have difficulty dealing with an organization that does not neatly fit into one of their predefined categories.

We, too, as a society feel the pressure to conform. It would be so much easier if we just adjust ourselves to fit into this predefined world. Rightly so, we look to others who share broad common goals to learn what works and doesn't work for them with the hope that we can emulate their successes and avoid their failures. We feel the pressure to compete with those around us lest we fade into obscurity. We are compelled to adopt principles and procedures used by others, believing this modern world demands it.

Certainly, amongst all of this are those things that we have no choice but to follow. Our principle of anonymity must give way to the Internal Revenue Code. Banking regulations impose new and difficult obligations on groups with limited treasuries. But it is here that we must find the courage to be vigilant. We must honestly and squarely ask, are we required to conform, or is it just easier? Are we doing this because it is best? Or are we doing this because everyone else is? Are we taking the advice of our consultants blindly, or are we rigorously testing the advice against our time-tested principles? Are we simply being expedient?

This is not a new challenge.

As Bill W. stated in a 1950 Grapevine article, "Our Traditions are set down on paper. But they were written first in our hearts. For each of us knows, instinctively I think, that AA is not ours to do with as we please. We are but caretakers to preserve the spiritual quality of our Fellowship; keep it whole for those who will come after us and have need of what has so generously been given to us.

"We learned our lesson about money early. We feared organization lest we solidify and destroy ourselves as a *movement!* At the same time we faced the moral and humane obligation to make our program instantly available to all who asked for it. And they came in ever increasing numbers." ("AA Is Not Big Business," Grapevine, November 1950)

Let us look at an example of how this might come up. Let's say an area knows that other, similar organizations embrace an obligation to safeguard the funds entrusted to them. They know that these organizations often purchase a bond to ensure that if someone caring for the money walks away with it, the bonding company will cover the loss. This would appear to be a prudent effort and quite appropriate considering our Fellowship has many examples of treasurers raiding the treasury. Furthermore, this will guarantee that the area has resources to continue to help groups carry the message — a laudable A.A. purpose.

Vigilance now requires a deeper examination into this plan. Most, if not all, of these policies require a background check of the individual to be bonded. I, for one, could never pass muster. When I was running for treasurer of my area, in my not-too-distant past I had taken money

out of my lawyer's trust account. I was disbarred. This was a fact that a bonding company certainly would have uncovered and would have used to declare me too great a risk for a bond.

Our Ninth Concept provides that, "Good service leaders, together with sound and appropriate methods of choosing them, are at all levels indispensable for our future functioning and safety." Combined with our Second Tradition, which mandates that we have only one ultimate authority — a loving God as he expresses himself in our group conscience — we now have a conflict. Those good service leaders who might wish to run are now unwilling due to the risk of shame and humiliation if they can't be bonded. Secondly, we now have an additional authority: the underwriting requirements of our bonding company.

Next, let's suppose that our bonded treasurer does what is unfortunately not rare enough: they get drunk and run off with the money. Another provision of these policies requires that criminal charges be brought to make a claim against the policy. Now we are required to report our errant treasurer. This has been traditionally against our principles. Our Twelfth Concept's Fifth Warranty provides that we should never be personally punitive. We allow God to discipline the individual with the threat of an alcoholic death. There is no reason for us to get involved. Again, we have exchanged God in our group conscience for the provisions of an insurance policy. We have to ask, have we not gone fundamentally against who and what we really are?

In the end, this desire to provide financial certainty is understandable. However, I have learned that in my personal program of recovery, I have to constantly examine my motives. Am I driven by fear, or am I inspired by love? In my area, we have purchased a broad form liability policy to cover us from potential lawsuits brought by someone injured at area-sponsored events, such as the state convention. At first blush, it seems we have procured insurance to protect our treasury just as above. However, we made a conscious declaration that the purpose of this insurance was to be certain that we had the resources to make right any harm we caused. This is something we couldn't do without the insurance. It is an act of love rather than fear. Buying insurance in that instance is in alignment with who we are; it is in support of our principles.

I am not saying areas or the General Service Office should decide one way or another. Each has to evaluate the circumstances according to their own conscience. I am only suggesting that these factors need to be considered if we are really remaining vigilant.

We face many such issues as the world around us continues to try to force us into submission to uniformity. With “best practices,” industry standards and an increasingly complicated legal environment, it is difficult for us to consider each and decide which of these are things we are required to follow, which of these we want to follow and which of these we can’t follow. We are apt to simply follow the advice of our experts and leave it there.

We are confronted by the Internet and social media, which make us feel smaller and ever more isolated. Overwhelmed by legal and regulatory obligations that restrict our activities and principles, we want to surrender rather than look for the spiritually inspired solution. Feeling defeated by a new societal trend away from joining organizations and toward isolating in social media, we look for a way to overcome the tide, sometimes risking the very heart of who we are: one alcoholic talking to another.

Each of these opportunities requires courageous vigilance — the vigilance to constantly watch what we are doing, always asking ourselves what is our real motive in doing this. It also requires great courage to be willing to stand up to the tide of change. Sometimes the change simply isn’t for us. We must also be constantly watchful for that opportunity to do better and not shy away from it simply because it is new or different.

A Bill concluded back in 1950, “Yes, we’ve had need of money and we’ve had to provide services. But we’ve resolved never to allow either money or the management of our necessary affairs to obscure our spiritual aims. The same loving God whose divine wisdom has shown us that one desperate and shaky drunk, fumbling for a nickel to call for help, looms larger than any ‘organization’ we shall ever have, or need!” (“AA Is Not Big Business,” Grapevine, November 1950)

A.A. Groups: The Heartbeat of A.A.'s Structure

Christina P., Delegate Panel 69, Area 65 Northeast Texas

I can remember becoming so lost and lonely as a practicing alcoholic, so very tired of running away from my ever-growing list of problems and responsibilities, my shame and despair, or my countless, unnamable fears. It was a dark period indeed. I no longer felt comfortable anywhere I went, whether it was out with my drinking buddies, into my delusional mind or hiding away from my husband down in the basement of our beautiful home. I had lost my mother, my father and one of my brothers to the disease of alcoholism — a disease I couldn't comprehend or know that I had. And even though my husband's family completely enveloped me with their love and support, it was never good enough. Little did I know that, by surrendering to my powerlessness over alcohol and seeking help through Alcoholics Anonymous, I was to eventually find both a comforting "home" in a group and a "family" among a bunch of loving, welcoming drunks.

So, what is a "home group"? The term likely became familiar in the early days of Alcoholics Anonymous, when alcoholics would gather in someone's home once a week in their hometown and then get together in a car and drive to a meeting in other towns throughout the week for more shared experience, support and fellowship. I've heard many a longtimer fondly reminisce about these road trips with fellow group members and how important they were in early sobriety that they became a "captured audience." This was and still is a great opportunity for the newcomer to get to know, identify with and gradually trust others in recovery, so that they might begin to get real and honestly share their feelings, problems and struggles in their life.

Tradition One states, "Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity." I now have a better understanding of "common welfare" and "unity" by the many teachings and examples from members of my home groups. It was in those groups that I had a growing awareness as described by Bill when he stated in *The Language of the Heart*, "I saw that I had been living too much alone, too much aloof from my fellows, and too deaf to that voice within." It was also where I began to feel a part of by being asked to take on the responsibilities and privileges of opening up, making coffee, cleaning the bathrooms, buying supplies, greeting the newcomer and giving rides to and from meetings. It was where I found

my sponsors and many of my sponsees, heard shared experience filled with hope and living solutions embodied by the spiritual principles of our Steps and Traditions.

“The A.A. Group” pamphlet states that, “the concept of the home group has still remained the strongest bond between the A.A. member and the Fellowship.” It goes on to say that with group “membership comes a right to vote on issues that might affect the group and might also affect A.A. as a whole — a process that forms the very cornerstone of A.A.’s service structure.” Over the years most of us have seen Conference Advisory Actions that were agenda items initiated and submitted by an informed group conscience sometimes passed on by the G.S.R. and then endorsed by the group’s district or area. As a Panel 69 delegate, I count on feedback and inquiries from as many group members as possible regarding the final agenda items or other concerns for a collective area conscience. Sadly, there is a large percentage of groups whose heartbeats or voices are not heard. Over the years I have seen many inquisitive and enthusiastic newcomers to our general service structure be discouraged or frustrated by a “well-meaning” oldtimer or an uninformed, apathetic group who chooses to operate on only one of our Three Legacies, possibly remaining ineffective in carrying the message and likely isolated from A.A. as a whole because “this is how we’ve always done it.”

How can we better serve our home groups? Technologically, A.A.W.S. and the G.S.O. have been through a major conversion/transition to a consolidated E.R.P. system utilizing NetSuite. There has also been continued development and updating of our Comprehensive Media Plan, including messaging and media platforms. We have seen the Meeting Guide newly updated and rebranded as an A.A.W.S. app, a tool that has been further enhanced with messaging and the addition of *Daily Reflections* quotes. These and many other projects are keeping our communications strategy team very busy exploring better ways to have information about us available to prospective members and newcomers, which are the lifeblood of our Fellowship.

Our Responsibility Statement says, “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.” Too many of us are sitting in our home groups and relying on the suffering alcoholic to come to us. I say let’s round up a bunch, get in the car and go visit and support the outlying silent groups or remote communities of alcoholics by reaching out to *them* with a warm handshake or a hug,

offering any help they may need while extending invitations to attend or have helpful workshops and come to district meetings or area assemblies.

Personally, I am one who can get so wrapped up in filling my calendar with service responsibilities and events, and I have found myself straying a bit too far from our Legacy of Recovery. I can always count on reconnecting with the God of my understanding and my primary purpose by going home to my A.A. family, a place for which I never knew I was looking for my whole life.

Let me end by quoting Bill with a passage from *The Language of the Heart*: “Each AA group is a safe haven. But it is always circumscribed by the tyrant alcohol. Like the men on Eddie Rickenbacker’s raft, we who live in the haven of AA cling together with an intensity of purpose which the outside world seldom comprehends. The anarchy of the individual melts away. Self-love subsides and democracy becomes a reality. We begin to know true freedom of the spirit. The awareness grows that all is well; that each of us may implicitly trust in him who is our loving guide from within — and from above.” What a privilege it is to be a member of my home group!

The Only Requirement ...

Brad M., Delegate Panel 69, Area 04 Arkansas

Hello, everyone. I am glad you are here. My name is Brad M., and I am currently serving you as the Panel 69 delegate for Area 04 Arkansas.

Thank you to the members here today for making the commitment to attend the 2019 Southwest Regional Forum. Your attendance and participation in the scheduled events this weekend are illustrations of the unconditional love we have for the alcoholic who is in desperate need of what we have been freely given. I am sure there are alcoholics within walking distance of this facility who continue to be loyal subjects of “King Alcohol,” as they have not found the “lifeboat of recovery.” They are the reason we are here, and it is my privilege to be here with you.

But enough of that pink-cloud stuff; I am an alcoholic trying to save my life. I was firmly told (it was not suggested) to say yes to every reasonable request from A.A. That is why I am “on the dais” in front of you today — not as an expert, but as a student of our thirty-six spiritual principles. A flawed student that suffers from sloth and procrastination.

Therefore, I offer to you this essay entitled, “The Only Requirement ...”

As I stand here in Houston today, I am convinced that there are no new controversies in A.A.; we simply recycle them, problems that have long since been resolved with our persistent hammering on the anvil of experience. We seem childishly determined on forming these stale controversies into a curvahedra, or a sphere that never ends. What I learned from my original home group remains true today: “There are only two kinds of alcoholics: those that drink and those that don’t.”

The Three Legacies of A.A. are safe harbors from the perils of our uniqueness. When we walk into the rooms of A.A., we are offered complete freedom from the limitations of our gender, ethnicity, religion, political affiliation, sexual preference, etc., etc., ad infinitum. Simply put, there are no second-class members in A.A. There is no better illustration of this fact than the story found on pages 141 and 142 of the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. This account of one of our experiences of fear in 1937 touches on many of the same hot-button social issues we are dealing with today. To allow this man, “the victim of another addiction even worse stigmatized than alcoholism,” into our rooms was a controversy built from fear and pride that risked sinking the lifeboat to the peril of everyone in the Fellowship. As with most of our controversies, the solution was a simple one: the answers to two simple rhetorical questions, “What are we really afraid of?” and “What would the Master do?” (Remarkably, those are not titles of two A.A. pamphlets.) And so it was at that point 82 years ago that our Fellowship began building a foundation of absolute inclusiveness — and we didn’t need a pamphlet to help us do it.

You see, “The Only Requirement ...”

By now, all of us understand the fact that our common welfare must come first. This pillar of our Fellowship is so important that my sobriety and your sobriety are dependent on it. This, of course, is known as Tradition One — you know, that “unity thing.” But, I wonder, what are we willing to sacrifice for each other’s sobriety? Am I willing to sacrifice my uniqueness for your sobriety? Do you need my help to maintain your sobriety? These are very heavy questions that are laced with the toxic mix of two polar opposites: fear and unconditional love. Bill Wilson teaches us that our Twelve Traditions are nothing more than a list of sacrifices. When I voluntarily became a member of A.A., I also voluntarily sacrificed some of my “rights” — the right to assert my will on the Fellowship; the right to place my needs before yours; the right to elevate the importance of my home group above yours; the right to exclude alcoholics who choose a different Higher Power than mine; the right to declare my opinions on outside issues, and so forth and so on. This is the great paradox of A.A. — surrender to win. To dock in the safe harbor of the Twelve Traditions, I must surrender my right to be a unique member of this Fellowship. I cannot assert my differences.

You see, “The Only Requirement ...”

So, why then do we do it? Why do we go to such great lengths to assert our differences? Why do we risk the unity of our Fellowship by reviving controversies from the past? Why do we abandon the solutions derived from the mistakes of others? Why does G.S.O. write a *Box 4-5-9* editorial that describes our founders as, “by and large also members of the most privileged class of the day — white, male and Christian,” and not as alcoholics? The answer, my friends, is not blowing in the wind; it can be found on page 98 of *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*. Bill Wilson writes, “Pride and fear and anger — these are the prime enemies of our common welfare. True brotherhood, harmony, and love, fortified by clear insights and right practices, are the only answers. And the purpose of A.A.’s traditional principles is to bring these forces to the top and keep them there. Only then can our common welfare be served; only then can A.A.’s unity become permanent.”

After reading these words of our co-founder, I am left with a deep understanding of the fact that my uniqueness has no value in A.A. The only way that I can be of maximum service to you and my Higher Power is to embrace the freedom from my ego as offered by this

Fellowship. We are, above all else, dealing with a fatal disease for which there is no cure. A long timer from my early sobriety said countless times, “This whiskey business is serious business because people die. And if nothing changes, nothing ever changes.”

You see, “The Only Requirement ...”

I prefer the long form of Tradition Three, which emphasizes, “Our membership ought to include all who suffer from alcoholism.” Upon the formal adoption of the Twelve Traditions by our fellowship, A.A. set a firm foundation of rigid inclusion as its policy for present and future membership in A.A.

We are not a naïve lot. We know that some members, and some groups of members, do not play nice with others. On page 124 of *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* we are warned, “Maybe this sounds as though the alcoholics in A.A. had suddenly gone peaceable, and had become one big happy family. Of course this is not so at all. We are human beings and we squabble.” What to do about it now? In this room today you will find the current leaders of A.A., the guardians of A.A.’s Traditions. It is our responsibility to ensure our membership includes all who suffer from this deadly disease; there are no exclusions in A.A. for the alcoholic. And we should exert that responsibility while speaking the language of the heart — the language of every alcoholic, speaking the truth in love. We can never forget the simple fact that groups do not break the Traditions; members do. When we squabble, we should pause and ask our God for direction and for that intuitive thought that used to be elusive to us alcoholics. Bill R., Panel 47 delegate from Arkansas, says, “For those that act up, we talk to them first and then ‘take them out back’ if they don’t listen.”

You see, “The Only Requirement ...”

Participation in the Third Legacy of A.A. has saved my life. But more than that, these Legacies have given me an opportunity to expand the reconstruction of my life beyond the walls of my home group. I look out across the room today and find comfort in the spiritual connection with my great friends — my A.A. family—whose dedication to this Fellowship is the fuel of my fire. And for that, I am very grateful.

I leave you a quote from Willard M. of Austin, Texas: “Be kind whenever possible — and it’s always possible.”

“The Only Requirement,” indeed.

Clarity of Purpose: Addressing the Needs of Our Meetings

David R., Delegate Panel 68, Area 25 Kansas

I chose this topic because it focuses on meetings, which, along with sponsorship and Twelfth Step efforts, is where the real work and the real magic of A.A. resides.

We had a wonderful workshop on this at the Conference, with the subtopics of good meeting leadership, singleness of and primary purpose, safety, rigidity in A.A., *The A.A. Service Manual*, attracting members to service, Grapevine and La Viña, and inclusion. We generated a bug tussle full of great ideas for things to do at the area, district, group and sponsorship levels. They’re in the *Final Conference Report*, and I’m sure many of us will be mining that resource as we plan events locally.

I won’t go over that report — y’all can read just fine. Instead I’m going to reflect on a couple of things: first, good meeting leadership, and second, what did we miss?

1) Good Meeting Leadership

I want to paraphrase Concept XI:

While the group conscience holds final responsibility for the group’s service work, it should always have the assistance of the best possible G.S.R.s, secretaries, steering committees, meeting leaders, greeters, coffee makers, district service committee reps and so forth. Therefore, the personal qualifications of these servants, the manner of their induction into service, the systems of their rotation, the way in which they are related to each other and the rights and duties of each, will always be matters for serious care and concern.

Bill echoes this in his essay on leadership: “So when we talk about A.A. leadership we only declare that we ought to select that leadership on the basis of obtaining the best talent we can find.”

At my area’s election assemblies, we take the time to read the job descriptions, we ask the candidates to consider some self-searching questions regarding their ability to serve in that capacity and we solemnly follow the Third Legacy Procedure in our voting. Our incoming chair then immediately sets about finding the best candidates he or she can for the appointed positions and presents that slate of servants at the following assembly meeting for approval or disapproval, jointly or individually, by the entire body.

Yet how many times do you hear a speaker say, “I went to the restroom, and when I came back, I found out I was the G.S.R.”? The highest position we have in A.A., just below the position of “sober,” is probably meeting leader. But it seems we take more care with selecting the lowest positions in the service structure than we do at this level. I hope that all of you can confront me on this point with the fact that, in your group, meeting leader is a position of honor that is carefully vetted, carefully taught and valued by all as a great trust. I would love to be the only one in the room who’s seen it looked upon as an onerous duty that, hopefully, you won’t get stuck with.

2) What Did We Miss?

Once home, I reflected on the Conference, as one does, including the workshop. To prepare for the workshop ahead of time, we were given background information about the format and we were instructed to come up with “big, bold ideas,” but not much else. There were 135 people who were passionate about A.A and brought more than 2,000 years of recovery with them into the workshop, all who obviously have some ideas on the needs of meetings. But it occurred to me, as I reflected, that we never really asked the groups what *they* thought their needs were. So, I did a little digging.

First, I asked several members this question: “What needs/problems does your group have?” Then I went back through several years of minutes from a central office’s group rep meeting. A portion of each meeting usually involves discussion of group issues. I wanted to see what topics had been brought up.

Here are some of the concerns that were expressed:

- Financial issues
- Members who are off meds being disruptive
- Staffing hours for the service office
- Sexual predators and protecting adolescents
- Relations with Al-Anon
- Being a good tenant of the church where they met
- How to provide literature for corrections
- Should a Thirteenth Step workshop be for women only, or should it include men?
- Planning events *with* other groups, instead of *in competition with* them
- Low attendance — what to do?
- Group ESH with moving to a new hall
- Using the power of the purse when services aren’t accountable
- Taking meetings to a liver transplant unit — cooperation or affiliation?
- What *are* you supposed to do with those Birthday Plan envelopes?
- Liability insurance
- Who to call to get someone into detox or treatment
- How to hold and process a group inventory
- Fear that A.A. is being replaced by other programs and the Internet
- Apathy
- Obstacles to carrying the message, such as HIPPA and other laws

My takeaway from this is that down in the trenches it tends to be the more practical matters that are on people’s minds. The suggestions from the workshop, along with our Traditions, will probably address a lot of concerns, but there seem to be some that were overlooked — topics such as moving, financial matters, relations with landlords and privacy laws.

Last year we got the results of the communications audit that was conducted by Impact Collaborative. I want to cite a few of the findings:

1. A.A.'s primary purpose is alive and well at the group level, but it is getting somewhat lost at the board, administrative and Conference levels.
2. Current and former G.S.R.s expressed a high level of frustration at the lack of focus on member issues and still-suffering alcoholic issues at district meetings.
3. Few of the questions asked at various events, such as forums, had to do with issues of carrying the message.
4. Information is not traveling up or down the triangle effectively or efficiently.

As James Lovell of the Apollo 13 flight said, "Houston, we have a problem." My challenge as a delegate is to seek solutions to the issues that the meetings are bringing up and thus add to the suggestions of the workshop. I invite all of you to join me in that quest.

What does "Carrying the Message" Mean Today?

Teresa J., Delegate Panel 68, Area 46 New Mexico

I want to talk to you today about our 5th Tradition, our Primary Purpose, and look at whether or not we are really living up to our spiritual responsibility in that regard. Our 5th Tradition says simply that "each group has but one primary purpose – to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers." So, I'm here ask the question, "Are we actually carrying the message to the suffering alcoholic?"

I've lived in New Mexico for 26 years and have never seen a Public Service Announcement for Alcoholics Anonymous on TV or heard one on the radio. I've never read an article about A.A. in the newspaper. I've never seen a pamphlet in a library or in a hospital. One time about 12 years ago I saw a stack of business cards at a counseling center that said, "If you want to drink that's your business, if you want to stop drinking that's ours. Alcoholics Anonymous." And it had the phone number for our local Central Office on it. I was glad to see something from A.A. in my community, but the message it was communicating, in my opinion, was that A.A. had some sort of "business" interest in getting people to stop drinking.

I was not at all surprised that the communications audit commissioned by our General Service Board in 2017 and 2018 revealed that, while most people have heard of A.A., the general public doesn't really know much about A.A. and is actually pretty confused about who we are. A good many people think we are a religious organization. And most people don't see any difference between us and treatment centers.

This last point was made crystal clear for me a few years ago when I was serving as the treasurer for my area. The company carrying our liability insurance decided to stop carrying that type of coverage; so, I had to find a new company to provide our insurance. Naïvely, I thought this would be a fairly simple and straightforward task. To agent after agent I had to explain that we were not a treatment facility. Even still, the forms they sent me asked how many doctors or nurses we had on staff, and how many beds we had in our facilities. I was genuinely surprised that people didn't know how A.A. worked. I don't know why I should have been surprised, though. I certainly didn't know anything about A.A. before I was introduced to it while detoxing in mental hospital 19 years ago.

Recently, while reading *Language of the Heart* I noticed something that had previously slipped right passed me. Bill was describing how an expected article from *Readers Digest* did not materialize when the Big Book was printed. So, he got busy canvassing every magazine he could think of to get someone to write an article about our then fledgling Society and its new book. I was dumbfounded. Somehow, it had never occurred to me before that Bill had asked *Readers Digest* to write an article in the first place and it was Bill who asked Fulton Oursler of *Liberty Magazine* to publish the article that announced Alcoholics Anonymous, both the book and the movement, to the entire country in the Fall of 1939. Did you know it was a member of the Cleveland Group who happened to be a freelance writer who wrote the articles that appeared in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*?

So, it would seem that some of the monumental events that started the growth of A.A. from a few small groups to a nation-wide and, eventually, an international fellowship didn't just happen by chance – Bill and members of our fellowship went out and made them happen. They went out and carried the message so that those who were still suffering would know that

there was a solution. And for decades, that's what members of Alcoholics Anonymous did. And for decades our Fellowship grew.

In 1940 our membership was estimated to be less than 2 thousand and by 1950 it had exploded to over 96 thousand. Between 1950 and 1960 estimated membership nearly doubled to 162 thousand and by 1970 that estimate had nearly doubled again to 311 thousand. Between 1970 and 1980 our membership tripled to over 900 thousand. By 1990 our membership had more than doubled to over 2 million. Since 1990 our membership numbers have fluctuated slightly up and down but have stayed right around 2 million one hundred thousand. Think of it. For 55 years our numbers exploded, doubled, doubled, tripled, and doubled again. Now, for the past three decades our membership numbers have remained virtually unchanged while the population of the United States and Canada grew by over 30% and the population of the planet grew by over 40%. Why? There has to be a reason. Most likely, there are a lot of reasons.

In true alcoholic form, I'm going to present a theory that isn't backed up by a bit of research or first-hand knowledge. So, I think, to a large extent, we've stopped carrying the message. Don't get me wrong, we do a pretty good job of sharing our message once people find their way to an A.A. meeting. But rather than carry our message to the still suffering alcoholic, we hold on to our message until the suffering alcoholic finds us.

I was taught that the purpose of the group is to carry the message outside of the meeting – otherwise it's just a meeting. I believe the 5th Tradition also applies to the district and the area. We should always be focused on answering the question, "How are we carrying the message to the suffering alcoholic?" I know of far too many groups, districts and committees in my area that seem to have plenty of volunteers and money to put on camp-outs, picnics, and workshops but never seem carry the message to anybody except to each other. I'm not saying these events don't have their place. Workshops (and forums) are valuable tools for education and provide members with important opportunities to be of service, but we ought not confuse them with fulfilling our Primary Purpose.

I'm a panel 68 delegate, so, I'm nearing the end of my rotation. For months now people have asked what I'm going to do when my rotation ends. My answer is easy – I'm going to carry the message.

Thank you for allowing me to be of service to the Fellowship that saved my life!

FULL FORUM PRESENTATION

Concept Nine—Leadership

Troy BD., Panel 69 Area 67 Southeast Texas

Concept Nine States: Good service leaders, together with sound and appropriate methods of choosing them, are at all levels indispensable for our future functioning and safety. The primary world service leadership once exercised by the founders of A.A. must necessarily be assumed by the Trustees of the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Bill writes in this concept, “No matter how carefully we design our service structure of principles and relationships, no matter how well we apportion authority and responsibility, the operating results of our structure can be no better than the personal performance of those who must man it and make it work. Good leadership cannot function in a poorly designed structure. But weak leadership can hardly function at all, even in the best of structures.” Bill goes on to write that in his estimation we have created a basically sound structure, and except for occasional refinements that job is finished, however, finding good leadership will be a continuous problem.

Why is this? Well, look around the room, none of us got here based on our stellar leadership performances, except for those dear friends, our Class A Trustees, who were actually sent for. I don't know about the rest of you but I was NOT sent for. If you were like me, I didn't get here to be or even stay sober, I didn't have a problem with drinking, I had a problem with consequences. My plan was to find out who was in charge, buddy up to that person, because clearly, they would know how to drink right, especially if they were leading the rest of the drunks. I would then take over that person's leadership role for a short period of time to prove to others I wasn't an alcoholic. Since I could then effectively say, “I ran AA for a while, I don't need it now.” Of course, you all immediately tried to dash my dubious plan by informing me, no one is in charge. I smiled, weakly, and continued to try and find out who the real leaders were. It wasn't long before I heard someone share on Tradition 2, stating “Our leaders are but trusted servants, they do not govern.” This almost got me to stop seeking out someone in charge, almost.

I believe this is the crux of our problem, we don't have true leaders in the sense that we would normally see in the world around us. We instead have people who are giving back what was so freely given to them; they do not have autonomous authority but have real responsibility to those they serve. Again, few of us got here because we were recommended to be here based on our good deeds, on our service to others, on our selflessness. My father, for as long as I can remember, has told me, "Troy, the world does not revolve around you." I still have days where I question this bold idea. So, if we are not the bosses of everyone what are we looking for in a trusted servant? Bill W. answers this question, "We shall be in continual need of these...attributes - tolerance, responsibility, flexibility, and vision – among our leaders of A.A. services at all levels. So, I would like to take my presentation time today to unpack this thought both at the individual level and for our fellowship as a whole.

Let us first consider tolerance; it is my experience that this idea boils down to my capacity to, as we are so fond of saying, place principles before personalities. I will admit this would be easier for me if everyone's personalities were more like my own. Is true tolerance something we are teaching our sponsees to have and practice? Are we being good examples of tolerance? Are we tolerant of our trusted servants? When someone down the triangle makes what we deem as a mistake, do we treat them with love and respect or do we do we light the torches and break out the pitch forks? Bill discusses the balance we must have between wanting our leaders to be faceless automatons with no personality always focusing on principles, trying to please everyone and the infallible big doers with sterling judgement, and morals. We can't really have or expect any of us to be either.

There is so much we can say about responsibility. I remember the first time I heard that as we move down the ladder of service we had more responsibility but less authority. I was furious that this was not clearly stated on a framed poster in each meeting room of A.A. We do of course have delegated authority and the right of decision, however without constant and clear communication about these decisions we can certainly find ourselves in hot water with those we serve. For some reason this is constant and clear communication still seems to be a problem at almost all levels of the service structure. Are we being clear in our communication up and down the ladder, especially with matters that are deemed as important? To make the responsibility matters worse, we have adopted the spirit of rotation.

I imagine that many of you are like me, as soon as I got a good grip on how to properly serve any role in A.A. my rotation was up and I had to move on to another role. I promise you if I could go back in time and keep the knowledge that I have gained through my service journey I would rock it out. I would be the best G.S.R. anyone has ever seen. So, it is our responsibility to serve to the best of our ability, but to also to share our experience strength in hope with those that come after us. However, we have to be careful to not step on the toes of those who replace us in the service structure. This can be a tricky situation. When I was rotating out as D.C.M., I made a vow to not return to the district meeting until I was asked to attend, in order to give the new D.C.M. space to facilitate meetings without my approval or more likely disapproval. However, I asked the other members of district to every once in a while, shake their heads, frown and say, "That's not how Troy did it." I guess I am still learning how to be a Past DCM, Past Area Chair and I look forward to learning how to be a Past Delegate.

Flexibility is another seemingly easy idea. However in my experience it too is difficult to navigate. Bill discusses the ability to compromise (cheerfully) and that a qualification of good leadership is the "give and take". I again will admit, I had the "take" part down pat, giving was another matter altogether. For me, I've learned that I cannot be flexible if I am unwilling to change my mind. The only way I can be truly informed in my decisions is to listen to others especially those that don't agree with me. Early in my service career I would avoid, at all costs, those who oppose me or challenge me in anyway. I have learned to be a true servant; I must listen to these opinions, disagreements and even the occasional critique. I had to learn how to have open discussions with those who didn't agree with me. Amazingly, I have been shown time and time again that I was not seeing the entire truth, which is a nice way of saying I was wrong. In our Fellowship we strive to always give voice to the minority opinion for a reason, they are often right. Still, there will be times where we cannot compromise and we will have to stand firm in our convictions. Our never-ending debate on our primary purpose is an example when our trusted servants must not compromise.

What about vision? As Bill wrote, "some might feel this sort of striving to be a sort of heresy, because we A.A.'s are constantly telling ourselves, "One Day at a Time." But that valuable principle really refers to our mental and emotional lives...As individuals and as a fellowship; we shall surely suffer if we cast the whole job of planning for tomorrow onto a fatuous, or

complacent, idea of Providence.” The struggle with vision is real. We are always balancing how it has always been done with how it could be done better. I am and will always be someone that looks at every situation constructively, some would say destructively. I find myself constantly thinking about how processes and procedures can be more effective. I was reminded of this after my first day of my first General Service Conference when I shared with my Sponsor, how I thought things could have been better. He stopped me and asked, “Can’t you just participate this year before you start fixing things?” I feel strongly that we can, as a fellowship, do a better job at having vision. It is painfully obvious we as an organization are so far behind the digital age. Next time you get on your search engine of choice, I don’t want to affiliate with any particular one, type in “I want to stop drinking.” See how many pages you have to scroll through before you find anything at all about A.A. You will be amazed before you are halfway through, sadly, how many pages you have to scroll through. I was actually told to do this myself and after typing in “I want to stop drinking,” now have constant stream of advertisements for treatment facilities both near and far. I am just waiting for someone at work to notice and report me to the E.A.P.

So why do we have to consider this for all levels of service? I have for a while now, started looking at each new person I meet in General Service as a potential, future Trustee. I believe it is critical we consider who we are electing to any position and at any level. Bill reminds us that our G.S.R will be electing our Delegate and that our Delegates will be electing our Trustees, so it is paramount that we are well represented up and down the triangle. For our home groups we can’t wait for someone to go to the bathroom to elect them to serve as our group service representative. Likewise, at the area level we can’t base our votes on popularity but instead on merit. I believe that our 3rd Legacy procedures help manage this but I have also seen that process undermined by politicking before the election process even starts. Are we being mindful of who we are electing to represent us?

I want to end today with something that I heard last year at the General Service Conference; we have three sides to our A.A. triangle; recovery, unity and service. If you are here today and are not actively pursuing service in some form you are effectively losing one side of your triangle, and a triangle without that right side representing service is no longer a triangle but a less than sign. Don’t let your program be less than.

Thank for allowing me the opportunity to be of service and I truly thank you for my life and my sobriety.

FULL FORUM WORKSHOP

Concept Nine—Leadership

Presenter: Troy BD. **Moderator:** Jimmy D. **Reporter:**

In this full forum workshop, the presenter shared history and quotes from Bill W. that were relevant to the workshop topic. The presenter also shared some attributes of leadership, such as tolerance, communication and vision. Members took part in the workshop and shared at the microphone. There was some discussion and comments on how delegates are assigned to committees at the G.S.C., as well as comments regarding the need for rotation among district and area positions.

Workshop members shared thoughts and experiences regarding Concept Nine and leadership. Many spoke of leading by example, encouraging service sponsorship, supporting and “teaching” service, as well as using “attraction not promotion.” In addition, members shared ideas and practices that would help cultivate leadership. Some of these were: “Keep inviting”; “Get to know who you are voting for”; provide more “Traditions education” and include “family-type activities in the group.” Other suggestions included “inventory voting motives,” “be better informed on the position description” and “add HOW (honesty/openness/willingness)” to actions.

WORKSHOP REPORTS

7-7:55 p.m.

Supporting Grapevine: From your Story to Service

Moderator: Albin Z., AA Grapevine, Inc. Publisher **Reporter:** Ino F., AA Grapevine Board Director

The workshop began with the moderator sharing his experience in the publishing industry to better inform the attendees about “How do you conduct and write your story workshop.” The most recent survey indicated that people don’t participate with Grapevine and La Viña because “we don’t have enough time.” It was explained where on the AAGV.org website one can find documentation on “How to . . .” for different workshops (audio, written, etc.). The editorial calendar was outlined. Participants were informed that submissions should be submitted five months ahead of time if you are writing for a particular theme or topic in the editorial calendar. In addition, workshop attendees were informed that no story-writing experience is necessary for those who attend or put on a Grapevine/La Viña workshop. What is needed, however, is willingness. The moderator shared that Grapevine and La Viña is always looking for stories on Steps, Traditions, and Concepts. The magazine receives about 150 stories a month for Grapevine and 75 a month for La Viña. A suggestion was made that anyone who wants to write a story for Grapevine should read general stories from the Big Book first. The magazines are also in need of photographs (anonymity-protected) that can be used for the new audio/video project.

Circles of Love & Service

Moderator: Trish L., Trustee-at-Large/Can. **Reporter:** Chris B.

At the start of this workshop, the moderator spoke about the sharing of the people of Esket — a First Nation community in Canada. Workshop members shared many instances where the hand of A.A. was offered, through service, to alcoholics. One member from Wilmer, Texas, spoke about seeing parolees get sober and carry A.A.’s message. Another member from Houston, Texas, said that “a two-person meeting in Costa Rica showed her and her sponsees how good we have it in populous areas.” Another woman from Tyler, Texas, said that “in a remote part of New Mexico, she ran across someone in need and, via G.S.O. or intergroup, extended the hand of A.A.” A member also shared an instance where a college

course about alcoholism changed her view on alcoholism, those affected by it *and* helped her to admit to her own problem. Members at this workshop also had questions about remote treatment and archives.

Anonymity

Moderator: Gene M. **Reporter:** Don A.

During sharing in this workshop, attendees considered the question: “How can we balance anonymity with the need for better communication?” The moderator read from *Our Great Responsibility* and *The Language of the Heart* and spoke from his experience about anonymity issues in A.A.

One member spoke about three levels of anonymity: “Ours, mine, and A.A.’s.” Another attendee reminded the group about anonymity on social media and read the long version of Tradition 12. One woman spoke about the need to discuss anonymity as a spiritual concept rather than as a privacy issue — particularly with younger A.A.s. Some members shared their perception of anonymity, or what they had learned from other A.A.s. For instance, one woman shared that she was taught that breaking one’s own anonymity is only allowed in an effort to help a still-suffering alcoholic.

Workshop attendees shared many instances, examples and experience regarding balancing anonymity and the need for better communication. For instance, a member spoke about the lack of understanding of how social media works and how controls can be used to protect anonymity (i.e. utilizing privacy settings) while another workshop member shared that Facebook’s business model is “their clients” and the “sale of their data.” Another member spoke about the difference between anonymity and privacy while another expressed a hope that technology will better connect suffering alcoholics with recovery without violating anonymity. One A.A. encouraged her sponsees to consider their motives before posting about topics on social media. A workshop attendee asked, “Where are the young people in this discussion? They could be very helpful in finding solutions to these issues.” Concerns about the actual privacy of “private Facebook groups” were also expressed.

Accessibilities

Moderator: Alicia H. **Reporter:** Connie F.

In this workshop, the topic of “Accessibilities” was introduced and workshop attendees were asked to share in response to two questions: “How else can we help A.A.s who are deaf participate?” and “What can we do to assist the elderly in having access to meetings and participate in A.A.?”

In response to the first question, workshop participants offered various means and ways to expand inclusivity of A.A.s who are deaf such as “have ASL resources available; identify which meetings offer ASL interpreters; develop workshops to provide ASL signing service to closed A.A. meetings; develop accessibility committees and disseminate A.A. accessibilities information to the professional community.” In addition, members said, “Don’t ignore the hearing impaired during the meetings” and “provide online deaf services and other languages at aa-intergroup.org.”

In response to the query regarding what A.A.s can do to assist the elderly in having access to A.A. meetings, members shared that we can “develop a stand-alone accessibilities committee; have a more inclusive meeting list; coordinate transportation for elderly to meetings; provide online meetings or even over the phone meetings and start a video conferencing meeting, such as used by www.laurenceaa.org.”

Service Sponsorship

Moderator: Steve S. **Reporter:** Gary K.

The moderator of this workshop commented that being of service to your homegroup and carrying the message to alcoholics is essential to A.A. members. Members considered the advisability of a service sponsor as someone to “bounce ideas off of” and were asked, “Why not get a Three Legacy sponsor?” In response, members of the workshop acknowledged that service sponsors are needed to share their experience on the Concepts. “Step” sponsors may not have the experience necessary to best guide those in service.

Also asked was: “How do we take folks through the Twelve Traditions?” In response, members shared that the Traditions Checklist, studies, panels, SWRAASAs, and taking members through the Traditions (regardless of service experience) were good practices.

Finally, the question “Is it necessary that the service sponsor be a D.C.M. or a past delegate?” Was answered with a “no.” Workshop participants thought they should, however, have a working knowledge of Traditions and Concepts. In addition, sometimes multiple service sponsors can be advisable — depending on the position an A.A. is holding at the time.

8:05-9pm

Supporting La Viña: From Your Story to Service

Moderator: Nivia H., AA Grapevine, Inc. Executive/Customer Service Assistant

Reporter: Ino F., AA Grapevine Board Director

During this workshop, the moderator and workshop members discussed simple ways to contribute to La Viña, including taking pictures (respecting individual anonymity) to go with the written story and how to keep it simple when writing your story. New developments and publications were shared, such as the new catalog in English and Spanish and La Viña’s new book, *Bajo el Mismo Techo* (Under the Same Roof).

The 2020 editorial calendar was also discussed, along with themes for each issue. Workshop members shared methods for encouraging group members to participate in La Viña. Questions and answers about La Viña were shared and tips and methods about how to write, how stories are selected and how to improve all aspects of the magazine were also discussed.

Fostering Participation in A.A.: Who’s Not in the Room?

Moderators: PJ H. & Olga R. **Reporter:** Cindy N.

This workshop addressed how to make all those who want or need A.A. feel welcome at meetings. Olga related her experience in working with those who didn’t feel welcome and what she learned. She related personal experience that the language of the heart will break down the barriers of culture and help people feel welcomed. PJ related experience of being “a person not in the room” who came to A.A. feeling “outside the norm” with “terminal uniqueness.”

The workshop members discussed three questions relating to the workshop topic. Participants shared their personal experience in answering the first question: **“Our Third Tradition — Do we welcome everyone?”** One member shared that her diverse group makes “greeting people an intentional, physical action” and this is why she believes her group is very diverse. Another group has members with mental health issues. A member reported that her group leverages literature to learn how to welcome members. Another workshop member related personal experience: As a woman of color, she was Twelfth-stepped by a woman who she would normally not mix with — a white woman in a wheelchair. She related that she was fortunate to have “the gift of desperation” and finally heard and accepted help.

The second question was asked: **“Are we reaching out to all who want it, and what more can we do?”** In response, workshop members related many different methods they have for reaching out and what more they can do. One member shared that her area “has a special committee that reaches out to the deaf community and provides interpreters for the deaf, as needed.” Another member said, “we need to be aware of elderly people and keep in mind that many have difficulty hearing and speak up.” Other suggestions were to reach out to people who may have transportation issues (such as the elderly), follow the example of online meetings using video conferencing technology, use CPC to carry the message to groups who are underrepresented (such as First Nation) and, finally, find and overcome language and cultural barriers (such as those in the Hispanic community).

The third question, **“A courageous conversation we are not having about inclusion in A.A. is ...”** generated questions such as one woman’s, who said that, “as a white woman, [she] has asked people of color at the MO State Convention where are all the people of color? — and the answer she gets is usually that they are NA.” Another woman asked if anyone has experience with someone experiencing barriers because of religious affiliation. One member “provided a few examples of Jehovah's Witnesses who have attempted to get sober through A.A. but struggled because they didn’t get the support from the Elders of their religion to continue in A.A

Creating Interest in General Service

Moderator: Troy BD. **Reporter:** Kris H.

Workshop members in the room counted off into five equal groups and then rearranged seating to reflect this. Each group was instructed to come up with one list of what we must do and another list of what we must *not* do to create general service interest. The groups then picked the five best/most important items (a combination of ‘does’ and ‘don’ts’). The group picks were as follows:

Group 1: Enthusiastic and fun; invite; explain roles; not rigid; gossip and politicking

Group 2: Support T/S; lead by example; educate; must not ignore rotation; must not place barriers to serve

Group 3: Bring others; tell the truth; invite; hear the minority; provide food/coffee

Group 4: Take road trips; ask; workshop; invite; welcome visitors

Group 5: Educate; share experience; clear expectations; personal invitations; sponsorship

Among the five groups, two actions: “Extending invitations” and “educating members” — or a variation of such — were repeated by several groups as important elements to creating interest in general service.

Twelve Traditions

Moderator: Jonathan S. **Reporter:** Cathy H.

In this workshop addressing A.A.’s Twelve Traditions, members considered four questions. The first question, “Are we somehow breaching Tradition 7 by either accepting or applying for the Google Ads grant?” generated diverse answers. Members shared responses such as, “No different than running newspaper ads for no charge” and “Ad words are a “hook” on the internet,” as well as “never brought to groups for discussion.”

The second question posed was, “Adopted 60 years ago, do we value or are they [the Twelve Traditions] as important to us as society changes?” In response, it was shared that “we have a responsibility to the newcomer” and “they are the glue that holds us together.” It was also noted that the 12 Traditions are “not absolute: we have a spiritual program with spiritual principles that are everlasting.”

Third, members were asked, “What is the difference between Tradition 11 and 12?” Participants shared that Tradition 11 has to do with “public relations and the outside world,” noting that the “spiritual person attracts” others. Tradition 12 deals with “anonymity” and what goes on “inside the meetings.” A final question about “outside issues” was responded to with “recovery is the inside issue,” and all else is an “outside issue.”

Relationship Between A.A. and Al-Anon

Moderator: David R. **Reporter:** Jerry W.

In this workshop, A.A. members discussed and shared thoughts and experiences in response to several questions: “Should Al-Anon sponsorship be prerequisite for A.A.s?”; “How are the programs of A.A. and Al-Anon different?”; “Are there elements of personalities which cause friction between the two groups and how can we deal with them?”; “What are the issues dealt with in Al-Anon that are not covered in the Big Book?” and, finally, “How do we cooperate more effectively with each other?”

Members began to discuss the questions. Although some experiences were discussed by members of the group, no single issue was definitively explored. However, those who raised the issue were given ideas within the workshop that presented some solutions.

PAST TRUSTEES SHARING

Beth R., Southwest Regional Trustee, 1999-2003

We have a strong and loving region. It's great to have people from the office come down, meet us and share with us. It's one of those weekends where you can learn a lot and you can enjoy meeting new people. As time goes on, some of you that are just getting started in various service positions will see people from other states or areas that you might meet here this weekend at another regional event. After a while, in a way, you might feel like you grew up with these people. It's wonderful.

If I had a suggestion to make to those of you in service, it would be to please think about this: Your personal program, to me, means my home group and my sponsor doing the things that it takes to stay sober — as an individual. This is very important. But service work is also very important. Sometimes it is easy to mix them up and think that they are one and the same. They are not. If you are going to continue in service work, my suggestion is to work your personal program to the very best of your ability, and that will help you do your job in your service position — whatever that job is. Sometimes we get really busy and we think, Well, I've got this service meeting or that service commitment to make and I'll just skip my meeting. I've found that many people have made their service work their personal program and then that's it. It's easy to do, but I don't know how healthy it would be. So, if I had a suggestion to make, that would be it. Remember, you have a personal program that keeps you well and helps you to be healthy. The healthier you are, the better you will do in your service work. Please come back to another Regional Forum.

Yolanda F., Southwest Regional Trustee, 2015-2019

I was a D.C.M. when I approached my service sponsor. He was the founder of the group I belonged to — a Spanish-speaking group. For some reason, I got fearful. My fear came because some of the leaders who had been in my life had left to go back to Mexico, others had passed away, and others were so ill that they couldn't come to the meeting as often. So, I was afraid, and I approached my sponsor and I said, "What are we, the little people, what are we going to do? Everyone is leaving us — somehow escaping us." He looked at me,

pointed right at me, and said, “That’s why we are passing it on.” And it dawned on me. For some reason, the fear subsided, because I knew what I had been given by these great old timers in my life. Things I had experienced with them that they walked me through and some of the stories they told me, those are the legacies we have. I realized that that is the importance of having all this rotation in our program. As we come along, there is going to be a rotation and we are not going to be there anymore. So, it’s up to you. People ask, “Where are the young people?” And I see young people in our region who are leaders! I am so happy that I encourage them to keep going. That’s what we need to do, to encourage everyone to keep going.

I am not afraid like I was that day. I have faith in everyone as we go along. There was a young lady who cried yesterday because she couldn’t believe what was going on. Those are the things that make me understand and realize that we are okay. We are going to continue to bring in those youngsters and make them important. They will carry the torch. All these problems that we’ve been having and so many of these problems I am listening to from the microphones — they can be addressed by sponsorship. We need to keep going.

One more thing: Past delegates, your areas have invested so much in you, now it is time for the returns. Let’s keep going with this! Thank you so much for everything — it is amazing.

Howard L., Southeast Regional Trustee, 2005-2009

I don’t ever think about what I’m going to say, but this morning, while I was in the lobby, I met a friend of mine and he said, “I want to give you a couple of suggestions.”

And I am *a/ways* open to ignoring suggestions . . .

He said, “The first thing you need to do is be honest.”

And I thought, “Well, that’s going to cramp my style just a little bit.”

He said, “Don’t begin anything with “Mother.”

So I said, “Well, I probably don’t need to share this morning.”

But I’m going to try and live within those guidelines. I listen a lot at these things. I listened to a lot of people say, “Alcoholics Anonymous is changing.” We talk a lot about how we need to change but, apparently, the people who say that aren’t looking around. Because we *are*

changing. But not all of those are necessarily good changes. A young lady, the last person to share at the sharing session, said some of what I would say, because a lot of our changes are looking like what we say when we say we want diversity. Do you know what the opposite of diversity is? It's unity. One of the greatest strengths Alcoholics Anonymous has had throughout history was that we have had unity in our purpose, unity in our membership and unity in our quest.

But now we are not necessarily as united as we have been, because we are looking for differences. I'll be honest with you — I don't look or care whether there are young people in Alcoholics Anonymous — or women or people of color or people of any sexual orientation. You may think, this is one arrogant guy standing up there in his own world. But the only thing I care about, being in Alcoholics Anonymous, is alcoholics. Whatever else we are, what we are supposed to be are alcoholics who wish to recover from alcoholism. And if we are that, then we have a really good program. There are a lot of options and there are a lot of things that work — we don't have a monopoly on it. But we've got the most successful thing in the history of alcoholism — when we stick to our purpose.

One of the most well-known things that we talk about is the "What would the Master do?" story. This is all about inclusion and diversity, right? If you said, "right" then you haven't read the story. That story doesn't include a single thing other than an alcoholic. They just made sure they didn't *exclude* the alcoholic because of anything else. If we focus on *that* then we will have everybody we are supposed to have. If we focus on every other thing, then we won't have anything. We won't survive. We will go the way of all the groups that have done the same thing — and you know them, so I don't have to quote them for you.

But let's not do that. Let's stick to our program. Let's do things and let's keep coming back as another trustee mentioned. Let's be alcoholics in Alcoholics Anonymous who are trying to help other alcoholics who are trying to get sober — no matter who they are or what they are, no matter how they are shaped, no matter if they come from far off lands like the Southeast region — no matter what. If we concentrate on what we do best, we will be doing really well. But, if we lose our way, we will be wandering in the wilderness like I was when I got here. I wouldn't wish that on anybody. But we can do better than that, and that's what I want to leave you with.

Let's do better than that. Let's leave this better than it was when we got here. Let's concentrate on what we can do and what we do share, and, like the young lady said, let's concentrate on the similarities rather than the differences. If we do so, we will be a united Fellowship. And we will do what we do best.

Don M., General Service Trustee, 2009-2013

I am glad we are talking about leadership and vision. Almost all group consciences start with opinions — so have opinions. I am so grateful that when I got to A.A. I was introduced to the program through some well-conditioned groups. I picked up from them that I needed to work on the Steps and do my inventory so I could resolve my internal conflicts so that I didn't subject my group, or the people around me, to my conflicts. When I am listening today I hear our ordinary common problem with power struggles and our common problems with conflict. I hear that somehow conflict hurts unity and all these other things. But I don't necessarily believe that's true. My experience is that conflict is like splitting an atom and it releases a lot of energy. We are nuclear families — some of us are fission and some of us are fusion. You get to pick whether you are going to explode or if you are going to create some kind of unity.

I am so grateful that the Traditions are here because they are *half* the conflict resolution problem and power struggle problem. The Concepts are part of the other half. The Traditions enable me to have the discipline I need to avoid unnecessary conflict. I am so grateful that I got stuck and was led to the Concepts, because the Concepts, for me, are a process to deal with necessary conflict. In my personal experience, when I tried to use the Traditions to deal with necessary conflict, I weaponized the Traditions. They gave me ample opportunity to legitimize telling you to shut up; I'd pick whichever Tradition was convenient and go, "That's a violation of . . . !" While the other part of me said, "Well, it's really hard to violate a suggestion, Don."

A part of my growth in sobriety in A.A. has been to not run away from pain and conflict — they are all part of the process by which we find unity. There is not much you can say in five minutes about the Concepts, so all I can suggest is to get together with each other and start studying them. Start using them a little bit. What happens is that the Concepts encourage us to do the work to find the democratic dialogue to deal with our legitimate conflicts and power struggles.

If I'd summarize my understanding of it today (and it takes a while to get used to this and it takes practice), the thing that I love about the Concepts is that they encourage me to honor, respect and examine the extremes so that I can help find the middle. If we find the middle and the group conscience — out of respect for the extremes — it's the way we become unified.

There are things that have made me successful in the service structure, such as learning to be comfortable with ambiguity, figuring out what my relationship with insecurity is and getting very comfortable with feeling stupid. For me, being comfortable with feeling stupid is one of the best things in the world — and then I get to practice being wrong. I get a lot of practice with that, but I didn't get a lot of practice with admitting that I was wrong. You guys have taught me to do that.

I encourage everyone here to get together with study groups and study the Concepts. Don't run away from conflict and power struggles — they're normal and inevitable. In here we do something so powerful — we figure out how to turn our *power struggles* into *power sharing*. And we figure out how to turn that into collective action so that we can do something useful for the future of A.A. I owe it to the future people of A.A. to be uncomfortable and to do my part of the legitimate suffering for them, in these rooms, so that we lower the bar so they can experience recovery and spiritual growth. That's what I get to give to the future. Keep doing what you are doing, and keep making mistakes. It's what we all do. I'm really grateful that you guys allowed me to do that and live with my flaws. I'm going to keep making mistakes and you guys are going to keep pointing them out to me and, hopefully, when I'm on my deathbed, I want to be making my last mistake. Thank you very much.

Conley B., Southwest Regional Trustee, 2007-2011

Recently, two paragraphs were taken out of Concept Eleven. I think that is the first time that has ever happened. I hope that women will take leadership and look at those two paragraphs to see if there is something in there that has worth — besides the gender references — to be restored back to its original condition and let people make decisions on their own about what was Bill's timeframe and what that meant. I think that there are some statements in those two paragraphs that talk about relationships, any adult relationships, that are complementary and

not competitive. I think that's part of what we are all about — learning to get along, recognizing our differences, and overcoming those kinds of things.

I think about one of our past regional trustees, who was the first Hispanic trustee to serve, as well as the first Hispanic woman regional trustee. Both came from this region. We have led in diversity, if you will, but then again, it is not about diversity. It is about having the best person for the job at the time — whatever that person is.

Michele opened this forum up. I was one of the people who interviewed her when she applied to become a Class A trustee. I am glad that she did. I am glad to see her and I have been glad to see her development. I suggest that we should be considerate of our friends — the Class As have done an awful lot for us over the years. I hope that our next book will be something about our friends and gratitude for their assistance. Our next book could be a history of those Class As who have served our Fellowship and the things that they have helped us to implement along the way. I think those Class As are so important and I think we need to be cognizant, as a Fellowship, that we make friends with people like that because I think that, these days, we have not made enough friends with the rest of the world.

The delegates and their presentations this weekend were excellent. I am awed by you guys and girls. The delegates are getting smarter — hopefully we are doing a better job of educating you. When you come to the SWRAASA and you participate in those things, you get fed from the whole region and you get to experience what is going on outside your home group, your district, and your area. You get the benefit of that cross fertilization that makes this area stronger. It's those principles that are a function of the Eleventh Concept where we induct you into service over a period, we examine your relationships, we look at your compositions, we talk about all those sorts of things. That is what we are supposed to be doing. I suggest that sponsors should be doing that as part of how they apply Concept Eleven in sponsoring newcomers and how they lead them through that process.

I am awed by this group of people, the accessibility and all those things that they are doing in and around Austin — how we are working to reach out to other areas, and, as Howard made the reference, to not forget the rest of us who are still coming in. It's not about everybody else,

it's about that alcoholic that needs us now. I salute you for your service, I thank you for all you have done and for all you are about to do.

CLOSING REMARKS

Michele Grinberg, Class A (nonalcoholic) General Service Board chairperson

I am Michele Grinberg, a class A (nonalcoholic) trustee and General Service Board chair. I am a grateful trustee who loves what A.A. does and I practice, to the best of my ability, the principles of this program, one day at a time. I have had a wonderful time this weekend, and I hope you have, too. Thank you to everyone.

As I said on Friday night, I see my job at regional forums as being a good listener. I have taken notes on my iPad and I have written down several of your ideas. As I fly home today I will read them and look for ideas for more discussion and I will bring those forward, when appropriate.

At every regional forum I hear an unofficial theme. At this forum, for me, it was being good trusted servant leaders. The challenge, of course, is how to be a good trusted servant leader in a way that people who are not in service will then find service attractive and get involved — and experience the joy and continuing growth that comes with service. Here are a few of the many, many things that I heard this weekend that resonated with me and pertained to the theme of good servant leaders:

1. **Enthusiasm in service:** One of the delegates shared an idea about being better sponsors of the three legacies.
2. **Attractiveness:** An attendee stated, “Be an attractive member of service.” Indeed, if you are the only service person someone sees, what message are you sending? I heard another attendee catch fire about the idea of a service sponsor. It was something she heard for the first time this weekend — you touched her.
3. **Motivation:** I heard a good question from a delegate sharing: “When we act, are we driven by fear, or are we inspired by love?”
4. **Sacrifice:** A delegate shared his view that the Traditions teach that we must give up a number of personal rights in order to be good servant leaders acting in accordance with our Traditions. He said (and I smile when I quote this), “My uniqueness has no value in A.A.”

5. **Kindness:** Quoting Willard from Austin, “Be kind whenever possible — and it is always possible.”
6. **Carrying the message:** We were reminded by a delegate to continue the work of our founders and early A.A. members in carrying the message outside the doors of A.A. meetings.
7. And finally, from the full Forum Leadership workshop, we were reminded of the Concept IX essay and Bill’s attributes for leadership: **Tolerance, responsibility, flexibility and vision.**

So, after processing everything I’ve heard this weekend, I’ve come away with some questions that I will consider. I hope that you will also consider them and talk about them with each other.

1. What more can each of us do to communicate that A.A. is welcoming to all?
2. How can we communicate better with each other and spread a genuine enthusiasm for service — and being a good servant leader?
3. How do we encourage more folks — from all ages, backgrounds and languages — into our wonderful service structure? Because, as a young woman at the mic said, “In these rooms, we are all equal.” And, as Howard said: “Just make sure we don’t exclude the alcoholic because of anything else.”

As Bill W. wrote, “Honesty with ourselves and others gets us sober, but it is tolerance that keeps us that way.” Let’s communicate with each other about these issues with love and tolerance. Listening to you, I know A.A. is full of enthusiastic, smart, tolerant and loving people who will continue to work hard, encourage good service leadership and keep the hand of A.A. out there. I look forward to hearing your solutions on assuring the hand of A.A. is extended to anyone reaching towards you — whether they know it or not — and to assuring that all are welcome in our service structure. Thank you so much for a wonderful weekend. Thank you for your willingness. I hope some of you have caught the service bug that’s traveling around this room. Next July, I hope to see you all in Detroit where together we will be dancing along the road of happy destiny.