

About

National EAP Representatives Meet at A.A.'s General Service Office

A recent meeting at the General Service Office (G.S.O.) in New York brought representatives from employee assistance programs (EAP) and human resource departments together with G.S.O. staff members. The daylong event was aimed at reacquainting these professionals, all of whom are conversant with A.A. and its program of recovery, with how the Fellowship can be a resource to them in their work.

A.A. seeks to improve and expand its communication with professionals who in their work encounter problem drinkers. Key to that effort is the work of local Cooperation With the Professional Community (C.P.C.) committees, which includes organizing events, answering questions, and providing written material on recovery in Alcoholics Anonymous.

The G.S.O. staff person on the C.P.C. assignment, who helped organize the EAP meeting, regularly responds to inquiries from professionals – doctors, nurses, judges, lawyers, clergy, social workers, educators, etc. – while also helping to coordinate A.A.'s presence at about 60 national professional conferences each year.

Garry Giannone, vice president, health and wellness, Prudential Financial Inc. in Newark, New Jersey, attended the meeting at G.S.O. and says he gained a renewed awareness of how Alcoholics Anonymous works. "A.A. is a Fellowship, not a business. I have been in the field of providing recovery resources for 25 years, and have sometimes thought that A.A. should be doing more to market the program. But then it wouldn't be A.A. That's clearer now." (A.A.'s policy is one of attraction rather than promotion, which means that it does not advertise, though it does use media to provide information about A.A. and how to locate it.)

Garry says he has always made use of A.A. meetings as a resource for employees who needed help with their drinking problems. "If I could, I would get everyone in early recovery to go to a meeting every day," he says.

More restrictive insurance coverage has made the availability of A.A. meetings even more important, says Garry. "There was a time when everyone got sent away for 28 days to a rehab, but no more. We may ease an employee into the idea of going to an A.A. meeting by suggesting that they consider a 'self-help support meeting.' When they ask, 'such as?', we'll say A.A."

In the course of the EAP meeting, G.S.O.'s recently revamped A.A. Web site (www.aa.org) was demonstrated for the visitors. The Web site, which is available in English, Spanish, and French, provides contact information for local A.A. offices, newsletters published by G.S.O. (including About A.A.), and specific information geared toward professionals.

"The redesigned Web site is a great resource," says Tom Wilcox, the local executive council chairman for the Air Line Pilots Association, Cary, Illinois. "Part of the problem on the job

for anyone looking for help with a drinking problem is maintaining anonymity; that's why the Website can be useful. I mean, will someone reach for a pamphlet in a rack when they might be seen? Maybe not."

Tom, who is an airline pilot, points out that alcoholism is a disqualifying medical condition for those who fly planes. "Airline pilots who are diagnosed alcoholic lose their license. They can, however, after going through a year-long process in which they've stayed abstinent from alcohol, get their license back," says Tom. "We know A.A. is effective in maintaining abstinence."

Joanne Pilat, the regional EAP representative for United Airlines in Chicago, says, "we refer people to treatment programs that work with A.A., such as that they invite A.A. in to hold meetings. In my work, I have seen how that A.A. connection helps people recover."

The idea for the event came out of a meeting between Joanne, a certified EAP professional and a licensed clinical social worker, and Elaine McDowell, Ph.D., a nonalcoholic and past chair of the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous. Leonard Blumenthal, LL.D., (nonalcoholic) current chairman, agreed that a meeting of EAP professionals would be useful.

Joanne contends that "some EAPs are not aware of how to use A.A." In a class she teaches in the masters of social work program at Loyola University, Chicago, Joanne makes attendance at an Al-Anon meeting and an A.A. meeting a part of the curriculum.

"Even though this is the 21st Century, my students still have old-fashioned ideas about who goes to A.A. meetings," says Joanne. "Despite my lecturing eloquently for 15 weeks, almost to a person my students tell me at the end of the term that their attendance at the A.A. and Al-Anon meetings was the single most beneficial part of the class. I would recommend that my peers attend an open A.A. meeting."

Employees at United Airlines come to the EAP office with the usual issues that come up for EAPs across the country: stress on the job, depression, marital problems. "I would say, though, that it's common that in the background somewhere there's a problem with alcohol or drugs," says Joanne.

Rudy Asuncion, national director of EAP for the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, Prospect Heights, Illinois, says he "did not know about the different services offered out of G.S.O. That, as an EAP person, I can call and get an answer – or be put in touch with a local A.A. member or committee – I didn't know that."

His union makes ample use of A.A., says Rudy. "We are committed to the Twelve Steps of A.A. I have had managers ask me which Step a guy was on."

He adds, though, that that was not always the case. "In the late 1960s we had an 'alcoholism committee' that was formed to see

if there was anything that could be done with drunks instead of just firing them. Back then, though, A.A. was seen as a last resort.”

Nowadays, he says, the company will agree to move a worker’s shift to make it possible for him to attend A.A. meetings.

“EAP’s reputation in the corporate system is good; if we ask for something, the feeling is it deserves merit,” says Rudy.

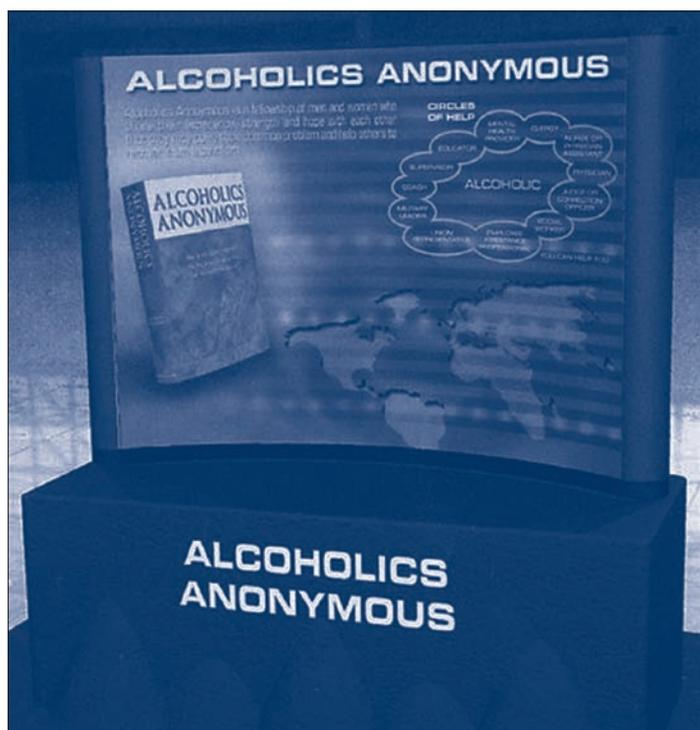
A.A. on the Scene At Meetings of Professionals

Alcoholics Anonymous set up exhibit booths at 55 national meetings of professionals in 2005.

A.A. exhibited for the first time in 1956, and now has information booths at the major meetings of a number of professional groups, including those for public health, corrections, education, medicine, nursing, clergy, and social work. The aim is to inform those working in these fields of the ways A.A. can be a resource to them. Exhibits have proven an efficient vehicle for disseminating information about the Fellowship.

The General Service Office in New York and local Cooperation With the Professional Community committees in the United States and Canada coordinate the work. A.A. is planning to exhibit at 60 events this year, among them the American Psychological Association’s annual meeting, the 11th Annual Hospital Case Management Conference, the National Conference for Lawyer Assistance Programs, and the Annual Program Meeting of the Council on Social Work.

A.A. has been exhibiting at some organizations for many years and chooses meetings based on how effective its presence can be in spreading knowledge of the A.A. program. Coordinators of big professional meetings sometimes invite A.A. to set up a booth.



A.A.’s portable exhibit booth — used for disseminating information about the Fellowship — will be on site this year at upwards of 60 major meetings of professional groups.

The exhibits, which are stocked with literature published by A.A., are staffed by local A.A. members who volunteer their time.

“If there is one thing that I would like people at these conventions to understand it’s that the A.A. program is always available, whenever you need it, and that it’s free,” says Tom F., an A.A. member who last year helped staff exhibits at half a dozen big professional gatherings in the Washington D.C. area.

“Many of the people at these meetings are already well aware of our Fellowship,” says Tom. “Health professionals, in particular, know what we do,” he says.

“At a meeting of teachers, though, a couple of people did not realize we were there to tell them how A.A. could help them help their students. They thought we were there to tell them what they could do with their own drinking problems.”

Dave R., the head of the Cooperation With the Professional Community committee for the Greater Toronto Area, estimates that he has participated in staffing A.A. booths at more than 20 events. “I feel what we are doing makes a difference,” says Dave. “We are reminding people that A.A. is available, and we are getting the literature out there,” he says.

Another A.A. member who has staffed exhibit booths is Gerry R., of New Orleans, who says A.A.’s aim is to convey the simple message, “we are here and this is what we do. We are usually only one of a hundred or more exhibitors, and we are there to welcome anyone who wants to stop by and chat and get some information.”

A.A.’s Evolving Web Site Undergoes Another Overhaul

The redesigned A.A. Web site of the General Service Office (www.aa.org) debuted on January 1, nine years after G.S.O.’s first Web site appeared on the Internet. Visits to aa.org have grown, along with the Internet. In 1999, the site logged 730,000 visits, up from 400,000 the previous year. Now, monthly visits top a quarter of a million.

Demonstrating how the Web site has become the favored way for A.A. members and others to contact G.S.O., 70% of those attending the A.A. International Convention in Toronto last summer registered online. And of the more than 2,000 inquiries to the Cooperation With the Professional Community desk in a recent year, 1,334 came via the Web site.

Overall, the site contains a vast amount of material, including current and back issues of *Box 4-5-9* and *About A.A.*, information for the media, answers for those wondering if they might have a drinking problem, a history of A.A., and information on how to find A.A. meetings in many parts of the country.

Let Us Hear From You ...

Are there specific topics you would like to see explored in *About A.A.*? Please send us your thoughts, ideas, comments, so we may better communicate with the professional community. You can e-mail the Cooperation With the Professional Community desk at: cpc@aa.org.

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