

Public
Information
WORKBOOK

Public Information Workbook

This workbook is service material, reflecting A.A. experience shared at the General Service Office. A.A. workbooks are compiled from the practical experience of A.A. members in the various service areas. They also reflect guidance given through the Twelve Traditions and the General Service Conference (U.S./Canada).

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Introduction

What is Public Information work and Why Should A.A.s Do It?

Public Information (P.I.) in Alcoholics Anonymous means carrying the message of recovery to the still-suffering alcoholic by informing the general public about the A.A. program. We carry the message by getting in touch with and responding to the media, schools, industry, and other organizations which can report on the nature and purpose of A.A. and what it can do for alcoholics.

This workbook will guide you through the Public Information process. The pages that follow suggest ways individuals can organize and perform P.I. work, as well as activities that have been successful for local P.I. committees.

Those undertaking P.I. work for the first time, whether it be at the area, district, group, or intergroup/central office level, are encouraged to read and take guidance from the information contained here. It is suggested that members taking part in P.I. work should have several years of continuous sobriety.

The first Public Information committee in A.A. was formed by the General Service Board in 1956. At that time, the following statement of "A.A.'s movement-wide public information policy" was written and approved by the General Service Conference:

In all public relations, A.A.'s sole objective is to help the still suffering alcoholic. Always mindful of the importance of personal anonymity we believe this can be done by making known to him, and to those who may be interested in his problems, our own experience as individuals and as a Fellowship in learning to live without alcohol. We believe that our experience should be made available freely to all who express sincere interest. We believe fur-

ther that all efforts in this field should always reflect our gratitude for the gift of sobriety and our awareness that many outside A.A. are equally concerned with the serious problem of alcoholism.

As our co-founder, Bill W., wrote:

Public Information takes many forms—the simple sign outside a meeting place that says “A.A. meeting tonight;” listing in local phone directories; distribution of A.A. literature; and radio and television shows using sophisticated media techniques. Whatever the form, it comes down to “one drunk carrying the message to another drunk,” whether through personal contact or through the use of third parties and the media.

The needs and experiences of people in your own area, large or small, urban or rural, will affect what you decide to do. The suggestions in this workbook are just that—suggestions—to spark your thinking on how best to work at carrying the message.

Forming a P.I. Committee

There are different ways in organizing a P.I. committee. Local needs and practices will guide you regarding whether you work primarily through the area and district structure or through the local central/intergroup office.

The A.A. Guidelines, Public Information, are your most complete resource, along with other material found in the P.I. Workbook and the folder that comes with it. The Guidelines stem from shared experience of several areas and intergroup/central offices in the forming of P.I. committees.

Once you decide to form a P.I. committee, it is a good idea to identify exactly what your needs are and set goals and how many people you have

available to get the job done. In some instances, the first task for a committee is to inform the A.A. members in your area about the need to communicate with the public. Sometimes you need to correct misconceptions about whether A.A.s should be going out to non-A.A.s. A few P.I. committees have reported resistance from members who fear they will be doing “promotion” by letting professionals and the public know about A.A. Have the members read and become familiar with the P.I. Workbook so that they have a clear understanding of ways the A.A. message is carried to the public, and of the Traditions and A.A. experience in this area.

Therefore, total and candid communication within A.A. about P.I. work is important. Your first audience is the Fellowship itself. Some P.I. committees share with one another by exchanging minutes of their meetings. It is also helpful to share your activities and ideas with G.S.O. for possible inclusion in the P.I. section of *Box 4-5-9*. P.I. committee members can be visible to other A.A.s through participation in their group and other business meetings. Let the telephone answering service or central/intergroup office know who to contact when there is a need for a P.I. contact.

The A.A. program works when an active alcoholic wants help, and A.A. is on hand to give that help. However, somewhere in the background, there has usually been the help of a doctor, alcoholism agency or facility, relative, employer, teacher, someone who knew about A.A. and where to find it.

Suggested P.I. Committee Goals

As part of P.I. shared experience, the following is a list of goals from a district P.I. committee:

1. Be sure every public library has at least one Conference-approved book, e.g. the Big Book, *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* or *Living Sober*.
2. Let the Fellowship know how to reach out to the hearing impaired.

3. Place a literature rack in every high school, college, police station, library and hospital in the district and keep the rack stocked with appropriate literature and meeting schedules.
4. Send a letter to high schools, offering A.A. literature and A.A. Videos for Young People and/or a presentation on A.A.—what we do and what we do not do. (See Guide Letters in this Workbook.)
5. Send a letter to convalescent homes, rest homes and senior centers in the district offering A.A. literature and/or a presentation on A.A. (See Guide Letters in this Workbook.)
6. List open A.A. meetings in the newspapers in the district.
7. Place a small (paid if necessary) announcement in every district newspaper around the holidays.
8. Work with the newspapers — anonymity, Traditions — generating interest in our Fellowship.
9. Respond to speaking requests at non-A.A. meetings in the district.
10. Place Public Service Announcements with radio and television stations.
11. Put meeting schedules behind the front desks at every hotel, motel and bed and breakfast.
12. Participate in district and state A.A. seminars and conventions.
13. Fight apathy within the Fellowship, find a co-chair and interested people in order to achieve all the above, and most importantly, keep your sanity and stay away from the first drink.

Working Within the Traditions

The Twelve Traditions are *our* Traditions and the responsibility for preserving them is *ours*. Many P.I. committees place fundamental importance on informing the committee members about these Traditions—what they are and why they came into being. With this ground work, P.I. committees can effectively communicate A.A. principles to the general public and to representatives of the media. We cannot expect others to understand and observe the Traditions if we are poorly informed ourselves. Sadly, we have also found that lack of information can lead to intolerance. For example, if an A.A. member’s anonymity is broken at the media level, it is often quite simply the result of a misunderstanding. A courteous note explaining the Tradition to the member involved is helpful; a snap, critical judgment is not. Politeness and quiet explanation are the A.A. way.

An understanding of all the Traditions and a firm grasp of the anonymity Traditions are especially vital. The pamphlet “Understanding Anonymity” and the Anonymity Wallet Card are useful in making the A.A. anonymity principle clear to the public. (Remember, it is not a break of Tradition Eleven when you privately identify yourself as an A.A. member to non-A.A.s encountered in the course of P.I. work.)

Traditions Are Our Guide

Thoughtful reading of A.A. literature (*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* and the pamphlets “A.A. Tradition—How It Developed” and “The Twelve Traditions Illustrated”) is essential for anyone who works with non-A.A.s.

Of course, all the Traditions are important in this Twelfth Step work; and Traditions Six, Eight, Eleven and Twelve are directly related to it.

Tradition Six: “An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.”

Today, alcoholism is a major concern of many local, state, provincial and national agencies. Many speak glowingly of the A.A. program and cooperate with A.A. groups and committees. To what extent should A.A. members participate in the programs of these agencies?

Experience has given us a simple guiding principle: We do cooperate, but we do not affiliate. We want to work constructively with other organizations in the field of alcoholism, but we do not want to be merged with them in the public mind. Public linking of the A.A. name with that of another organization could give the impression of affiliation. We should be careful to make it clear that A.A. is available as a resource for other agencies, and that we are always available to help and cooperate.

A.A. is concerned solely with the personal recovery and continued sobriety of individual alcoholics who turn to the Fellowship for help. Alcoholics Anonymous does not engage in the fields of alcoholism research, medical or psychiatric treatment, or propaganda in any form, although members may participate in such activities as individuals.

Committees on Cooperation With the Professional Community (C.P.C.), too, are especially aware of the Sixth and Seventh Traditions (the C.P.C. Workbook is a good resource). The pamphlets “How A.A. Members Cooperate With Professionals,” “A.A. in Your Community,” and “If You Are a Professional” are also helpful.

Doing What We Do Best

We stick to what we know best—personal recovery and Twelfth-Step work. We are not authorities on the whole field of alcoholism. We share our recovery program, but we are not professionals. We have no official

definition of alcoholism. Although we are victims of the illness, we have no profound knowledge of its cause or “cure.”

Public Information workers are frequently involved in activities at the media level. A.A. is not a secret society, and we carry the message to whomever we can. If a suffering alcoholic never meets an A.A. member, how is he or she going to find us? We must, however, be ever aware of the need to remain anonymous at the public level; we must try to give the media an accurate picture of the A.A. Fellowship as a whole.

A.A.s who carry the message through public information have found it essential to emphasize and to remember that A.A. is a Fellowship of peers.

Workshops and Meeting Formats

Many committees have found that workshops provide a way of taking a look at local needs, opportunities and attitudes, as well as the service structure, the Traditions, etc. Workshops are also fine tools for exploring ideas and settling on methods.

A Sample Workshop

Here is what was done in one area:

An all-day workshop was planned. It was opened with the Serenity Prayer, then followed by a reading of the short form of the Twelve Concepts. The Fifth Tradition was also read, and related to the First Concept. The Tradition says that each group has one primary purpose—to carry the message; the Concept states that ultimate responsibility and authority belong to the A.A. groups.

The bulk of the day was devoted to discussion, with the full group breaking up into seven small tables. Before the discussion began, a brief presentation on Public Information was given.

Two discussion topics were assigned to each table, and a recorder was appointed to take notes and report on the whole group. Topics were:

1. What is the best way to form a P.I. Committee?
How do we form a working plan for the committee?
2. What is the best way to reach professionals?
What is the best way to sponsor professionals?
3. How can we sponsor members in service?
How can we sponsor doctors, clergy, police?
4. How can we bridge the gap between professionals and A.A.?
What type of presentations are appropriate for professionals?
5. What are the best A.A. attitudes toward professionals?
6. How can we make contact with professionals?
7. What literature is best, and from whom?

Brief summaries of the discussion were reported from each table, and general discussion took place.

Relations With the Professional Community

In some localities, relations with the professional community are still handled by the Public Information committee; in others, a committee on Cooperation With the Professional Community (C.P.C.) is formed. (See the A.A. Guidelines on Cooperation With the Professional Community in the Guidelines enclosed in the pocket of your P.I. folder.)

We can always, of course, take action *as individuals* to establish good relations with the medical profession. For example, we can identify ourselves as A.A. members to the doctors who knew us as practicing alcoholics, and thank the doctor for his or her help with our problem. We can show appreciation to hospitals and nursing staffs, by saying thanks in person and by writing thank-you letters.

As a committee, we can keep physicians supplied with A.A. literature. We can make a point of inviting our own doctors or others we know in the medical profession to open meetings, making sure they know they are welcome to any open meeting of A.A.

Some committees give A.A. Grapevine subscriptions to doctors in their communities with the doctor's permission. A Grapevine order form is enclosed in the pocket of the P.I. folder.

Similarly, P.I. committees communicate in the same way with lawyers, educators, the clergy and others.

Community or Public Information Meetings

The A.A. program works when an active alcoholic *wants* help, and an A.A. is on hand to give that help. But, somewhere in the background, there has probably been help from an employer, a doctor, an alcoholism agency or facility, or relative—someone who knew about A.A. and how to find us.

From the beginning, A.A. has depended on good community relations to keep its “helping hands” informed and ready. Here are some ways A.A. members in an area can tell others about A.A., and keep the friends of A.A. working with us.

A community or public information meeting can do a lot to strengthen relationships with nonalcoholic friends, and help make new friends. The committee invites doctors, members of the clergy, law enforcement officers, employers, public service workers, and others who deal with active alcoholics to a special open meeting.

Invitations should be mailed, ten days before the meeting, to groups in the area, friends of A.A., and those who are interested in the problem of alcoholism—doctors, judges, alcoholism agencies, clergy, personnel directors, social workers, and, of course, the press.

The announcement below is one suggested format:

The _____ Public Information Committee (or group) of Alcoholics Anonymous invites you, your family, and friends to a Community Meeting about Alcoholics Anonymous

The meeting will be held at _____ on _____.

It will start promptly at _____ and end at _____.

Speakers: John S., Chairperson
Dr. Maureen Blank, "The Medical View"
Bert L. and Doris G.

Sample Meeting Format

There are many kinds of successful public information meeting programs. Here is one that is frequently followed:

1. A short welcome and introduction is given by the A.A. chairperson, who should try to cover all or most of these points:

- Welcoming remarks, mentioning A.A.'s willingness to help whenever and wherever it can.
- Anonymity: Requesting that the press and all present cooperate with our A.A. Tradition and respect the anonymity of A.A. members present.

• The following is often said:

"There may be some here who are not familiar with our Tradition of personal anonymity at the media level. Our public relations policy is based on attraction, not promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, TV and films. Therefore, we respectfully ask that no A.A. member be identified by full name or photograph in published or broadcast reports of this meeting."

- What A.A. is and is not, and what A.A.s have discovered about their problem.
- The A.A. program works to arrest the illness of alcoholism.
- A.A. is for all faiths and those of no faith. It is for men and women of all ages.
- Speakers' opinions are their own.
- A.A.'s Tradition of self-support (*no* collection at this meeting).
- A.A. helps keep the member sober, as well as getting him or her sober.
- A.A. can be found in most cities and towns. Look for a listing in the local telephone directory or check local newspapers.
- Many non-A.A.s have helped us. (At this point, introduce non-A.A. speaker.)

2. A non-A.A. guest speaker (public service worker, judge, minister, executive) discusses A.A. from his or her point of view and experiences.

3. Either another non-A.A. speaks or an A.A. member speaks briefly about his or her own drinking experience and explains the A.A. program—how it works, and what it does and does not do.

4. An A.A. member gives his or her drinking and recovery story in some detail. (A.A. speakers should understand when they are invited that non-A.A.s will be present.)

5. Concluding remarks by the chairperson: “Keep an open mind. If you suspect you have a drinking problem, you’ve come to the right place to find out, and to find help.” Explain where A.A. help is available in the community.

6. Show one of the current A.A. films, available from G.S.O. or your local intergroup/central office.

Participating in Non-A.A. Events

In keeping with our Tradition of cooperation but not affiliation, many A.A. Public Information committees participate in events sponsored by non-A.A. entities.

Talks to outside groups are perhaps the most widely used and popular method of getting information across. Suggestions on this means of communication are found in the pamphlet “Speaking at Non-A.A. Meetings” and in the Public Information Guidelines.

One kind of event in which P.I.s are often asked to participate is the community or health fair, sponsored by local colleges, public health organizations, and so on. Members of the local P.I. committee frequently staff the A.A. booth at such events, answering questions and providing information as requested.

A table-top display for these events (M-13 in the literature catalog) is available from G.S.O. “A.A. at a Glance” and other P.I. literature are usually used in conjunction with the table-top display. Mailing labels for the public to request informational literature from G.S.O. may also be available at a display or booth. Following the event, the A.A. member responsible for the display or booth sends the completed labels to the P.I. Desk at G.S.O.

“A.A. at a Glance” and “A Message to Teenagers” (available in quantities from G.S.O. at no charge) are often used as giveaway items when A.A. members speak at non-A.A. groups. Some show the videos that have been specifically developed for young people. These films are described in the enclosed literature catalog.

Presentations to Employers

Many industries recognize alcoholism as a tragically wasteful overhead and are encouraged to find that A.A. does not cost them either time or money. They know the advantages of a sober worker who attends A.A. and will often make available A.A. literature (as well as publicize A.A. awareness).

Experience has shown that a businesslike approach to industry is most likely to succeed. Telephone the personnel director's secretary to ascertain the name and title of the correct person who deals with alcoholism policies. Then contact that person by telephone, requesting an interview, and follow up by a letter of confirmation.

Once a meeting is arranged, offer the cooperation of Alcoholics Anonymous. Explain what A.A. can do and cannot do. In most cases the personnel offices are pleased to receive local telephone numbers, a list of local meetings (without contact names or numbers), as well as posters and literature. Offer to talk to staff and/or management about the A.A. program.

Many companies publish internal magazines/newsletters and articles. Information about A.A. can be included, thus carrying the message even more widely throughout the company.

We are reminded that A.A. has no opinion on alcohol policies of businesses, but this does not mean that we cannot cooperate within our Traditions.

See also Presentation section, page 45.

Carrying the Message Through the Media

General Guidelines

Without the help of newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, Internet and new media technologies, it is doubtful that A.A. could have reached into the lives of millions of alcoholics. From the beginning, communications people have respected what A.A. does, have appreciated our Traditions, have trusted us and deserved our trust.

In dealing with the media, we have one real advantage: honesty. A.A. members are not, it is hoped, seeking personal gain or publicity, and the

media respects us. Our aim is to help other suffering alcoholics, and we can approach local media people with the knowledge that we are trying to provide information that will be interesting and helpful to readers, listeners, and viewers. Remember, it's a wise public information person who gives an editor, news director, or reporter credit for having a conscientious desire to serve the public.

What Is “Real News”?

Opportunities for news about the Fellowship include facts about the growth of A.A., about male and female membership, about changing age ratios in the membership; as well as publication of a new Conference-approved pamphlet or book or an International Convention. Some of this information is available in the input of A.A.'s triennial survey of its members.

The activities suggested in this workbook are newsworthy. Some are so familiar that we forget they may be news to non-A.A.s—the recovery story itself or talks at schools are frequently good press material. Area conferences and conventions are also newsworthy events.

Periodically, newspapers run three and four installment features on alcoholism and A.A. Close contact with your local newspaper can generate these features, and even more important, can give you the chance to work along with the writer in the interest of accuracy.

Similarly, local television news departments frequently run three- or four-part special reports on subjects of community interest. A contact to the stations news director about the story value of the A.A. recovery program may well be rewarded with a sincere thank you for a “story idea”!

In 1960...the board of trustees approved certain guidelines to be followed by the Public Information Committee in the release of information about A.A. to news sources. Among these principles... are the following:

The release must be factual; boasting, disparagement of other groups concerned with the problem of alcoholism, or engagement in controversy in any form, whether by direct representation or by implication, must be carefully avoided.

We should recognize that our experience to speak about alcoholism is limited in subject matter to Alcoholics Anonymous and its recovery program; hence, any statement in reference to other or broader aspects of the problem of alcoholism should be accurately attributed to authoritative sources outside the movement, identified by name.

Preserving Anonymity on Radio, TV and Internet Interviews

A.A. members occasionally participate in interviews on radio, TV and the Internet, with great benefit to the Fellowship and to suffering alcoholics. Many in the media are aware of the Anonymity Traditions, and accustomed to helping A.A.s preserve personal anonymity at the public level. For those media persons who are not aware of our Traditions, be sure to explain the need for personal anonymity on your part, and request their cooperation.

An A.A. who appears on radio, TV or the Internet and is identified as an A.A. member will find it safer to carefully arrange with the interviewer to use only his or her first name, and to appear in such a way that identification is impossible. The 1968 General Service Conference felt that a “full-face appearance on TV is an anonymity break, even though the name is withheld.”

If an A.A. member plans to make a radio, TV or Internet appearance simply as a *recovered alcoholic*, without disclosing A.A. membership, no question of anonymity arises. The A.A. appears as any other guest, using full name and full-face picture.

Press Interviews

When appearing on interview programs, as an A.A. member, with anonymity protected, explain to the interviewer in advance that A.A.s traditionally confine such discussions to the A.A. program. The member does not speak on or qualify as an expert on the disease of alcoholism, drugs, suicide rates, and so on.

Traditionally, A.A.s preface their remarks by saying that they speak for themselves, not for the entire Fellowship. Generally, they state that the sole concern of A.A. is the recovery and continued sobriety of those alcoholics who turn to the Fellowship for help. When we speak as A.A.s, we are careful to say that A.A. has no opinion on other issues.

Talk Shows and Similar Programs

Many radio stations have regular talk phone-in shows (Open Line, Talk Back, Call Up, etc.), which provide an excellent opportunity to talk about A.A.'s role in the community. If there is such a program available in your community, call the station and inform the program director or talk show producer that you would like to provide a representative to talk about Alcoholics Anonymous. You will be scheduled for a certain day and time.

A.A. Representative

Be sure that the person who represents A.A. is knowledgeable about the Traditions and Steps, and can converse in an intelligent and articulate manner. It is important that the representative be able to field questions about A.A. accurately, and remain level-headed. It is not uncommon for someone to call a talk show and attack the guest representative. If that happens, just make the point that A.A. does not engage in controversy.

Annual Anonymity

Memo to Media

Following is a sample copy of the Anonymity Letter sent to the press

each year from G.S.O. This letter is sent to newspapers in the U.S. and

Canada and also sent to radio and TV stations. It is suggested that local

P.I. committees send the same letter to local newspapers, radio and TV.

Copies can be obtained from G.S.O.

Letters from local people can mean more with hometown media

than do mass mailings from New York.

Anonymity Letter to Media

Anonymity at the Public Level

A Note Of Thanks, A Request For Cooperation

From time to time we write our public media friends to thank them for helping us observe our long-standing tradition of anonymity for members of Alcoholics Anonymous.

First, let us express our gratitude to you. From the beginning of A.A. in 1935, its members have recognized that word-of-mouth is not sufficient by itself to carry the program's message of hope and recovery to the many people still suffering from alcoholism. The public media has been a vital part of this effort, and today we estimate that there are more than 2 million successfully recovering members of Alcoholics Anonymous in more than 180 countries.

Second, we respectfully request that you continue to cooperate with us in maintaining the anonymity of our members. The principle of anonymity is a basic tenet of our fellowship. Those who are reluctant to seek our help may overcome their fear if they are confident that their anonymity will be respected. In addition, and perhaps less understood, our tradition of anonymity acts as a restraint on our members, reminding us that we are a program of principles, not personalities, and that no individual A.A. member may presume to act as a spokesman or leader of our fellowship. If an A.A. member is identified in the media, we ask that you please use first names only (e.g. Bob S. or Alice F.) and that you not use photographs or electronic images in which member's faces may be recognized.

Again, we thank you for your continued cooperation. Those who wish to know more about our fellowship may write or phone, or visit the section "Media Resources" on www.aa.org. Although our fellowship does not comment on matters of public controversy, we are happy to provide background information about A.A. to anyone who seeks it.

Sincerely,

Public Information Committee of Alcoholics Anonymous

Radio, Television and Cable Public Service Announcements —PSAs

As a means of “attraction rather than promotion,” the General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous has voted the group conscience of A.A. as a whole in the United States and Canada to produce public service announcements for both radio and television.

Speaking in Concept XI on the importance of public information work, our co-founder, Bill, says:

We are trying our best to reach more of those 25 million alcoholics who today inhabit the world. We have to reach them directly and indirectly. In order to accomplish this it will be necessary that understanding of A.A. and public good will towards A.A. go on growing everywhere. We need to be on even better terms with medicine, religion, employers, governments, courts, prisons, mental hospitals, and all those conducting enterprises in the alcohol field. We need the increasing good will of editors, writers, television, and radio channels. These publicity outlets—local, national, and international—should be opened wider and wider, always foregoing, however, high pressure promotion tactics. It is to, and through, all these resources that we must try to carry A.A.’s message to those who suffer alcoholism and its consequences. (*A.A. Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Service*, p. 51).

Most radio, television and cable stations devote a specific amount of time annually to “broadcasts in the public interest,” and often this programming entails the airing of public service announcements. The General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous makes available radio and television public service announcements produced by the trustees’ Committee on Public Information. In some areas, high-quality PSAs are successfully produced by P.I. committees at a most reason-

able cost. With our Traditions as the foundation, PSAs can be constructed to show that A.A. is local. (Please see order forms in P.I. Kit, or order from A.A.W.S. catalog.)

Approaching Local Broadcast Facilities

In seeking to have public service announcements aired, you may telephone the broadcast station's community relations or public service person, program director or general manager, and ask if you may personally deliver to them a recorded or videotaped public service announcement—even if you are told to simply mail the material to a particular individual, *contact the person*. Explain who you are, making it clear you are a volunteer. To identify yourself as an A.A. member is *not* breaking the anonymity Traditions.

Local A.A. identifications: The television and radio PSAs do not require a local telephone number. A local telephone number, as well as other information—such as a tag line indicating “this is a Public Service Announcement”—can be added to television PSAs by your local station. Often your local station will offer to do the minor production necessary, or you may ask them to do so.

Contact more than one station: An A.A. spot campaign should not be exclusive with any one station, nor does the station expect it to be. Order as many sets of PSAs as there are stations in your area.

When the station has used the spots, a thank-you note to your contact on behalf of A.A. is very important. (It will also be a valued addition to the station's public service files.)

The television spots are available on DVD, U-Matic or Betacam SP. Order forms for each television PSA are available from G.S.O. The radio spots are available on CDs or in print. Some radio DJs prefer to have print or electronic copies of our radio PSA scripts. These are available from G.S.O.

Introduction

An understanding of anonymity in A.A. is the first prerequisite for being effective in public information. For a fuller understanding of anonymity in the digital age, many P.I. committees hold workshops on “Anonymity in a Digital Age.” Resources for such a workshop are the newly updated “Understanding Anonymity,” the October 2010 A.A. Grapevine: Preserving Anonymity in a Digital Age and the service material on “How to Conduct a Sharing Session.” At first glance the terms anonymity and public information seem to contradict each other. Actually, they don’t, as these selections from the co-founder’s writings demonstrate.

Bill W. wrote extensively about anonymity, and this section of the P.I. Workbook is made up of his words. It is divided into three sections. We follow Bill in distinguishing the significance of anonymity at the practical and the spiritual levels, as well as at the individual and the group levels, the private and public, and the local and national. Then, Bill W. takes up the questions of anonymity breaks and their consequences.

Part I—Anonymity — the Need

“In my belief, the entire future of our fellowship hangs upon this vital principle. If we continue to be filled with the spirit and practice of anonymity, no shoal or reef can wreck us. If we forget this principle, the lid to Pandora’s box will be off and the spirits of Money, Power, and Prestige will be loosed among us. Obsessed by these evil genii, we might well founder and break up. I devoutly believe this will never happen. No A.A. principle merits more study and application than this one. I am positive that A.A.’s anonymity is the key to

long-time survival.”

(*A.A. Comes of Age*, pp. 131-32)

Bill's Last Message

“Anonymity has two attributes essential to our individual and collective survival; the spiritual and the practical.

“On the spiritual level, anonymity demands the greatest discipline of which we are capable; on the practical level anonymity has brought protection for the newcomer, respect and support of the world outside, and security from those of us who would use A.A. for sick and selfish purposes.”

(Bill's Last Message)

Anonymity as a spiritual message

“We are sure that humility, expressed by anonymity, is the greatest safeguard that Alcoholics Anonymous can ever have.”

“...anonymity is real humility at work. It is an all-pervading spiritual quality which today keynotes A.A. life everywhere. Moved by the spirit of anonymity, we try to give up our natural desires for personal distinction as A.A. members both among fellow alcoholics and before the general public. As we lay aside these very human aspirations, we believe that each of us takes part in the weaving of a protective mantle which covers our whole Society and under which we may grow and work in unity.”

(*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, p. 187)

Sacrifice and Survival

“The spiritual substance of anonymity is sacrifice. Because A.A.'s Twelve Traditions repeatedly ask us to give up personal desires for the common good, we realize that the sacrificial spirit, well symbolized by anonymity, is the foundation of all these Traditions. It is A.A.'s proved

willingness to make these sacrifices that gives people high confidence in our future.” (A.A. *Come of Age*, p. 132)

Part II—Anonymity as a Personal Choice

“...While it is quite evident that most of us believe in anonymity, our practice of the principle does vary a great deal.

“Of course, it should be the privilege, even the right, of each individual or group to handle anonymity as they wish. But to do that intelligently we shall need to be convinced that the principle is a good one for practically all of us; indeed we must realize that the future safety and effectiveness of Alcoholics Anonymous may depend upon its preservation.” (The *Language of the Heart*, p. 15)

“It should be the privilege of each individual A.A. to cloak himself with as much personal anonymity as he desires. His fellow A.A.s should respect his wishes and help guard whatever status he wants to assume.” (ibid)

Anonymity at the Group Level

“In practice then, the principle of anonymity seems to come down to this: with one very important exception, the question of how far each individual or group shall go in dropping anonymity is left strictly to the individual or group concerned. The exception is: that all groups or individuals, when writing or speaking for publication as members of Alcoholics Anonymous, feel bound never to disclose their true names. It is at this point of publication that we feel we should draw the line on anonymity. *We ought not disclose ourselves to the general public through the media of the press, in pictures or on the radio.*” (“A.A. Tradition — How It Developed,” p. 41)

Anonymity at the Public Level

“Great modesty and humility are needed by every A.A. member for his own permanent recovery. If these virtues are such vital needs to the individual, so must they be to A.A. as a whole. This principle of anonymity before the general public can, if we take it seriously enough, guarantee the Alcoholics Anonymous movement these sterling attributes forever. Our public relations policy should mainly rest upon the principle of attraction and seldom, if ever, upon promotion.” (*ibid*)

“The old files at A.A. headquarters reveal many scores of...experiences with broken anonymity. Most of them point up the same lessons.

“They tell us that we alcoholics are the biggest rationalizers in the world; that fortified with the excuse we are doing great things for A.A. we can, through broken anonymity, resume our old and disastrous pursuit of personal power and prestige, public honors, and money—the same implacable urges that when frustrated once caused us to drink; the same forces that are today ripping the globe apart at its seams. Moreover, they make clear that enough spectacular anonymity breakers could someday carry our whole society down into the ruinous dead end with them.”

(*Best of the Grapevine*, Vol. 1, p. 278)

Media Attitudes Toward Anonymity

“...almost every newspaper reporter who covers us complains, at first, of the difficulty of writing his story without names. But he quickly forgets his difficulty when he realizes that here is a group of people who care nothing for personal gain.”

(*The Language of the Heart*, pp. 17-18)

“For many years, news channels all over the world have showered A.A. with enthusiastic publicity, a never-ending stream of it, far out of

proportion to the news value involved. Editors tell us why this is. They give us extra space and time because their confidence in A.A. is complete. The very foundation of that high confidence is, they say, our continual insistence of personal anonymity at the press level.” *(Best of the Grapevine Vol. 1, p. 280)*

Part III—Anonymity Breaks

“Of course, no A.A. need be anonymous to family, friends, or neighbors.... But before the general public—press, radio, films, television, and the like—the revelation of full names and pictures is the point of peril. This is the main escape hatch for the fearful destructive forces that still lie latent in us all. Here the lid can and must stay down.”

(Best of the Grapevine, Vol. 1, pp. 279-80)

“...we are certain that if such [worldly] forces ever rule our Fellowship, we will perish too, just as other societies have perished throughout human history. Let us not suppose for a moment that we recovered alcoholics are so much better or stronger than other folks; or that because in twenty years nothing has ever happened to A.A., nothing ever can.” *bid*, pp. 278-79)

“Our really great hope lies in the fact that our total experience, as alcoholics and as A.A. members, has at least taught us the immense power of these forces of self-destruction. These hard-won lessons have made us entirely willing to undertake every personal sacrifice necessary for the preservation of our treasured Fellowship. *(ibid*, p. 279)

Bill's Experience

“...I was once a breaker of anonymity myself... I learned that the temporary or seeming good can often be the deadly enemy of the perma-

ment best. When it comes to survival for A.A., nothing short of our very best will be good enough.” *(ibid, p. 280)*

Rationalization of Anonymity Breaks

“...they [anonymity breakers] express the belief that our anonymity Tradition is wrong—at least for them.... They forget that, during their drinking days, prestige and achievement of worldly ambition were their principle aims. They do not realize that, by breaking anonymity, they are unconsciously pursuing those old and perilous illusions once more. They forget that the keeping of one’s anonymity often means a sacrifice of one’s desire for power, prestige, and money. They do not see that if these strivings became general in A.A., the course of our whole history would be changed; that we would be sowing the seeds of our own destruction as a society.”

(From a letter by Bill W., 1958, *As Bill Sees It*, p. 198)

Consequences of Anonymity Breaks

“Any who would drop their anonymity must reflect that they may set a precedent which could eventually destroy a valuable principle. We must never let any immediate advantage shake us in our determination to keep intact such a really vital tradition.”

(“A.A. Tradition — How It Developed,” p. 41)

Reflections on Anonymity from the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions

- *We need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films.*
- *Anonymity to this extent is actually the practice of genuine humility.*
- *Even within the Fellowship every member's name and story needs to be confidential if the member so wishes it.*
- *Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion.*
- *As a Fellowship, we wish to publicize our principles and our work but not individual members.*
- *To us the Tradition of anonymity is far more than a sound public relations policy. It is more a denial of self-seeking.*
- *This Tradition of anonymity is a constant and practical reminder that personal ambition has no place in A.A.*
- *The spiritual substance of anonymity is sacrifice.*
- *Moved by the spirit of anonymity, we try to give up our natural desires for personal distinction both among fellow alcoholics and before the general public.*
- *We are sure that humility, expressed by anonymity, is the greatest safeguard that Alcoholics Anonymous can ever have.*

Bibliography

A.A. Comes of Age
"A.A. Tradition — How It Developed"
Best of the Grapevine, Vol. I
The Language of the Heart
Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions
"Understanding Anonymity"

Guide Letters

For many Public Information committees (and C.P.C. and other committees), contact with the professional whose work may be involved with the active alcoholic is made by letter and a follow-up visit.

In this section you will find sample letters used by Public Information committees. The most effective letters and phone calls include some or all of the following elements:

Information About A.A.—Phrases from the Preamble can be quoted, or a few sentences can describe what A.A. is and what it can and cannot do. Many letters enclose literature, such as “A.A. at a Glance,” “Information on Alcoholics Anonymous,” “If You are a Professional,” and “A.A. in Your Community.”

A Request to Cooperate With the Professional—An A.A. contact can be suggested, giving the local Public Information Committee mailing address, or that of an intergroup or central office. (Many letters explain that A.A. members are available and interested in helping to come and talk about A.A., put on a public A.A. meeting, provide literature, and so on.)

Information About the Traditions, Making Clear What A.A. Does and Does Not Do—Clarification of the Traditions is important, particularly those that relate to nonaffiliation and anonymity.

Reminder: The following material is presented as a guide only. These letters are just samples intended to give you a “jumping-off” point; they may be modified to suit the needs of your own area. Guide Letters are also available from G.S.O. electronically upon request. E-mail publicinfo@aa.org.

Guide Letter to Schools

Dear _____:

We of the _____ Public Information Committee of Alcoholics Anonymous would welcome the opportunity to provide information about our program of recovery from alcoholism to your students.

With your permission, we could share how so many of us, including young people, have been able to arrest alcoholism through the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. Here are some flyers and pamphlets for your information. Additionally, we are sending you a copy of the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* for the Health Science section of your library.

We look forward to hearing from you, and to providing any further information about Alcoholics Anonymous.

Sincerely,

Guide Letter Inviting Professional to Take Part in Workshop

Dear _____:

The _____ Area/District/Central Office/Intergroup Public Information Committee of Alcoholics Anonymous will hold a workshop for A.A. members and others who are interested in helping alcoholics maintain sobriety through the A.A. program of recovery.

We would be delighted if you agreed to take part in a panel discussion on the subject of _____. This panel will be held from ____ p.m. to _____ p.m. on _____. Some of the other panelists will be _____, _____, and _____. A preliminary program for this workshop is enclosed.

It is only through the kind cooperation of so many of our nonalcoholic friends like you that A.A. now has well over two million members in approximately 150 countries worldwide.

The _____ panel of our workshop would be greatly enhanced by the addition of your insight and professional expertise. Please let us know by _____ if you will join us.

Sincerely yours,

Enclosure: Preliminary program

Guide Letter to Physicians

Dear _____:

You may be familiar with Alcoholics Anonymous, and have patients with alcoholism problems whom you may want to send to A.A. Perhaps we can help you help our fellow alcoholics. The attached Fact Sheet explains briefly what A.A. is and what it is not.

If you have questions about A.A., an A.A. member would be glad to talk with you. He or she is also available to introduce your alcoholic patient to our Fellowship.

For any of the pamphlets listed below, please check and return the list in the enclosed self-addressed envelope. We want you to know that the _____ Public Information Committee of Alcoholics Anonymous is here to be of service to you.

Sincerely,

Guide Letter to Police Department

Dear _____:

We of the _____ Public Information Committee of Alcoholics Anonymous request your permission to visit your headquarters to provide information about our program of recovery from alcoholism.

Alcoholics Anonymous has cooperated for many years with local DWI and other programs. Many members of A.A. were once in trouble with the law because of alcoholism. Today they are useful, productive citizens and safe drivers.

Alcoholics Anonymous is not affiliated with any other organization or institution. We want you to know that we are available to be of help to you.

Sincerely,

Guide Letter to the Clergy

Dear _____:

We of the _____ Public Information Committee of Alcoholics Anonymous would like to offer information about A.A., through you, to members of your congregation who may have a drinking problem. We know that you are in a unique position to have contact with and help the active alcoholic.

Alcoholics Anonymous is a worldwide fellowship of men and women who help each other to maintain sobriety through sharing their recovery experience with others.

The enclosed postcard returned to us with any or all of the boxes checked will be answered promptly with a phone call to arrange an answer to your request in the manner most convenient to you.

Sincerely,

(Postcard)

1. Would you be interested in having an A.A. member(s) speak to any of your individual members or groups? _____
2. Would you be interested in accompanying an A.A. member to an *open* meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous? (Open meetings are for alcoholics and nonalcoholics) _____
3. Would you like us to provide you with a schedule of A.A. meetings, dates, times, and locations? _____
4. Would you like us to provide you with an order form for A.A. literature? (We do have some no charge flyers for distribution.) _____

Guide Letter to Senior Citizen Centers

Dear _____:

Today, we hear a great deal about alcoholism among young people. Far less is said about the alarming increase in alcoholism among older persons; a fact that is causing concern to everyone involved with alcoholism, and with recovery from this serious illness.

We of the _____ Public Information Committee of Alcoholics Anonymous are enclosing a copy of the pamphlet "A.A. for the Older Alcoholic—Never Too Late," which is designed for people sixty years and over. If you know someone who may be interested in this pamphlet, please let us know and we will forward copies to you, at no charge.

Another service we make available on request is sending a speaker on the recovery program of A.A. The speaker is a former problem drinker with some years of sobriety, well qualified to answer questions about how alcoholics can recover in A.A. Our experience shows that even those with no drinking problem of their own find such programs intensely interesting, for in our society almost everyone has a relative or friend whose drinking is a cause for worry.

If we can supply your organization with literature or any additional information, please write or call.

Sincerely,

Guide Letters to Broadcast Outlets

Example 1:

Here are the public service spots that you requested. Alcoholics Anonymous has well over two million members in approximately 150 countries worldwide. Here in _____ , we have almost _____ separate A.A. groups which meet once or more each week.

Alcoholics Anonymous is a program of attraction rather than promotion, and members remain anonymous at the public level. With anonymity protected, however, we are glad to be guests on discussion, telephone talk, or community interest shows. If you would like help in bringing the story of Alcoholics Anonymous in this area to your audience, please contact me at the address below.

The enclosed A.A. literature is for your further information. Thanks again for your interest in Alcoholics Anonymous.

Sincerely,

Example 2:

Why does a college station need to air public service announcements from Alcoholics Anonymous? Think of this: one out of every ten drinkers is an alcoholic, whether the age is 18 or 88. Alcoholism is a disease—not an age!

Enclosed please find public service announcements in a format suitable for your station.

We also have qualified young members of A.A. available for public affairs or interview programs. Just call or write if A.A. can be of service.

Sincerely,

Sample Newspaper Announcements

Some committees place small, paid announcements in local newspapers. In case you need to buy space, here are some suggested announcements:

If you want to drink,
that's your business.

If you want to stop,
that's ours.

Call Alcoholics Anonymous
(address and telephone)

If you want to drink,
that's your business.

If you want to stop,
we can help.

Call Alcoholics Anonymous
(telephone)

Have you sometimes wished
you could spend a
holiday sober?

Call Alcoholics Anonymous
(telephone)

Cards and Signs

These are often used to offer the telephone number of the nearest central office, intergroup, or A.A. contact (depending upon the size of the community), or to give the times and places of nearby meetings. Cards and signs have been placed in telephone offices, police stations, sheriffs' offices, hospitals, county infirmaries, hotels, and taxi stations. Signs may be in the form of car cards (in buses or subway trains) or of road signs (those that welcome the traveler to "our town" by listing local lodges and civic clubs).

Telephone Directories

Sometimes, it is the local P.I. committee that is responsible for the A.A. listing in the phone book (including the Yellow Pages). Sometimes towns, cities, or countries/provinces have Web sites where this information can also appear.

Background on Triennial A.A. Membership Survey

The first broad survey of Alcoholics Anonymous was undertaken in 1968, following the unanimous recommendation of the delegates to the General Service Conference and under authorization of the board of trustees. The purpose of the survey has been to keep A.A. members informed on current trends in membership characteristics, and to provide information about Alcoholics Anonymous to the professional community and to the general public as part of A.A.'s purpose to carry our message to those who still suffer from alcoholism.

Since the first survey in 1968, the General Service Conference has conducted a membership survey every three years, with one exception.* In 2004 more than 7,700 A.A. members from the U.S. and Canada participated in a random survey of the membership. Information regarding the survey results has been made available to the general public through an A.A. pamphlet describing the survey findings.

Experience shows that following the release of survey results to the media a flurry of requests for additional information descends upon G.S.O. and local Public Information committees. For example, both newspaper and broadcast journalists seek additional information about A.A., and many prepare fine articles about A.A. and the opportunity for recovery within it. Local Public Information committees supply smaller, local media with a press release prepared by the trustees' Public Information Committee. Some excellent articles about A.A. come out of a variety of areas, both rural and metropolitan.

Occasionally, some concerns are raised about A.A. conducting a membership survey, even though the General Service Conference

*The Survey, which would have occurred in 1995, consistent with the existing triennial pattern, was deferred for one year by Conference Action and was actually conducted in 1996. It

is anticipated that the 2010 survey will be conducted in 2011.

has continued to support it, and thousands of A.A. members have agreed to participate in it. It seems clear that the Membership Survey is in support of our primary purpose stated in the Fifth Tradition—to carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

The Survey is also reported to the membership through *Box 4-5-9*.

