

# EXPERIENCE Has Taught Us:

AN INTRODUCTION TO  
OUR TWELVE TRADITIONS



**This is A.A. General Service Conference-approved literature.**

## **A.A. PREAMBLE<sup>©</sup>**

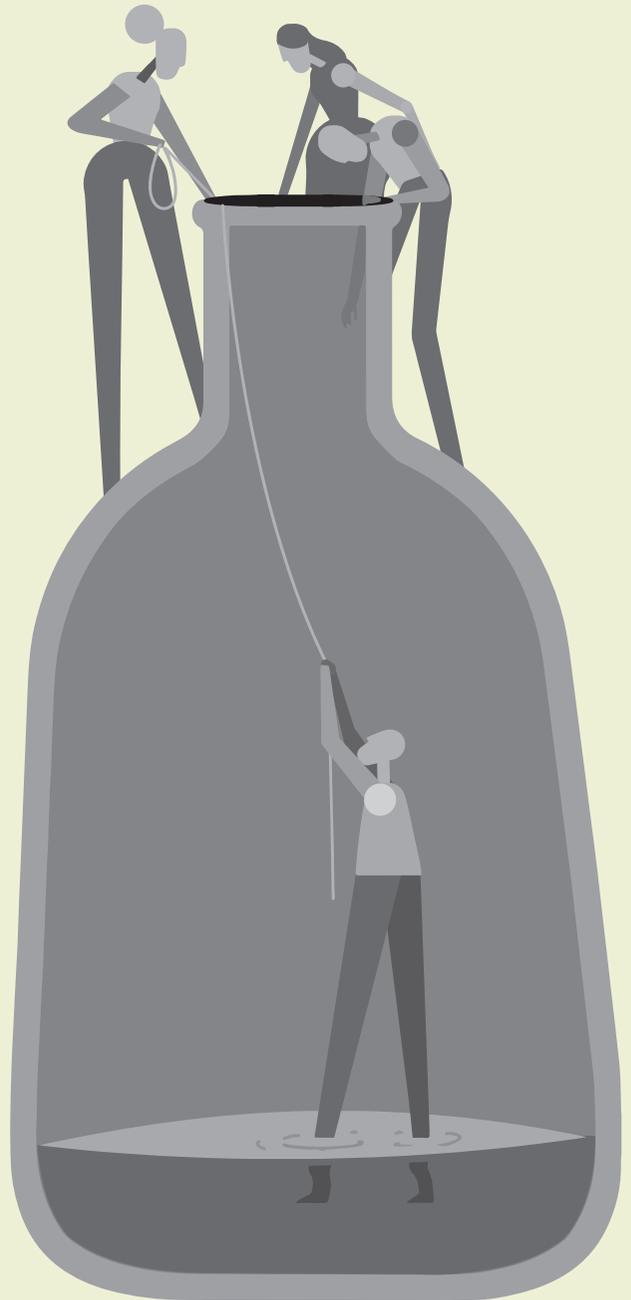
Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of people who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for A.A. membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions. A.A. is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy, neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

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## INTRODUCTION

As Alcoholics Anonymous came into being, the founders and early members identified some basic principles to provide ongoing guidance and protection for individuals, groups and the Fellowship as a whole.



**Known as the Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous, these principles helped to guide A.A. through its early years and they remain at the heart of Alcoholics Anonymous today, providing the foundation upon which A.A. is built.**

# TRADITION 1

**“Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.”**

*For the individual to recover, the group and the Fellowship must stick together.*



We of A.A. need each other to stay sober. Our individual sobriety depends on the group, and the group depends on us. Focusing on what's best for the group and the Fellowship as a whole, we experience the safety, security and unity that comes with being one voice among many. Without unity, the heart of A.A. would cease to beat and we would be left in loneliness once more.

**“For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority — a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.”**

*The only power and authority to be found in A.A. stems from the group conscience.*



A.A. is both a democracy and, as A.A. co-founder Bill W. put it, “a benign anarchy” — a perfect combination for those of us who often rebelled against taking any orders. Among us, the spirit of collaboration is strong. Our leaders do not drive by mandate but instead lead by example. Where once we obstinately stood against everyone and everything, we come to recognize the wisdom of the group and to follow its guidance.

# TRADITION 3

**“The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.”**

*If you want to stop drinking, you're welcome in A.A.*



We want always to be “inclusive, never exclusive.” To join A.A., all we had to do was decide we wanted to be members. No forms to sign. No dues to pay. All we need is a desire to stop drinking. Membership is a choice that only we can make, and we are members the moment we say we are.

**“Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.”**

*Wherever two or more alcoholics are gathered to practice A.A. principles, they can call themselves a group.*



There are all kinds of A.A. groups — big groups, little groups, groups that meet in candlelight or groups that meet on the beach. Some groups focus on beginners; some encourage sharing only from people with long-term sobriety.

Underneath it all runs the powerful need to offer the hand of A.A. to all who reach for it. And each group is free to decide exactly how they will do so.

# TRADITION 5

**“Each group has but one primary purpose — to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.”**

*No matter how different we may be, we are bound by one common goal.*



We don't have to see eye-to-eye on everything. But there is one focal point we can all recognize and honor — our primary purpose. When we carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers, it unites us and can help to heal much of the pain we have endured in active alcoholism.

**“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.”**

*Entanglements can overwhelm our purpose and keep us from carrying the message.*



When it comes to our relationship with outside enterprises or facilities, no matter how much good they may be doing, a constructive approach is to “Live and Let Live.” It’s wise for us to stick with staying sober and helping other alcoholics do the same, while allowing those outside the Fellowship the freedom to do what they do best.

# TRADITION 7

**“Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.”**

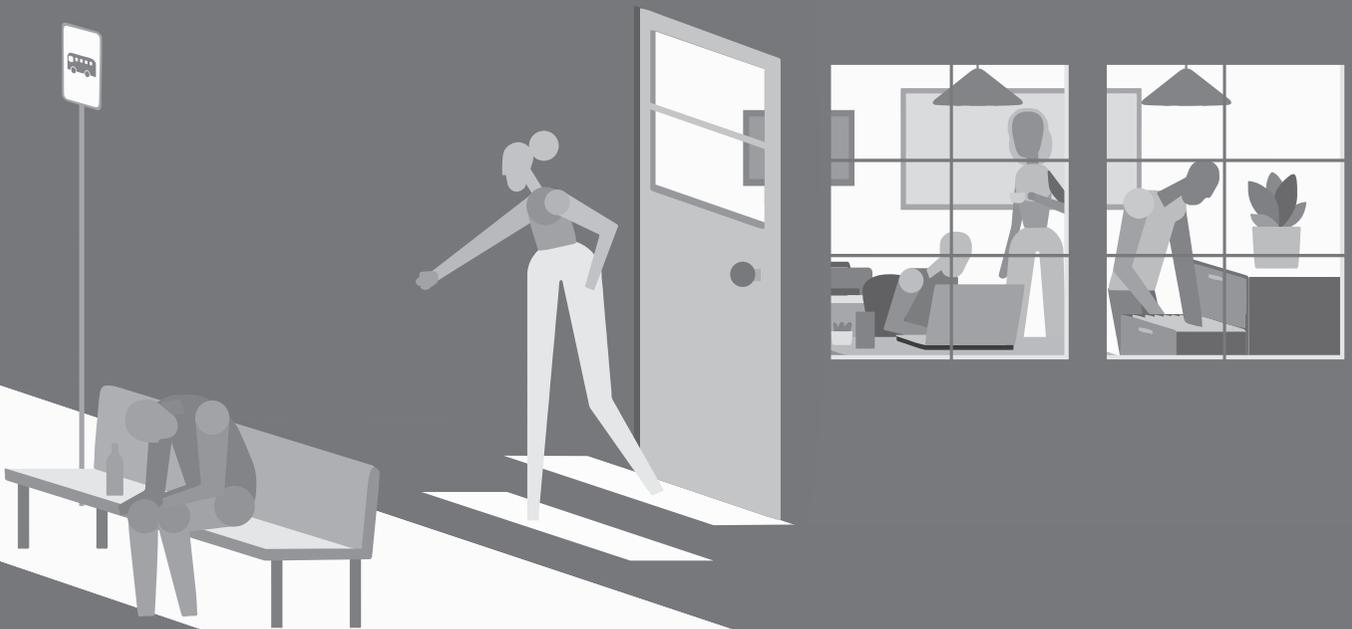
*The spirit of responsibility defines our attitude toward money — and toward service.*



Supporting A.A. from within allows us to keep the focus where it needs to be — on extending the hand of A.A. to all who need it. The idea of paying our own way opens the door to a new kind of growth many of us had never known. Where once we had been irresponsible, we have become responsible — for the Fellowship and for ourselves.

**“Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.”**

*While A.A.’s Twelfth Step is never to be paid for, special workers can help make our Twelfth Step work possible.*



There is no professional class of members in A.A. being paid to carry the message to others. This is something we do for ourselves — and for each other.

As Bill W. makes clear, while A.A. has to hire people where there are legitimate jobs to fulfill, “what is not to be paid for is face-to-face treatment of a drunk.”

## TRADITION 9

**“A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.”**

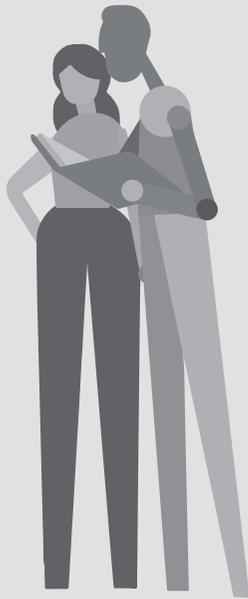
*It's important to find the sweet spot between disorganization and getting things done.*



*Someone* has to do *something* in A.A. in order for the Fellowship to function, and this often means we have to delegate some of this work to others — to rotating committees or boards working on our behalf, providing services that we, as individual members, cannot, such as publishing A.A. materials or providing information about A.A. to the general public.

**“Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues;  
hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.”**

*Steering clear of outside issues allows us to focus on what we do best.*



Controversy seems to be a habit for some of us. Yet experience has shown that when speaking as A.A. members it's best not to take a position on outside issues. By not endorsing or opposing anyone or anything, we're free to concentrate on helping drunks get and stay sober.

# TRADITION 11

**“Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films.”**

*Providing an example of sobriety can be more powerful than promoting A.A.*



A.A. is not a secret society. Yet, when it comes to communication with the outside world, there is a line we ought not cross — the line between attraction and promotion. And this line applies to the internet and social media, too, where anonymity can evaporate with the push of a button or a single post. While our friends in the professional community may recommend us, we know that being in the public eye can be hazardous. Rather than promoting A.A., we find it far better to let our actions speak for themselves.

**“Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.”**

*Sacrifice is the watchword of anonymity.*



For scared and desperate newcomers coming to our doors, we who are sober can offer a warm welcome. We don't even need to know their names or anything about them — we can see the pain in their eyes, regardless of who they are or where they come from. As A.A. members we have no interest in publicity or notoriety — for ourselves or for others. We simply want to be of service to those who need us.

**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.

**A Declaration of Unity:** This we owe to A.A.'s future: to place our common welfare first; to keep our Fellowship united. For on A.A. unity depend our lives and the lives of those to come.

More information about A.A.'s Traditions can be found in the books *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, *A.A. Comes of Age*, *Language of the Heart* and the pamphlets "Twelve Traditions Illustrated" and "A.A. Tradition-How It Developed."



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