

focus



The Newsletter of Alcoholics Anonymous Area 86

Focus: Tradition Six

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Tradition Six - Short form:

"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."

Tradition Six comes as close to an outright prohibition as any of our Traditions. Although it appears stern and arbitrary, our founders had not only the example of other organizations to guide them but also had some pretty hairy experiences from our own Fellowship's members to suggest that extreme caution was a requirement for A.A.'s future. I'm regularly thankful that our founders knew who we were and had some pretty accurate ideas of the nonsense we could create when discussing politics, money, or religion. It's one of the many unofficial A.A. slogans that say any two alcoholics are likely to come up with three ideas.

If you delve into A.A. history, you're bound to come across the trials and tribulations of the Washingtonian Society. Like a lot of A.A.'s (yours truly most definitely included), many Washingtonians were constitutionally incapable of keeping their mouths shut (read Tradition Ten in the **Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions** and if you want much, much more about the Washingtonians, simply enter the name into any Internet search engine and prepare to spend the rest of the day reading). The society endorsed the Temperance movement and did the same on the subject of Abolition (of slavery). According to several sources, the Society's problems stemmed from a lack of central focus and *singleness of purpose*. It also tried direct treatment in its 'Home for the Fallen' in Boston. Finally, multiple disagreements led to infighting and the Washingtonians disappeared entirely from a height of somewhere between one and six million members at the end of the 19th Century (according to the Grapevine).

Most A.A.'s are also aware of the Oxford Group. It was the Christian organization, born in the 1920's, from which Ebby T. brought the concepts to Bill W. that later led him and Dr. Bob used to form A.A. Both Bill and Dr. Bob were members of the Oxford Group until the 1940's. Like the Washingtonians, the Oxford Group also had problems arising from its ambitions. Although it started as an organization dedicated to good works and right living, the Oxford Group eventually morphed into a political lobby group, Moral Re-Armament (MRA).

MRA was dedicated (in the U.S., for example), to getting that country into World War II. And although there is no direct historical evidence of a common leadership, many Moral Re-armament members transferred their activities to the Moral Majority (dissolved in 1989) led by the late Jerry Falwell. Neither groups had any time for Alcoholics.

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Special Needs, Remote Communities???

What's that all about?

Focus: Special Needs & Remote Communities

Not heard about Special Needs or Remote Communities? That's okay. Some have heard about them and don't understand what they are and some have never heard of them at all so I'll try and explain them in as few words as possible.

Neither is a "standing" committee at the General Service Office! So how did they become an Area subcommittee?

Accessibility to meetings for people with various disabilities had become a topic over the years. Questions were raised as to whether the meeting was accessible to those who required wheelchairs or were blind or needed a sign language interpreter and the list goes on. Translations of the Big Books and other AA literature had become available from New York but few members knew they were available in many formats. Personally I knew someone who waited more than six months before finally getting a Big Book simply because no one knew it was available in Hungarian. It had become quite apparent that information from the General Service Office was not being transmitted to the groups as it related to Special Needs material.

Chronic alcoholism and the use of solvents and drugs amongst the First Nations and Native communities of Canada had become well known through the news media in the late 1980's and 1990's. Other Areas in Canada were already involved in trying to carry the A.A. message and it became a topic of discussion in Area 86 starting in 1992.

In 2002 Area 86 elected its first Special Needs/Remote Communities Subcommittee Chairperson so you would have someone to find out what Special Needs and Remote Communities is all about and keep you up to date on literature and other material available from the General Service Office and other sources. Early on it became apparent that language and culture and, in some cases, geography (location) were common in both Special Needs and Remote Communities.. With so many things in common it might appear that a common solution to carrying the Alcoholics Anonymous message would be the same but , no, it is radically different from meeting to meeting, District to District, and Area to Area, but a few solutions may be universal.

When the Big Book was introduced and sold it was discovered that people were getting and staying sober by reading and following the suggestions in the book. Since then many conference approved translations have been done in print editions in many languages, in Braille, and on audio and video tapes, CDs, and DVDs. Unfortunately there are no First Nations or Native conference approved translations as yet but many do read English or French and many of you have contributed Big Books and other literature to the treatment centre in Hagersville and they will end up in those Remote Communities. There are some literature translations in Ojibway and Oji-Cree as well as other First Nations languages available by special request from the Treatment Facilities coordinator at the General Service Office in New York.

For those that use wheelchairs or canes, are blind and need assistance, are deaf and need an interpreter to attend and participate in an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, the accessibility symbols on a meeting list are as important as the time and location of the meeting is to the rest of us. There are programs that have been used in other Areas and Districts for those that are homebound or confined to a nursing facility and that information is available. The finding and passing along of information is your Area Subcommittee chairperson's primary purpose as a trusted servant of the Alcoholics Anonymous fellowship. Use them.

Now you know a little of what this committee is about. To learn more, plan on attending some of the workshops or service days in your District, neighbouring Districts, and at the Area Assembly. You may just learn something that will help enrich someone else's life, and maybe even your own.

Bob J.
Area Subcommittee Chair, Special Needs & Remote Communities

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Focus: Tradition Six (continued)

So it goes. Alcoholics (again definitely including your humble scribe) are some of the most wilful, stubborn, bull-headed people I know. It's said that the personality profile of typical alcoholics makes us smarter than the instructions, bigger than the rules and, when faced with the task of fitting a square peg into a round hole, more likely than most to reach for a bigger hammer. Anyone in doubt about our general ability to work and play well with others needs only to regularly attend group business meetings. In some places, A.A. service is a blood sport. So, all you have to do is to place us collectively in charge of lots of money, property beyond imagining, and the power to control it. Money, property, and prestige? Oh, my. You may shudder (and you should!).

Myles W.
DCM, District 5 / CW4

Tradition Seven - Short form:

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

Focus: Tradition Seven

It states in the long form of Tradition Seven that the A.A. groups themselves ought to be fully supported by the voluntary contributions of their own members, and this ideal should be achieved as soon as possible. This tells me that, as a member of a group, I am responsible for my share of the financial commitments of my group. If my group's expenses are \$ 300.00 per month and there are 10 members that means I owe \$ 30.00 per month. If the case is that out of 10 members only 5 can afford to pay then my commitment is \$ 60.00 per month. This is my understanding of Tradition Seven.

I also believe that, as a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, that I am responsible for the cost of carrying the message of hope to all who need it. Is too much of the money in the basket being used to carry group responsibilities like rent, coffee, cakes and large spreads of food? Don't get me wrong I'm not on a rant here. I am just asking the question. It is of the utmost importance, in fact our very existence depends upon self-support from our membership. History has proven that accepting contributions from outside our membership would lead us down a road to outside interference and divert us from our primary purpose. Alcoholics Anonymous has adopted the principle of paying their own way. This allows A.A. not to be a burden on society as most of us were when we were drinking.

I have heard it said that if every member of A.A. gave a dollar for each year they have been sober once a year that there would be enough money to give the literature away for free. This is a great ideal although I don't think I will see it in my life. I like to take a spiritual attitude when it comes to Tradition Seven, I don't really see it as giving money. I think of it as another opportunity to do Twelve Step work. *When anyone anywhere reaches out for help I want the hand of A.A. always to be there and for that I am responsible.* It takes money to carry our message of hope. Let's do this the best that we can for our own lives depend on it.

Yours in Love & Service,
Joe B.
DCM, District 12

Area 86 / Focus

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Newsletter Chair Janis V.
Assistant Editor: Heidi. P.

Contributors:
Myles W., Bob J., Joe B., Percy G.,
Ken F., Jim B.

Contact information:
Email only please

thegatekeepers@wightman.ca

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Focus: Why Service?

When I arrived at the doors of Alcoholics Anonymous on September 8th, 1993 it was as a result of the demand of a treatment centre that I attend. I did not want to be in A.A. I was not that bad. I was different. For the first year I would only attend one meeting per week and I felt that one per week was one too many. However, I knew that if I wanted the fertilizer to stop hitting the ventilating equipment in the outside world then I would have to stay for a while. In that way I would get everyone off my back.

Today I am a firm believer in the principle that when the student is ready the teacher appears. In the spring of 1995 I was taken to my first Area Assembly. Once I saw the Service Manual, I knew that I had to assist in the rewrite of this book as it could never work. That started me on my journey in service. As ill-framed as my intentions were, my Higher Power, who by the way I did not believe in, had other plans.

My Higher Power put in my path a person who decided that I needed more meetings and he took me to the Freedom Group, an Institutional group. I, who believed that I had nothing in common with these alcoholics, soon came to realize how grateful I really was. I felt that I had nothing to offer the inside members and that may still be true but what they had to offer me was a reward that I never expected. From the sharing of their experiences I realized that everything that happened to them could have happened to me. But for the Grace of a Higher Power, I could have been sitting with them behind bars.

Although I had joined the Bracebridge Group and acted as the Registrar for my home group, I was elected as GSR for the Freedom Group (1996-1997). It was during this time that I came to understand the principle of *Gratitude*. I was not only grateful to be sober and for having a God of my understanding but I was also grateful for the inner peace of mind that I got in being able to give back to those who were not able to freely walk about. It was in this position that I realized that if it had not been for my Higher Power looking out for me while I drank myself to oblivion, I could have been an inside member. To this day I regularly attend the Freedom Group on Tuesday evenings and at each meeting I continue to receive *Gratitude* for what Alcoholics Anonymous and My Higher Power continue to give me.

I have continued my journey in service and although I believe that one of the most important roles for me is to be at the door of my home group every Thursday night to shake the hands of the newcomer, I have had countless rewards while being part of the service structure of District 7 and Area 86.

I was elected GSR for my home group (1998-1999) and there I learnt *Acceptance*: to accept the fact that others have opinions and they have the right to express them. Following my position as GSR for my home group, I was elected as the Corrections Chair for District 7 (200-2001). This position allowed me to assist in putting on and going to meetings in Provincial, Federal and institutions for Young Offenders. While in this position I obtained the reward of *Patience* and *Tolerance*. I came to the realization that not everyone wants to do institutional work and not everyone honours their commitments. When they don't you do.

Following corrections I was the Alternate DCM for District 7 (2002-2003) followed by a two year term as DCM (2004-2005). As Alternate DCM I was suppose to learn how to keep my mouth shut. I know this because every time I spoke, I seemed to put my foot in my mouth. As DCM I learned the meaning of *Humility*. I realized that I did not know everything and I had to ask for help from those who went before me as well as guidance from my Higher Power.

You in Area 86 elected me as your Area 86 Sub Committee Chair for Corrections (2006-2007). Every job that I have been elected to in service I felt ill-equipped to perform but in this position I felt more ill-equipped than all others. Fear ran rampant. How was I going to be able to do justice to you who put your faith in me? In this position I learned that FEAR just stands for *Face Everything And Recover*. I had a great group of District Correction Chairs who guided me though. I did the job to the best of my ability and you did not criticize me for the errors that I made. With what was going on in the Area, I had made a decision not to continue in service as the turmoil was going against the principles that I had learned in the fellowship and a bad taste had developed.

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Focus: Why Service? (continued)

It was only with the persuasion of a past delegate and some other members of Panel 56 stating that things will change for the better that I allowed my name to stand for Secretary-Registrar.

To my amazement you trusted and honoured me by electing me to that position (2008-2009). It was in this position that I learned how to say the Serenity Prayer in numerous formats. The most commonly used was "God, grant me the Serenity to Accept the fact that no one is going to get their forms in before the last minute, the Courage to ask them to change their ways and the Wisdom to know when to shut my mouth and Accept the inevitable".

You have now given me the privilege of serving as your Panel 60 Alternate Delegate for Area 86 Western Ontario. I am continually humbled by your trust and support which each and every one of you have supplied.

"Why Service?", you ask and I say, "*Why Not Service?*" The rewards are too numerous to mention. Before you criticize service, try it. You may enjoy it and the rewards that flow. Oh, by the way, the Service Manual works just fine the way it is written.

Yours in love and service,

Percy G.
Alternate Delegate, Panel 60
Area 86 Western Ontario General Service

Focus: Tradition Eight

Tradition Eight - Short form:

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

Remaining non-profession in Alcoholics Anonymous, as it relates to carrying the message of hope and recovery, is arguably the mortar, if not the blocks, in the foundation of our program.

"Professional" is defined as the occupation of counseling alcoholics for a fee or hire. The spirit of A.A. is based on giving back what was freely given to us, first through divine inspiration to Bill W., and then through the first one hundred members and the creation of the Big Book. The idea of "Recovery for hire" is abhorrent to many members and flies in the face of many of our principle and traditions.

However, a distinction must be drawn between working to provide the means to carry our message and being paid for actual 12 step work. There are many services positions that are essential within alcoholics anonymous. Intergroup offices or G.S.O., for example, have positions that are full time, whether filled by alcoholics or non- alcoholics. To attract qualified people for these positions, remuneration is, in most cases, required.

In days past and perhaps today, our members struggle with this distinction and shun those who opt to serve Alcoholics as a vocation.

I respectfully submit that applying the principles of "*the only way to help one self is by helping another*" and "*to thine own self be true*" will keep us all on the spiritual path that will guarantee our individual sobriety and our continued existence as a fellowship.

Yours in Service,

A.A Member
District 3

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The Difference You and I Can Make!***Focus: The Difference***

I often wonder where I would be if it had not been for a few people who came into the Barton Street Jail in Aug. 1964. There I was locked in jail at the young age of 16 after a night of drinking where I got into trouble with the law. I phoned home to hear my dad say, "you got there yourself, you can get out by yourself." I was beside myself. I never dreamt of ending up in jail only a few months out on my own. One night I was sitting in the cell block with the rest of the inmates when the guard asked if anyone would like to go to an A.A. meeting. One of the inmates asked me if I wanted to go down with him and I asked, "What the hell is AA?". "Free TM's and coffee", he answered. I looked at the bail of tobacco and papers they gave me and I thought, "Why not? A good TM would be nice to smoke.

Off I went to my first AA meeting. I can honestly say that I do not remember who put it on or how many people there were or what was said but I did learn that there was a place I could go to if I ever had a drinking problem. Imagine someone who didn't know me from Adam took time from his or her evening to come into the jail to share with me what they have learned and asked nothing in return.

Well I would like to say that from that night on all was well and I never touched another drink again but that was not to be. I struggled through my teen age years in and out of trouble drinking far too much only to find myself back behind bars again. This time the judge sent me down to do some time. While in the ORG I went to the A.A. meeting again for free smokes and some time away from the cell block. I heard their stories but never felt it had much to do with me. Thanks for the smokes and coffee boys, see you next week. Well, I got sent to a bush camp and the local A.A. people would come in every Tuesday night and put on an A.A. meeting. At these meetings there were only a few of us and we got to talk to these people. Men and women would come in and share with us. After we could sit around and talk to these people. It got more personal. After they would leave we would go back to our dorms and make fun of them. I would get up in front of my inmates and tell them some stupid drunk story and we would all laugh. But when I laid my head down at night when I was all by myself in my thoughts I knew then that I had a drinking problem. I knew that I was where I was because of what I done when I was drinking.

10 years after getting out a prison, getting married, having 3 kids, drinking, losing jobs, moving 17 times because I didn't pay the rent, and losing my oldest boy who was hit by a car and killed, I hit the end of my road. I over-dosed 4 times and cut my wrist once. I was a compete mess. I picked up the phone and called A.A.. Know why I called A.A.? Because someone was willing to take their time and come into the prisons and share their EXPERIENCE, STRENGTH and HOPE with me. They let me know that there was someplace I could go. Someplace that had people who were willing to help me. A place that didn't judge me and ask me to be something that I wasn't. They took me in just as I was.

I didn't make it the first nine years in A.A. but I kept coming back. Finally, I was willing to change and accept this new way of life. I had the privilege of speaking at a breakfast meeting in Durham one Sunday morning and shared my experience of the bush camp A.A. meeting and after the meeting 6 people came up to me and told me that they were the ones who came out to put those meetings on. I broke up. People who didn't know me came into the camp to see if there was some way they could help us guys in jail. GOD LOVE THEM.

You see, some plant the seed, some water the seed, and some harvest. By going into jails you might not know the seed that is planted or what you are watering or even harvesting. Some may say, "I don't know what to say them in prison. I have never been there (or what-ever)", but I can assure you that by just going in and putting a meeting on or sharing will be a benefit to someone. Today I look forward to going into Maple Hurst and putting on a meeting. Today I dress different from them but I can feel for them the way I felt when I was in there. What a blessing when I leave that jail knowing I am giving back what was so freely given to me. God bless the people who take time to go into those jails across the country. If you haven't done this yet, I would like to encourage you to try it. You don't know who might be helped.

Thanks for letting me share,
Ken F.
DCM, District #25

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Tradition Nine - Short form:

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

Focus: Tradition Nine

On one level, this tradition seems to be contradictory. Surely, I've thought, there needs to be some organization within Alcoholics Anonymous. How else could we have a service structure? Perhaps the answer lies in the inverted triangle that we see in our service manual. A.A. does not employ a traditional top-down approach to governance. Rather, we utilize a bottom-up approach to service.

This is addressed on page 174 of the 12 and 12; *“It is clear now that we ought never to name boards to govern us, but it is equally clear that we shall always need to authorize workers to serve us. It is the difference between the spirit of vested authority and the spirit of service, two concepts which are sometimes poles apart.”*

Each time that I attend my group's business meeting or a district meeting or some other committee meeting in the service of Alcoholics Anonymous, I leave with a sense of renewed purpose and renewed faith in the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. We are all there for a common purpose: to carry the message. And although we occasionally might hear opinions that we are not comfortable with, these opinions invariably help to bring the group's God-consciousness to light. Thankfully, then, no A.A. member can officially punish another member. Each opinion needs to be expressed and listened to. Part of the genius of A.A. is the fact that, eventually, the God-consciousness will be expressed.

Tied in with this last idea is the spirit of rotation. Without this tradition, power struggles could more easily influence decisions made in A.A.. Therefore, we need always remind ourselves of the first few words of our Preamble: ***“Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women....”***

No one person's opinion is more important than anyone else's. By keeping this in mind, we can more effectively find our God-consciousness and more effectively carry the message to the next alcoholic who walks in the door.

Jim B.
Alt. DCM, District 16

AREA OFFICERS

Area Delegate: Dean T.

Area Alternate Delegate: Percy G.

Area Chair: Anil G.

Area Treasurer: Mary K.

Area Secretary/Registrar Jim W.

Comments, feedback or articles contact

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Focus: Articles Wanted!

If you or any one in your District would like to submit an article for an upcoming Focus Newsletter, please contact The Newsletter/Website Chair Janis V. or email them to:

thegatekeepers@wightman.ca

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Focus: Delegate's View on Service

I'm going to talk a little about Service Work. Service is just one of our Three Legacies. Recovery and Unity are the other two that make up our triangle. Service work in Alcoholics Anonymous covers a wide spectrum of various jobs and tasks on a voluntary basis. The volunteer part sometimes gets forgotten. These tasks or service work can range anywhere from being the General Manager of our General Service Board to what I'm doing right now or to a point in time when I was barely 24 hours sober and staggered into my first A.A. meeting. I seated myself in the last row where no one would notice me. Unbeknownst to me, all eyes were upon me as I was performing the ultimate act of service to anyone more sober than me by being proof positive that active alcoholism hadn't gotten any better since they came through the doors of Alcoholics Anonymous themselves.

One of the most important acts of service we can perform is that of the Greeter. Here again I can reflect back to when I was a newcomer and I was going to various meeting. One meeting, in particular, was on a Monday night. I used to walk in and this fellow used to say, "Hi there, Dino, you're looking pretty good. Great to see you!". As I went on in, looking for that seat in the back row I used to think, "why is he lying to me like that?". I weighed a little over 250 pounds and my personal hygiene wasn't the greatest back then. But you know something? I went back there every Monday night to hear him say that again. I wasn't welcome in too many places so it was great to feel wanted. The meetings with greeters got me going back or, as I was told when leaving the meeting: *Keep Coming Back*.

It doesn't matter if you open the meeting room; make the coffee, put out the chairs, or are putting up the Slogans, Steps, the Traditions or the Concepts. All jobs are important in Alcoholics Anonymous. Then of course there is the undoing of all those things when the meeting is over. As a matter of fact, the most important job in Alcoholics Anonymous is the job that you are doing right now. I think that, depending upon the point of view, any job in Alcoholics Anonymous could be stated with the following prefix: *The most important job in Alcoholics Anonymous is ... {any job}.....* These tasks are meeting or group level tasks.

From here we can move on to Group representation or General Service. There is a flyer (#P19) entitled: "G.S.R. May be the Most Important Job in A.A." From this mould we build the foundation of an information trail that is the very lifeline of Alcoholics Anonymous. It can start at our Group table (or Group business meeting) and end up on the conference floor of our annual General Service Conference in New York. Our General Service Representative is where it all begins. As we move on to the different levels of service, the informational conduit is always there but the responsibility level increases as we move on in service.

The G.S.R. meets with their group members as they consider various ideas and concerns. The G.S.R. then carries his or her group conscience to a District meeting. There, other G.S.R.'s are doing the same thing as they form another group (called a District) and the G.S.R. of this group is called the District Committee Member (D.C.M.). The various ideas and concerns shared here become the District conscience and the D.C.M. then carries this conscience to an Area meeting where other DCM's are doing the same thing. This sharing becomes the Area conscience and can be carried to the General Service Conference by the Area Delegate. An informed group conscience is obtained by reporting back with information shared at the next level. The sharing from the General Service Conference will come back to the Area by the Delegate and then eventually this sharing is brought back to the group by the G.S.R. Service also moves on from here. As I said before, the responsibility level increases as you move on to the next level of service. This is why a solid foundation is so important when getting started at the group level. Good work ethics and skills are necessary to become a trusted servant.

Service work in Alcoholics Anonymous isn't for everyone; but everyone in Alcoholics Anonymous should try service. You may also be happy where you are in service. I feel you owe it to yourself to try the next level of service but I really think you owe it to Alcoholics Anonymous. I was also told that Service Work will enhance your sobriety in that you are making a commitment to stay sober in order to do Service Work. However you state it, it sure has worked for me.

Dean T.
Delegate, Panel 60
Area 86 Western Ontario General Service

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