

CONCEPTS FOR GROUPS

The Twelve Concepts of Service for use in your Home Group.

An overview of the 12 Concepts by Rhubarb Jim

Preface to Concepts For Groups

This web page reflects my understanding and experience from using knowledge found in the "Twelve Concepts for World Service" written by Bill Wilson in 1962, and published by "General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous." Their mailing address is

P.O. Box 459,

Grand Central Station,

New York, N.Y.10163.

They follow the recommendation of an ad hoc committee of the A.A. General Service Board, of the 1985 General Service Conference that recommended that future publications by the General Service Office be in the original 1962 version, with required factual changes provided as numbered footnotes at the end of each chapter.

Each of us should read the original manuscript. Then in the spirit of unity, agree on how we will collectively apply our individual understanding or lack of understanding to the Home Group that includes us in its membership.

This information as presented here, reflects the thinking of one person only.

It is not endorsed or opposed by the A.A. General Service Conference.

Concept One

Group Conscience

The final responsibility and the ultimate authority for A.A. world services should always reside in the collective conscience of our whole Fellowship.

The A.A. Groups today hold ultimate responsibility and final authority for our World Service. "Our" part of world service today is the North American continent and other land where the people are citizens of Canada or the United States of America. All the elements of service that make this possible start at the Group Business Meeting.

Group service began in 1935 with Bill W. and Dr. Bob providing their coordinated services to any alcoholic who would have it. In 1938 with 50 members in three Groups, Bill W. and Dr. Bob formed what is now the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous to provide a world service structure. This trusteeship was designed to inaugurate and maintain all those special services for A.A. as a whole that could not be performed well by single groups.

Twelve years later (1950) the anonymous and sometimes secret groups had grown to a total membership of 100,000 people in service. No single person or Group could have accomplished this. Quietly - one by one, each alcoholic had been searched out to become a Group member. The A.A. Traditions had been written and adopted. By 1950 a few densely populated areas of the country had already established Intergroups (or Central Offices) who coordinated local service operations. A confident unity had pretty much replaced fear, doubt and strife. The Groups still turned to Bill W. at what we now call the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous to solve all problems that could not be solved within the Group. There was no local District or Area you could go to.

In 1948 it had become known to some that Dr. Bob was suffering from a fatal illness. The Trustees always had relied heavily on Dr. Bob and Bill W. for advice. They had taken a firm grip on money expenditures but they necessarily turned to Bill W. and Dr. Bob every time a policy question arose. The average member, preoccupied with his group life and his own "Twelfth Stepping" knew almost nothing of A.A.'s World Services. Not one member in a thousand could tell who our Trustees were. Not one in a hundred had the least idea what had been done for A.A.'s general welfare. Tens of thousands already owed their chance at sobriety to the little noticed activity of our Trustees and General Services. But few realized this was true.

The fact had to be faced that A.A.'s founders were perishable. So too were the Group founders perishable. When these originators were gone who could link our little known Board to our thousands of Groups?

Trustees and Groups alike had strongly opposed calling together a representative conference of A.A. delegates, to whom they could become accountable. They thought that the risk was immense and that politics, confusion, expense, and fruitless strife surely would result. It was true that the woes of much lesser undertakings, such as local services (Intergroups and Central Offices) and clubs, had sometimes been great. Hence the conviction was widespread that calamity would be in the making if ever a conference representing all of A.A. were assembled. These arguments were not without merit; they were difficult to contest. It took little imagination to see that future collapse would be the certain penalty if we did not act boldly and decisively. Thus propelled by events, and guided by able leadership at all levels of our organization, we did take that necessary action. Now that the Conference is well established these many

years, we find that our former fears of the troubles a Conference might involve were largely groundless. The results of the Conference have exceeded the highest expectation of the pioneers of A.A. It now stands that the A.A. groups can and will take the final responsibility for their World Services.

There were other reasons for this basic shift of ultimate responsibility and authority to A.A. as whole. These reasons center around Tradition Two, which declares, "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."

Tradition Two, like all the A.A. Traditions, is the voice of experience, based upon the trials of thousands of Groups in our pioneering time. The main principles of Tradition Two are crystal clear: the A.A. Groups are to be the final authority; their leaders are to be entrusted with delegated responsibilities only.

Tradition Two had been written in 1945, and our Trustees had then authorized its publication. But it was not until 1951 that the first experimental General Service Conference was called to see whether Tradition Two could be successfully applied to A.A. as a whole, including its Trustees and founders. It had to be found out whether the A.A. Groups, by virtue of this Conference, could and would assume the ultimate responsibility for their World Service operation. It took five years more for all of us to be convinced that Tradition Two was for everybody. But at St. Louis in 1955, we knew that our General Service Conference - truly representing the conscience of A.A. world-wide - was going to work and work permanently.

Perhaps many of us are still vague about the "Group Conscience" of Alcoholics Anonymous, about what it really is.

Throughout the entire world today we are witnessing the breakdown of "Group Conscience." It has always been the hope of democratic nations that their citizens would always be enlightened enough, moral enough, and responsible enough to manage their own affairs through chosen representatives. But in many self-governing countries we are now seeing the inroads of ignorance, apathy, and power-seeking upon democratic systems. Their spiritual resources of right purpose and collective intelligence are waning. Consequently many a land become so helpless that the only answer is dictatorship.

Happily for us, there seems little prospect of such a calamity in A.A. The life of each individual and of each group is built around our Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. We very well know that the penalty for extensive disobedience to these principles is death for the individual, and the end of the Group. An even greater force for A.A.'s unity is the compelling love that we have for our fellow members and for the principles upon which our lives today are founded.

Therefore we believe that we see in our Fellowship a spiritualized society characterized by enough enlightenment, enough responsibility, and enough love of man and of God to insure that our democracy of World Service will work under all conditions. We are confident that we can rely upon Tradition Two, our "Group Conscience" and its trusted servants. Hence it was with a sense of great security that the old-timers had then fully vested in A.A.'s General Service Conference the authority for giving shape- through the labors of its chosen Delegates, Trustees, and service workers- to the destiny that we trust God in His wisdom is holding in store for all of us.

Concept Two Delegated Authority

When in 1955 the A.A. groups confirmed the permanent charter for their General Service Conference, they thereby delegated to the Conference complete authority for the active maintenance of our world services and thereby made the Conference - excepting for any changes in the Twelve Traditions or in Article 12 of the Conference Charter - the actual voice and the effective conscience for our whole Society.

Very few of the people who confirmed this permanent charter are still alive today. However, the structure and the organization which they worked so hard to create has been passed on through one caring hand after another, and is now offered to us. We were attracted to what they had. We were willing to go to any length to get what they had. They were willing to teach us how to do what they did, so that we could get what they got. They had no books to guide them. They had action backed by whatever skill and ability they had developed up to that point in their lives. Many times their actions brought about painful results and they learned not to do that again. Occasionally, the action brought about superior results. These are the actions we want to pass on to others by every means at our disposal - from our example, from discussion one to one, from group discussion, and from the written word.

On June 10, 1935, Dr. Bob awakened hung over, shaky, nervous and again determined not to drink today. He thought he had a better understanding of spiritual principles and knew more about the effects of alcohol on the body than his New York friend did, yet he had gotten drunk while his friend stayed sober. The two men had determined that the good doctor had failed to put "service" into his life. "Faith without works" is often the topic of conversation of spiritual folks. Dr. Bob had failed to include "works" in his new life. He asked Bill W to show him how he might help other suffering alcoholics to live a sober life. Service is not a requirement of the

fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. The fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous is the result of a request to be taught to be of service. Like Dr. Bob, people who want sobriety but do not want to be of service to others will drink again. As soon as a new person was willing to be included in service work, a place was provided. Their very life depended on this! In the spirit of true democracy the "group conscience" did what was required to keep citizens enlightened enough, moral enough and responsible enough to manage their own affairs.

In 1937, the Akron and New York groups authorized Dr. Bob and Bill W. to create overall services which could spread the A.A. message world-wide. Those two fledgling groups gave them the authority to create and manage world services.

Dr. Bob knew that Bill would have a better chance of finding friends and funds in New York City so he transferred all his immediate responsibility for the creation of world services to Bill W. Bill started the search for trusted nonalcoholic friends who could help, and in 1938 the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous Inc., (then called The Alcoholic Foundation) was formed - as a small trusteeship of A.A. members and our nonalcoholic friends.

At first the Trustees took jurisdiction over money matters only. Little by little they were obligated to assume many other responsibilities. Bill W. alone could not discharge these many other responsibilities on a permanent basis. He gave the Trustees added responsibility and corresponding authority as fast as possible.

For example, in 1940, a year after the book "Alcoholics Anonymous" was published, Bill W. and the Trustees saw that this great asset had to be put in trust for the whole fellowship. Therefore, the stock ownership of Works Publishing Inc. (a publishing corporation which Bill W. had helped to separately organize.) was turned over to the general service board of alcoholics anonymous and its Trustees.

Nearly all the income from the A.A. book was then needed to finance the overall service that Bill W. had set up for A.A. The Trustees, therefore, presently took over the primary management of office operation, because they were now responsible for the funds upon which its support depended. Consequently, so far as financial decisions were concerned, Bill W. became an advisor only. Another sizable chunk of his original authority was thus delegated. In 1941 when the A.A. groups began to send contributions to what we now call the General Service Board for support of our overall service office (now called General Service Office or G.S.O.), the Trustees control of world service monies became complete.

After some time it became apparent that A.A.'s public relations, a vital matter indeed, could not continue to be entrusted to Bill W. alone. Therefore, the A.A. groups were asked to give the Trustees of what is now the General Service Board complete control in this critical area. Later on the Trustees took jurisdiction over our national magazine, "The A.A. Grapevine," which had been separately organized by another group of volunteers.

Thus it went with every one of our world services. Bill W. still functioned in an advisory capacity in our headquarters operation, but the Board of Trustees was in full legal charge of all our affairs. As Dr. Bob and Bill W. looked to the future, it was clear that ample delegation to the Board was the only possible way.

Notwithstanding these delegations of immediate authority, Dr. Bob and Bill W. had quite properly felt that they still held an ultimate responsibility to A.A. and to the future, for the proper organization and structuring of our A.A. world services. If anything were to go wrong with world services, they would be held accountable, because the groups still looked to them rather than to their little - known Trustees for leadership in A.A. world affairs.

In the course of these developments the great difference between ultimate and immediate service authority became apparent.

As early as 1945 it became evident that the co-founder's ultimate responsibility and authority for services should never be wholly vested in a board of trustees. Certainly our Trustees must be given a large share of the active and immediate responsibility. But the ultimate and final responsibility which Dr. Bob and Bill W. still possessed simply could not be transferred to a self-appointed Board of Trustees which was relatively unknown among A.A.'s as a whole. A.A.'s history now shows where the ultimate authority finally went. In New York City in 1951, it tentatively went from Dr. Bob and Bill W. to the A.A. groups themselves. In 1951 our historical records show 111,765 members and 4,052 groups.

But the groups acceptance of ultimate service authority and responsibility was not enough. No matter what authority the groups had, they could not meet their new responsibilities until they had actually delegated most of the active responsibilities. The groups would have to be enlightened enough, moral enough, and responsible enough to manage their own local affairs and the affairs of World Services through chosen representatives; their "trusted servants." It was precisely in order to meet this need, that the General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous was given the general responsibility for the maintenance of A.A.'s World Services, and so on July 3rd, 1955 at St. Louis the General Service Conference became the service conscience for A.A. as a whole.

Exactly as Dr. Bob and Bill W. earlier had found it necessary to delegate a large part of their active authority to the Trustees, so have the A.A. groups found it necessary to delegate these same powers to their General Service Conference. The final say - the ultimate sanction in matters of large importance - has not been given to the Trustees alone. By the Conference Charter, confirmed in St. Louis in 1955, this authority is now delegated to the A.A. groups and thence (through local Districts and Areas) to their Conference, a body which is a representative cross-section of our entire fellowship.

Therefore, the General Service Conference of A.A. - plus any later-formed sections, has become for nearly every practical purpose, the active voice and the effective conscience of our whole society in its world affairs.

It was the deep hope of Bill W. and other old-timers, who as trusted servants of their groups, voted to create the General Service Conference and the service structure that resulted - that we have avoided those pitfalls into which each generation of society can fall because their originators or any succeeding trusted servants have failed, during their lifetime to properly delegate and distribute their own authority, responsibility and leadership.

Concept Three Right of Decision

As a traditional means of creating and maintaining a clearly defined working relation between the groups, the Conference, the A.A. General Service Board and its several service corporations, staffs, committees and executives, and of thus insuring their effective leadership, it is here suggested that we endow each of these elements of world service with a traditional "Right of Decision." (Note: here in the very first sentence of Concept III, Groups are specifically mentioned. Groups are the local element of world service.)

Within the framework of their general responsibilities, whether these be defined by Charter, (a written job description is a charter) by resolution, or by custom, it should be the traditional right of all World Service Boards, (local) committees, and (local) executives to decide which problems they will dispose of themselves, and which matters they will report, consult, or ask specific directions upon.

Notice the freedom of the above sentence. It does not say how responsibilities should be defined, but it includes all the ways responsibilities are given. It does not say they must be given, it says they should be given. It does not say they must personally resolve all problems. They are free to report the problem back to the group. They are free to consult with others outside the group, such as at District or Intergroup meetings, or they can ask the group itself for specific directions.

We ought to trust our world servants with these discretion's, because otherwise no effective leadership can be possible. Let us consider in detail, therefore, why the need for a "Right of Decision" in our leadership is imperative, and let us examine how this principle can be applied practically in all levels of our structure of world service.

We have seen how the A.A. Groups, through the Conference structure, under the concept of the "Group Conscience," are today holding the ultimate authority and final responsibility for World Services. We have also noted how, by reason of the Conference Charter and the "Trusted Servant" provision of Tradition Two, the groups have delegated to their General Service Conference full authority to manage and conduct A.A.'s world affairs. This includes world affairs at the local level.

The Conference and General Service Board Charters, in broad terms, define the responsibility of the Conference to act on behalf of A.A. as a whole. In these two documents, a necessarily large area of delegated service authority and responsibility has been staked out. These instruments, in a general way, describe the relation between the Groups, the Conference, the Trustees, and the active service units. These broad definitions and descriptions are an indispensable frame of reference, and we could not function without them.

At the Group level, a Charter, bylaws, or written job description can in broad terms define the responsibility of Group Trusted Servants to act on behalf of the Group as a whole. Only in a written document can a necessarily large area of delegated service authority and responsibility be staked out. These instruments, in a general way, describe the relation between the Group, the District, the Intergroup, and the Intergroup Service Committees. These broad definitions and descriptions are an indispensable frame of reference and we could not function effectively as a Group without them.

Nevertheless, it has long been evident that these highly important Charter provisions (job descriptions) cannot by themselves ensure smooth functioning and proper leadership at the several different levels of service which are involved. This has become crystal clear, and we need not seek very far for the reasons.

For example: knowing that theirs is the final authority, the District Committee Members are sometimes tempted to instruct their Area Delegates exactly how to vote upon certain matters in the Conference. Because they hold the ultimate authority, there is no doubt that the A.A. Groups through their District and Area meetings have the right to do this. If they insist, they can give directives to their Area Delegates on any and all A.A. matters.

But good management seldom means the full exercise of a stated set of ultimate rights. For example, were Groups to carry their instruction of Trusted Servants to extremes, we would be proceeding on the false theory that Group opinion in most local World Service matters would somehow be much superior to District or Intergroup opinion. Practically speaking, this could never be the case. There would be very few questions indeed that "instructed" Trusted Servants could better settle than an informed District or Intergroup meeting, or an Area Assembly, acting on the spot with full facts and debate to guide it. Of course it is understood that complete reporting of all District, Intergroup, and Area Assembly actions is always desirable. So is full consultation with Group and Group Committee members. Nevertheless, the "instructed" Trusted Servant who cannot act on his or her own conscience in a final District, Intergroup, or Area Assembly vote is not a "Trusted Servant" at all; he or she is just a messenger.

Now the Conference Charter does not actually solve typical problems like this. It is a broad document which can be variously construed. Under one interpretation, the Groups through the Conference Structure, can instruct the Area Delegates all they like. Under another, the Area Delegates and Trustees can actually ignore such instructions whenever they believe it to be desirable. How, then, shall we practically understand and reconcile such a condition?

How, indeed, shall we practically understand this type of problem at the Group level? Each Group is autonomous and is not governed by this specific Conference Charter. They are free to structure and Charter themselves in any fashion they desire so long as they adhere to the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts of Alcoholics Anonymous Inc. Ever Loners, Homers, and Internationalist, are members of Groups

Let us look at two more illustrations: the Conference, as will later be demonstrated, is in a state of nearly complete practical authority over the Trustees, despite the legal rights of the Board of Trustees. Suppose the Conference Delegates began to use this ultimate power of theirs unwisely? Suppose they began to issue hasty and flat directives to the Trustees on matters in which the Trustees would be far more knowledgeable than the Conference Delegates? What then?

This same kind of confusing problem used to beset the relations between the Trustees and their wholly - owned active service corporations, (A.A. World Services Inc., and A.A. Grapevine Inc.) entities which are nowadays partly directed by non-Trustee Volunteers and paid service workers. But the Board of Trustees certainly does own these outfits. Therefore the Trustees can hire and fire; their authority is final. Yet if the Trustees were to exert their full and absolute authority, if they were to attempt to manage these operating entities in detail, the volunteer staff members and paid staff members working on these entities would quickly become demoralized; they would be turned into buck - passers and rubber stamps; their choice would be to rebel and resign, or to submit and rot.

Therefore, some traditional and practical principle has to be devised which at all levels will continuously balance the right relation between ultimate authority and delegated responsibility. How then are we going to accomplish this?

There are three possible attitudes that we might take toward such a state of affairs. We could, for instance, throw away all corporate Charters, bylaws, job definitions, and the like. This would leave it entirely to each Trusted Servant to figure out what its authority and responsibility is. But such an absence of any chartered structure would be absurd; nothing but anarchy could result (Is this your group situation?)

Then, of course, we could take the opposite tact. Refusing to give our leadership any worthwhile discretion at all, we could add to our present Charters great numbers of rules, regulations, and bylaws that would attempt to cover every conceivable action or contingency. That would be altogether too much red tape - more than we could stand.

The right solution for this problem is to be found, however, in the latter part of Tradition Two, which provides for "Trusted Servants." This really means that we ought to trust our responsible leaders to decide, within the framework of their duties, how they will interpret and apply their own authority and responsibility to each particular problem or situation as it arises. This sort of leadership discretion should be the essence of "The Right of Decision," and Bill W. was certain that we need not have the slightest fear of granting this indispensable privilege at nearly every level of World Service.

There will always be plenty of ultimate authority to correct inefficiency, ineffectiveness, or abuse. If the Conference does not function well, the Groups can send in better Area Delegates. If the Trustees get badly out of line, the Conference can censure them, or even reorganize them. If the Headquarters' services go sour, the Trustees can elect better directors and hire better help. These remedies are ample and direct. But for so long as our World Services function reasonably well - and there should always be charity for occasional mistakes - then "trust" must be our watchword, otherwise we shall wind up leaderless.

These were the reasons for Bill W.'s belief that we should forthwith invest in all of our service bodies and people a traditional "Right of Decision." In our structure of World Services this "Right of Decision" could be practically applied as follows:

A. Excepting its Charter provisions to the contrary, the District and/or the Intergroup, always should be able to decide matters it will fully dispose of on its own responsibility, and which questions it will refer to the A.A. Groups (or most usually to its Committee members, G.S.R.'s, or Intergroup Delegates) for opinion or for definite guidance.

Therefore, it ought to be clearly understood and agreed that our General Service Representatives (G.S.R.'s), and Intergroup Delegates, are primarily the local World Servants of A.A. as a whole, that only in a secondary sense do they represent their Groups. Consequently they should, on final decisions, be entitled to cast their votes in District or Intergroup meetings according to the best dictates of their own judgment and conscience at that time.

B. Similarly, the Officers of the District and/or the Intergroup (operating, of course, within the Provisions of their own Charter and bylaws), should be able at all times to decide when they will act fully on their own responsibility and when they will ask the G.S.R.'s or the Intergroup Delegates for their guidance, approval of a recommendation, or for their actual decision and direction.

C. Within the scope of their definitely or normally implied responsibilities, all District or Intergroup committees, staff, or executives, should also be possessed of the right to decide when they will act wholly on their own and when they will refer their problem to the next higher authority.

This "Right of Decision" should never be made an excuse for failure to render proper reports of all significant actions taken; it ought never be used as a reason for constantly exceeding a clearly defined authority, nor as an excuse for persistently failing to consult those who are entitled to be consulted before an important decision or action is taken.

Our entire program rest squarely upon the principle of mutual trust. We trust God, we trust A.A., and we trust each other. Therefore, we cannot do less than trust our leaders in service. The "Right of Decision" that we offer them is not only the practical means by which they may act and lead effectively, but it is also the symbol of our own implicit confidence.

Concept Four

Right of Participation

Throughout our Conference structure, which starts at the Group level, we ought to maintain at all levels of responsibility a traditional "Right of Participation", taking care that each classification or Group of our local world servants shall be allowed a voting representation in reasonable proportion to the responsibility that each must discharge.

The principle of "Participation" has been carefully built into our Conference structure. Every Group today registered with the General Service Office (G.S.O.) has a group number and is part of the Conference Structure. The Conference Charter specifically provides that the Trustees, the Directors of our service corporations (A.A. World Services, Inc. and the A.A. Grapevine, Inc.) together with their respective staffs, shall always be voting members of the General Service Conference itself.

Exactly the same concept is borne in mind when our local World Service entities (District or Intergroup) establish wholly-owned service committees (Public Information, Hospital and Institution, Schedules, Unity, Fellowship, Newsletter, Answering Service, Literature, Grapevine). If it wished, our local World Service entities (District or Intergroup) could elect none but its own trusted servants to these service committees. But Tradition Nine has shown us the wisdom of having the Committee Director reporting back to the parent organization while the committee members report directly to the Groups who they are directly responsible to serve.

For example, if your local service level (District or Intergroup) were to be divided into 8 service zones which would each furnish one committee member to each service committee, and the Hospital and Institution Committee needed 24 volunteers per week, then the committee member would ask the Home Groups of that zone (perhaps 10 groups) to collectively furnish 3 volunteers per week (8 X 3 = 24). Of course the other local service committees are also making demands on the same Home Groups, but the Home Group is directly responsible to provide the volunteers to carry out the level of service that they, through their sometimes direct (service committee member) but most likely indirect (Intergroup Representative) representation had voted to provide.

Therefore the active management of local A.A. World Services Committees is composed of trusted servants whose mission is to see that these projects are properly managed. Each Home Group is provided a balanced relation between ultimate authority and delegated responsibility (see Concept III) when these trusted servants are permitted a proper degree of voting "Participation". At the service committee level the vote of the committee member has the same power as that of the Committee Director. The Committee Director in turn, in reporting back to the parent organization (District or Intergroup) has the same legal vote that Group Representatives have.

Such a typical corporate business structure easily permits a proper degree of voting "Participation". Every skilled element (the Groups and the Committees) to do the allotted job is presented. No class is set in absolute authority over another. This is the corporate or "Participating" method of doing business. As distinguished from structures so common to institutional, military and governmental agencies wherein high-level people or classes of people often are set in absolute authority, one over the other.

Success usually brings with it problems that were not considered at the founding of an endeavor. Growth often brings with it an increased workload beyond the capacity of an all volunteer organization. Paid staff workers soon became necessary at A.A. World Services Inc.; the A.A. Grapevine Inc.; and Central Offices or Intergroup offices of large metropolitan areas. Here too we see Trustees, volunteer experts and paid staff members acting in concert as the active managers of that operation.

For communication linkage a member of the Conference structure should be present at all Intergroup or Central Office meetings, both the Staff Meeting and Central Meeting. This direct communication is wanted and needed. Although they do not vote, these trusted servants may freely participate in debate.

To this highly effective and unifying principle of "Participation" at all responsible levels, there is one regrettable but necessary exception. Members holding paid staff positions cannot become heads of committees. This cannot be permitted because such a practice would interfere with the Concept of Rotation. Paid staff members might prove to be a vested interest most difficult to dislodge.

The preservation of the principle of "Participation" in our service structure is, and was to our founders who came to understand its application and benefits, a matter of the highest importance to our future. Experience suggests, however, that some of each new generation of Trusted Servants will inevitably try to weaken, modify, or toss out the principle of "Participation". Every year a few people at all levels will question the "Right" of others to participate in a vote. Every year a few people at all levels will refuse to accept the "Responsibility" of participating in the services they were responsible to perform. Every year a few people acting on behalf of the Group or any other unit in A.A. will vote to provide some services - expecting others to do the work. Every year a few committee chairpersons will be tempted to downsize the committee or just allow the members to drift off, or to run the committee on authoritarian and institutional lines. The result is always some form of trouble and misunderstanding until the principle of "Participation" is instituted once again. This lesson was learned the hard way and each year some of us must relearn the hard way, for all of us. Today we know we must maintain our spiritual resources of right purpose and collective intelligence with these concepts for World Service.

Over the years we have seen that we can never put all authority at the Group level and virtually all responsibility at supporting levels such as the Area, District, Intergroup or any committee of those levels. The Home Groups must continue to recognize they possess all the authority and responsibility. When A.A. volunteers are required they must come from the Groups or the Groups must stop asking Area, District, or Intergroup to coordinate whatever service these volunteers were needed for.

In Concept II we learned that service is not a requirement of the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. The fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous is the result of request to be taught to be of service. There is another good reason for "Participation," and this one has to do with our spiritual needs. All of us deeply desire to belong. We want an A.A. relation of brotherly partnership. It is our shining ideal that the "Spiritual Corporation" of A.A. should never include any members who are regarded as "second class". Deep down, I think this is what we have been struggling to achieve in our World Service Structure. Here is perhaps the principal reason why we should continue to ensure "Participation" at every important level. Just as there are no second-class A.A.'s, neither should there be any second-class World Service workers, either.

The "Right of Participation" is therefore a corrective of ultimate authority because it mitigates its harshness or misuse. It also encourages us who serve A.A. to accept the necessary disciplines that our several tasks require. We can do this when we are sure that we belong, when the fact of our "Participation" assures us that we are truly the "Trusted Servants" described in A.A.'s Tradition Two.

Concept Five Right of Appeal

Throughout our World Service structure, a Traditional "Right of Appeal" ought to prevail, thus assuring us that minority opinion will be heard and that petitions for the redress of personal grievances will be carefully considered.

With this concept, we believe that we shall never be subject to the tyranny of either the majority or the minority, provided we carefully define the relations between them and forthwith tread the path of World Service in the spirit of our Twelve Steps, our Twelve Traditions and our Conference Charter - in which we have long since inscribe these traditional rights of appeal and petition.

All of us as Group members have this right of appeal - at our Group level. Keep in mind that Tradition Four gives each Group the freedom to structure itself as it sees fit, so the specific procedure of the Group level appeal may vary, but it should exist in some form. That is the basic extent of this Concept for you as an individual A.A. member.

The Concept does provide some guidance to trusted servants in "service" as the Groups representative to District, Intergroup, or elsewhere in the service structure of A.A.

You as an individual may or may not be allowed to go there and voice your concern, for they are free to refer you back to your Home Group. They do not function for individuals, they receive instruction from, and report to Groups.

Every member of A.A. is important to the fellowship as a whole. Your informed opinion or petition is always welcome. Put it in writing and include a means of contacting you for additional information or notification of action taken.

(See also Concept Twelve - Warranty Six.)

Concept Six Liberty of Action

On behalf of A.A. as a whole, each group has the principle responsibility for the maintenance of our local A.A. services, and it has the final decision respecting local implementation of matters of general policy and finance as identified by the general Service Conference, the Area, Intergroup, and our local District. Active responsibility in most of these matters should be exercised by the Trusted Servants of the Groups as they fill the specific Trusted Servant positions created by the group.

The status of Trusted Servants, based on the experience of the group founders, will not be clear to future generations of trusted servants unless thorough written job descriptions are developed. Later, as personalities and talents of individuals change, the work of the various job titles can be reallocated so that nothing essential remains undone.

This concept of "Liberty of Action" is important to the Trusted Servants, but, as one of the Twelve Concept of Leadership, it is of greater importance to the Group. We A.A.'s are holding our Trusted Servants mainly responsible for all our service activities. We are saying to these people. "We trust you to serve us no matter what happens." Even in normal, ordinary times, the Trusted Servant is expected to lead in the formation of Group policy and see to its proper execution. They are the guardians of our Twelve Traditions. The Trusted Servants are not only responsible for monetary decisions, they are responsible for the investment and use of our human resources.

While the Trusted Servants of the Group must always operate under the close observation, guidance and sometimes, the direction of the group, it is, nevertheless true, that nobody could pass judgment upon and handle the large variety and quality of transactions that every group has. In view of this very large responsibility, they must, therefore, be given a correspondingly large grant of authority and leadership with which to discharge the responsibility. We should understand too, that the conduct of our group services is primarily a matter of policy and business. Of course, our objective is always a spiritual one; but this service aim can only be achieved by means of an effective business operation. Our Trusted Servants must function almost exactly like the operators of any large business corporation. They must have ample authority to really manage and conduct A.A.'s business.

The basic structure of World Service rest on the concept of the corporate concept. We do not choose the institution model where a few decide for the many, or the governmental model which takes from those that have, modifies what it takes, and distributes what is left to those that it deems entitled.

Go to any A.A. meeting and enjoy the feeling of fellowship that exist among us. Our structure, however, is not about feelings. Our structure is about the service we provide to those that have a desire to stop drinking, as we carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers. For that, we need leaders who have the vision to see what must be done, and the Liberty of Action to see it accomplished.

Concept Seven Balance of Power

The Group recognizes that the Charter and the Bylaws of the General Service Board are legal instruments: that the Trustees are thereby fully empowered to manage and conduct all of the world service affairs of Alcoholics Anonymous. It is further understood that the Conference Charter itself is not a legal document: that it relies instead upon the force of tradition and the power of the A.A. purse for its effectiveness.

This concept may appear to be contradictory; it may look like the collision of an irresistible force with an immovable object. On the one hand, we see the groups' Trusted Servants (variously called the Board of Trustees, or Conference, or Area Committee, or District Committee, or Group Steering Committee) who are vested with complete operational power over A.A.'s funds and services, while on the other hand, we find that the "Informed group conscience" is clothed with such great traditional influence and financial power that, if necessary, it could overcome the operational rights of the groups trusted servants. It can, therefore, give the trusted servants directives and secure compliance with them - practically speaking.

This means that the practical power of the "Informed group conscience" will nearly always be superior to the operational power of the groups' trusted servants. This superior power in the group flows from the powerful influences of the traditions and concepts themselves. It derives from the large majority of group-chosen trusted servants. And finally, in any great extremity, it would rest upon the undoubted ability of the group members to deny the trusted servants the monies with which to operate - which are the voluntary contributions of the members of the group. Theoretically, the informed group conscience is an advisory body only, but practically speaking, it has all of the ultimate rights and power that it may ever need.

When we reflect that our Trusted Servants have no salaried financial interest in their post, we can be quite sure that such a committee would never think of legally contesting the clear and sustained will of the "informed group conscience." If someday, the chips were really down, there would be little chance of a stalemate. The informed group conscience would find itself in complete control of the situation.

Of course, leadership cannot function if it is constantly subjected to a barrage of harassing directives. Up to the present time, our experience shows that this balance of powers between the groups trusted servants and the group is thoroughly workable. We have taken great pains to reserve final authority to the group by practical and traditional means. By operational means we have delegated ample functional authority to the trusted servants. We believe this balance can be maintained indefinitely, because the one is protected by tradition and the other by law.

Now we come to another interesting question often raised by new trusted servants. They say, "we trusted servants have certain rights and duties which are spelled out in writing in our job descriptions, are we not violating this trust when we accept an informed group opinion or directive? We should have a perfect legal right to say "no" to anything and everything that the group wants."

Our trusted servants certainly do have this absolute legal authority, but there is nothing in their job description that compels them to use all of their authority all of the time. They are quite at liberty to accept advice or even direction from anyone at all. They can simply refrain from using their absolute legal right to say "No" when it would be much wiser, all things considered to say "Yes." Just as the group should avoid the overuse of its authority, so should the groups trusted servants avoid overuse of their legal rights. The President of the U.S. for example, has an absolute legal right to veto congressional legislation. Yet ninety-nine percent of the time, he does not do it; because (a) he likes a piece of legislation, or (b) he does not like the legislation, but believes a veto would nevertheless be unwise or impossible of success. Whether or not he will exercise his veto is determined by circumstances. It is just like that with A.A.'s trusted servants.

Clearly then, our groups trusted servants do reserve a veto power over any group action; this is legally necessary and right in principle, even though the veto will seldom be used. At certain times, however; the groups trusted servants' veto, could be of important and constructive use.

Here, for instance, are three typical examples in which it would be the duty of the groups trusted servants to veto group conscience action:

1. If, in a time of haste or heavy stress, the group then present, should take an action or issue a directive to the groups trusted servants in clear violation of its own charter, or that of the General Service Board; or if the group were to pass any measure so ill-considered or so reckless as to seriously injure, in the judgment of the groups trusted servants, A.A.'s public relations or A.A. as a whole, it would then be the duty of the groups trusted servants to ask for a group conscience reconsideration. In events of a group refusal to reconsider, the group trusted servants could then use their legal right to veto and if desirable, they could appeal the issue directly to the informed group conscience.
2. Although traditionally the group trusted servants never should substantially exceed a group - approved budget without consulting the group, they should feel entirely free to reduce the group budget during any fiscal year, even though such an action might curtail or cancel special plans or projects initiated and directed by the group itself.
3. If, by reason of unforeseen conditions, any particular plan, project or directive of the group should become impractical or unworkable during a fiscal year, the group trusted servants should without prejudice, be able to use their right of veto and cancellation.

If, therefore in the years ahead, the group will always bear in mind, the actual rights, duties and responsibilities, and legal status of the groups trusted servants, and if the trusted servants in their deliberations, will constantly realize that the group is the real seat of ultimate service authority, we may be sure that neither will be seriously tempted to make a "rubber stamp" out of the other. We may expect that in this way, grave issues will always be resolved and harmonious cooperation will be the general rule.

Concept Eight Trusted Servants

The Trusted Servants of the group act in two primary capacities: (a) With respect to the larger matters of over-all group policy and finance, they are the principal planners and administrators. They and their primary committees (steering committee, nominating and any other group committee) directly manage these affairs. (b) But with respect to our separately designated (District, and Intergroup),

and constantly active services (Telephone, Hospital & Institution, Newsletter, Fellowship, Unity, Public Information, Schedules, and Literature Committees) the relation of the group trusted servant is mainly that of stock ownership and of custodial oversight which they exercise through their ability to elect all directors and representatives of these entities.

Since our Trusted Servants bear the primary responsibility for the good conduct of all our service affairs, this discussion deals with the basic concepts and methods by which they can best discharge their heavy obligations. Long experience has now proved that our "Boards of Trusted Servants"(Group Steering Committee, District Committee, Intergroup Delegates Meeting, Area Committee Meeting) as a whole, must devote itself almost exclusively to the larger and more serious questions of policy, finance, group relations, and leadership that constantly confront it. In these more critical matters, the Board of Trusted Servants must, of course, function with great care and deliberation. Here the "Board of Trusted Servants" is expected to plan, manage, and execute.

It follows, therefore, that the close attention of the "Board of Trusted Servants" to such large problems must not be subject to constant distraction and interference. Our Trusted Servants, as a body, cannot be burdened with a mass of lesser matters; they must not concern themselves with the endless questions and difficulties which arise daily, weekly, and monthly in the routine conduct of clearly delegated authority and responsibility for such services.

Here the "Board of Trusted Servants" attitude has to be that of custodial oversight; it cannot be the executive. Hence, the "Board of Trusted Servants" are the guarantors of the good management of A.A. local world services. They discharge their custodial obligations by electing the Directors of these services. By this means, the executive direction of these functions is securely lodged in the active service committees themselves, rather than in the nebulous general fellowship. Each corporate service entity should possess its own charter, its own working capital, its own executive, its own employees, and if necessary its own offices and equipment. Except to mediate difficult situations and to see that the service committees operate within their budgets and within the general framework of A.A. and "Board of Trusted Servants" policy, the "Board of Trusted Servants" will seldom need to do more, so far as routine service operations are concerned.

This arrangement is in line with modern corporate business practice. Each Group is in effect a holding company, charged with the custodial oversight of its wholly-owned and separately incorporated subsidiaries, of which each has, for operating purposes, a separate management (Area, District, and Intergroup). We have demonstrated to our satisfaction that this corporate basis of operation is superior to any other.

This lesson has been learned the hard way. When, in keeping with Tradition Nine, "we form boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve". Then Concept Four must take effect, in which all can truly "participate" in a ballot where there are no superiors, no inferiors, and no advisors.

We finally learned what the business world knows: That we could not, at the Group, District, Intergroup, Area, or Conference level, run our large, active, and full fledged business entity with loose-jointed committees and departments.

Keeping our local boards and committees (District and Intergroup) directly responsible to those they serve, made it easy to find local individual talent with the many diverse skills required.

A further consideration is that we have always rigorously avoided any great concentration of executive authority in any one service position or service entity. There are potent reasons for maintaining separate incorporation for each of our active services, and the separation of districts, areas, and world services, each with independent financial support. There are potent reasons for maintaining committees to provide our voluntary local services. Each of us as alcoholics could be here today and gone tomorrow. None of us require others to make this service work a full time occupation. However experience dating from our earliest days, strongly suggest that future trustees and trusted servants, in the supposed interest of simplicity, savings and hoped for efficiency will be periodically tempted to go in for concentrations of one kind or another. There were those too, who would not replace the committee members who, for justifiable reason, needed to be replaced. Should these acts be again repeated, we know that the risk of making an administrative shambles out of our service structure will be great, and the total structure could be affected. We know also that we can recover from these events.

Consider also that we have avoided any great concentration of money by dividing all group funds beyond its' prudent reserve, between the district, intergroup, area, and our trustees at the General Service Office. There is always a powerful connection between money and authority. Whenever we concentrate money, we shall inevitably create the temptation for the exercise of too much executive authority, an undesirable condition for us.

These observations are not intended to bar any future needful change. It is urged only that we avoid unnecessary repetitions of those painful experiences and mistakes of the past which sometimes result from too much concentration of money and authority. It can only be left on the record that we see no workable way to convert the "Boards of Trusted Servants" into an active, "all-purpose" service corporation.

Concept Nine Leadership For Our Future

Good service leaders, together with sound and appropriate methods of choosing them, are at all levels indispensable for our future functioning and safety. The Primary World Service-Leadership once exercised by the Founders of A.A. (Bill W. & Bob S.) must necessarily be assumed by the trustees of the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous.

No matter how carefully we design our service structure of principles and relationships, no matter how well we apportion authority and responsibility, the operating results of our structure can be no better than the personal performance of those who must people it and make it work. Good leadership cannot function well in a poorly designed structure. But weak leadership can hardly function at all even in the best of structures. But once we have created a basically sound structure, the job is finished, except for occasional refinements.

With leadership we shall have a continuous problem. Good leadership can be here today and gone tomorrow. Furnishing our service structure with able and willing workers has to be a continuous activity. It is therefore a problem that in its very nature cannot be permanently solved. We must continuously find the right people for our many service tasks. Since our future effectiveness must thus depend upon ever-new generations of leaders, it seems desirable that we now proceed to define what a good service leader should be; that we carefully indicate in each level of service, starting with our Groups, then proceeding through our District, Intergroup, Area, General Service Conference and our Board of Trustees, what special skill will always be required; and that we review our present methods of finding and choosing that leadership.

First let's remember that our Group is the base of the entire service structure. No one person speaks or acts for A.A. as a whole. To be a member of Alcoholics Anonymous is to be a member of a Group. Even loners, homers and Internationalist are Group members. Each of us should therefore be concerned with the choice of people as leaders of our Group.

Tradition One told us the Group welfare comes first. Tradition Two reveals the natural evolution of a Group from the founder and his friends to a so-called rotating committee. These new leaders, elected by ALL the (hopefully informed) members of the Group, have very sharply limited authority. In no sense whatever do they govern or direct the Group. They are being trusted to serve in the sometimes thankless privilege of doing the Group's business chores. Dividing the work into manageable sections they conduct the business of the Group. Labels are given each job to identify the primary service provided by the trusted servant. Being "Trusted" our leaders have the right to "Liberty of action" and are expected to lead in the formulation of Group policy and see to its proper execution, as we are now directed by Concept VI.

As "AA" expanded in our local community we learned how our autonomous Group (Tradition Four) could cooperate with other Groups in our District and our Intergroup, to carry the message (Tradition Five), in an efficient and effective fashion. We created primary committees of representatives from Groups, directly responsible to their Groups, but organized and led by a member of Intergroup, District, or Area. These servants were (of necessity) in addition to the General Service Representative or the Intergroup Delegate. These servants are the primary service providers of our World Services. Hence great care needs to be taken by the Group as they choose all these trusted servants. Hit or miss methods should be avoided.

Groups who name no trusted servants to these service positions should be encouraged to do so. In this area a degree of weakness tends to persist. The needed improvement seems to be a matter of increased care, responsibility and education.

As the Group members meet in their assemblies to name trusted servants, an even greater degree of care and dedication will be required. Personal fears and ambitions will have to be cast aside, feuds and controversy forgotten. Who are the best qualified people that we can name? I must be willing to serve also. This should be the thought of all. Every person in the Group should be elected to a meaningful service assignment, alternate assignment or committee assignment. A nominating committee can of course suggest a slate of candidates for service positions, but we often have more than one volunteer for a service position. In Group servants as with Area delegates our third legacy methods have generally produced people of a high level of dedication and competence. (See the A.A. Service manual pg. 52)

We now come to the principle theme of this particular concept: How can we best strengthen the composition and leadership of the Group, the Group which in years to come will have to exercise A.A.'s primary leadership in local world service administration, those trusted servants who will in fact have to assume the duties and responsibilities of tomorrow in connection with A.A.'s local world service.

As previously noted, the actual transference of authority and responsibility from Bill W. to the Trustees was finally completed in 1955. He continued to serve A.A. as an Elder Statesman, advising and completing a few chores left over from the 1955 St. Louis Convention (including the Concepts) until he passed away in March 1971. Even before Dr. Bob passed away in January 1951, Bill

began doing everything possible to strengthen the administrative composition and A.A. leadership of our General Service Board, so that future Trustees may be better able to cope with the problems and dangers which time will no doubt bring.

During the time of our infancy and adolescence, nothing could have been structurally better than the setup we then had. Looking at this record, many A.A.'s naturally feel that what was good for the past will surely be good for the future; that any change in the present composition of our structure of trusted servants will prove dangerous rather than beneficial.

But change has been pressing upon us right along, and it is still doing so. Experience has refuted the idea that changes which are needed to meet altered conditions are necessarily unwise.

Students of history recognize that the transference of the original leadership of a society to its successors in leadership is always a critical turning point. This difficult question of leadership, this problem of transference, must now be faced. Let us consider what specific personal qualities a local world service leader ought to have. For whatever use it may be to future generations of our trusted servants, Bill W. offered us this discussion on this subject published in a 1959 issue of "The A.A. Grapevine."

LEADERSHIP IN A.A.: Ever a Vital Need.

(Twelve Concepts for World Service pages 38 to 42)

"No society can function well without able leadership in all its levels, and A.A. can be no exception. It must be said, though, that we A.A.'s sometimes cherish the thought that we can do without much personal leadership at all. We are apt to warp the traditional idea of "principles before personalities" around to such a point that there would be no "personality" in leadership whatever. This would imply rather faceless automatons trying to please everybody, regardless.

At other times we are quite as apt to demand that A.A.'s leaders must necessarily be people of the most sterling judgment, morals, and inspirations; big doers, prime examples of all, and practically infallible.

Real leadership, of course, has to function in between these entirely imaginary poles of hoped-for excellence. In A.A. certainly no leader is faceless, and neither is any leader perfect. Fortunately our Society is blessed with any amount of real leadership- the active people of today and the potential leaders of tomorrow as each new generation of able members swarms in. We have an abundance of men and women whose dedication, stability, vision, and special skills make them capable of dealing with every possible service assignment. We have only to seek these folks out and trust them to serve us.

Somewhere in our literature there is a statement to this effect: Our leaders do not drive by mandate, they lead by example." In effect we are saying to them, "Act for us, but don't boss us."

A leader in A.A. service is therefore a man (or woman) who can personally put principles, plans, and policies into such dedicated and effective action that the rest of us want to back him up and help him with his job. When a leader power-drives us badly, we rebel; but when he too meekly becomes an order-taker and he exercises no judgment of his own - well, he really isn't a leader at all.

Good leadership originates plans, policies, and ideas for the improvement of our Fellowship and its services. But in new and important matters, it will nevertheless consult widely before taking decisions and actions. Good leadership will also remember that a fine plan or idea can come from anybody, anywhere. Consequently, good leadership will often discard its own cherished plans for others that are better, and it will give credit to the source.

Good leadership never passes the buck. Once assured that it has, or can, obtain sufficient general backing, it freely takes decisions and puts them into action forth-with, provided of course that such actions be within the framework of its defined authority and responsibility.

A "politico" is an individual who is forever trying to "get the people what they want." A statesman is an individual who can carefully discriminate when and when not to do this. He recognizes that even large majorities, when badly disturbed or uninformed, can, once in while, be dead wrong. When such an occasional situation arises, and something very vital is at stake, it is always the duty of leadership, even when in a small minority, to take a stand against the storm, using its every ability of authority and persuasion to effect a change.

Nothing, however, can be more fatal to leadership than opposition for opposition's sake. It never can be "Let's have it our way or no way at all." This sort of opposition is often powered by a visionless pride or a gripe that makes us want to block something or somebody. Then there is the opposition that casts its vote saying, "No, we don't like it." No real reasons are ever given. This won't do. When called upon, leadership must always give its reasons, and good ones.

Then, too, a leader must realize that even very prideful or angry people can sometimes be dead right, when the calm and the more humble are quite mistaken.

These points are practical illustrations of the kinds of careful discrimination and soul-searching that true leadership must always try to exercise.

Another qualification for leadership is "give and take," the ability to compromise cheerfully whenever a proper compromise can cause a situation to progress in what appears to be the right direction. Compromise comes hard to us "all-or-nothing" drunks. Nevertheless we must never lose sight of the fact that progress is nearly always characterized by a series of improving compromises. We cannot, however, compromise always. Now and then it is truly necessary to stick flat-footed to one's conviction about an issue until it is settled. These are situations for keen timing and careful discrimination as to which course to take.

Leadership is often called upon to face heavy and sometimes long-continued criticism. This is an acid test. There are always the constructive critics; our friends indeed. We ought never fail to give them a careful hearing. We should be willing to let them modify our opinions or change them completely. Often, too, we shall have to disagree and then stand fast without losing their friendship.

Then there are those whom we like to call our "destructive" critics. They power-drive, they are "politickers," they make accusations. Maybe they are violent, malicious. They pitch gobs of rumors, gossip, and general scuttle-butt to gain their ends—all for the good of A.A., of course! But in A.A. we have at last learned that these folks, who may be a trifle sicker than the rest of us, need not be really destructive at all, depending very much on how we relate ourselves to them.

To begin with, we ought to listen carefully to what they say. Sometimes they are telling the whole truth, or no truth at other times, a little truth. More often, though, they are just rationalizing themselves into nonsense. If we are within range, the whole truth, the half truth, or no truth at all can prove equally unpleasant to us. That is why we have to listen so carefully. If they have got the whole truth, or even a little truth, then we had better thank them and get on with our respective inventories, admitting we were wrong. If it is nonsense, we can ignore it. Or we can lay all the cards on the table and try to persuade them. Failing this, we can be sorry they are too sick to listen, and we can try to forget the whole business. There are few better means of self-survey and of developing genuine patience, than the work-outs these usually well-meaning but erratic brother members afford us. This is always a large order and we shall sometimes fail to make good on it ourselves. But we must keep trying.

Now we come to the all-important attribute of vision. Vision is, I think, the ability to make good estimates, both for the immediate and for the more distant future. Some might feel this sort of striving to be a sort of heresy, because we A.A.'s are constantly telling ourselves, "One day at a time." But that valuable principle really refers to our mental and emotional lives and means chiefly that we are not foolishly to repine over the past nor wishfully to day-dream about the future.

As individuals and as a fellowship, we shall surely suffer if we cast the whole job of planning for tomorrow onto a fatuous idea of Providence. God's real Providence has endowed us human beings with a considerable capacity for foresight, and He evidently expects us to use it. Therefore we must distinguish between wishful fantasy about a happy tomorrow and the present use of our powers of thoughtful estimate. This can spell the difference between future progress and unforeseen woe.

Vision is therefore the very essence of prudence, an essential virtue if ever there was one. Of course we shall often miscalculate the future in whole or in part, but that is better than to refuse to think at all.

The making of estimates has several aspects. We look at past and present experience to see what we think it means. From this we derive a tentative idea or policy. Looking first at the nearby future, we ask how our idea or policy might work. Then we ask how our policies or ideas might apply under the several differing conditions that could arise in the longer future. If an idea looks like a good bet, we try it on—experimentally when that is possible. Later we again evaluate the situation and ask whether our estimate is working out.

At about this stage we may have to take a critical decision. Maybe we have a policy or plan that still looks fine and is apparently doing well. Nevertheless we ought to ponder carefully what its longtime effect will be. Will today's nearby advantages boomerang into large liabilities for tomorrow? The temptation will almost always be to seize the nearby benefits and quite forget about the harmful precedents or consequences that we may be setting in motion.

These are no fancy theories. We have found that we must use these principles of estimate constantly, especially at world service levels where the stakes are high. In public relations, for example, we must estimate the reaction both of A.A. groups and the general public, both short-term and long-term. The same thing goes for our literature. Our finances have to be estimated and budgeted. We must think about our service needs as they relate to general economic conditions, group capability, and willingness to contribute. On many such problems often we must try to think months and years ahead.

As a matter of fact, all of A.A.'s Twelve Traditions were at first questions of estimate and vision for the future. Years ago for example we slowly evolved an idea about A.A. being self-supporting. There had been trouble here and there about outside gifts. Then still more trouble developed. Consequently we began to devise a policy of "no outside gifts." We began to suspect that large sums of this kind

would tend to make us irresponsible and could divert us from our primary aim. Finally we saw that for the long pull, outside money could really ruin us. At this point, what had been just an idea or general policy crystallized firmly into an A.A. tradition. We saw that we must sacrifice the quick, nearby advantage for long-term safety.

We went through this same process on anonymity. A few public breaks had looked good. But finally the vision came that many such breaks eventually could raise havoc among us. So it went: first a tentative idea, then an experimental policy, then a firm policy, and finally a deep conviction - a vision for tomorrow.

Such is our process of estimating the future, and responsible world leadership must be proficient in this vital activity. It is an essential ability, especially in our Trustees. Most of them, in my view, should be chosen on the basis that they have already demonstrated an aptness for foresight in their own business or professional careers.

We shall be in continual need of these same attributes- tolerance, responsibility, flexibility, and vision- among our leaders of A.A. services at all levels. The principles of leadership will be the same whatever the size of the operation.

Maybe this seems like an attempt to stake out a specially privileged and superior type of A.A. member. But it really is not so. We simply are recognizing that our talents vary greatly. The conductor of an orchestra is not necessarily good at finance or foresight. And it is quite unlikely that a fine banker could be a great musical performer. So when we talk about A.A. leadership, we only declare that we ought to select that leadership on the basis of obtaining the best talent we can find.

While this article was first thought of in connection with our world service leadership, it is possible that some of its suggestions can be useful to anyone who takes an active part of our Society.

This is true particularly in the area of Twelfth Step work, in which nearly all of us are actively engaged. Every sponsor is a leader. The stakes are about as big as they could be. A human life and usually the happiness of a whole family hang in the balance. What the sponsor does and says, how well he estimates the reactions of his prospects, how well he times and makes his presentation, how well he handles criticisms, and how well he leads his prospect on by personal spiritual example- these qualities of leadership can make all the difference, often the difference between life and death.

We thank God that Alcoholics Anonymous is blessed with so much leadership in all of its affairs."

Concept Ten

Authority - Well Defined

Every service responsibility should be matched by an equal service authority - the scope of such authority to be always well defined whether by tradition, by resolution, by specific job description or by appropriate charters and bylaws.

At all levels of Alcoholics Anonymous today, including our Intergroup, the District and our Home Group, we could exhibit serious deviations from the very sound principle that each operational responsibility must be accompanied by a corresponding authority to discharge it.

This is why Bill W. took such pains in preceding concepts to define the several authorities and responsibilities of the A.A. Groups, the General Service Conference Structure, the Trustees, and our active service corporations (A.A. World Services Inc. and the A.A. Grapevine). We have tried to make sure that authority in each of these levels is equal to responsibility. Then we have tried to relate these levels one to another in such a way that this principle is maintained throughout.

An outstanding characteristic of every good operational structure is that it guarantees harmonious and effective function by relating its several parts and people in such a way that none can doubt what their respective responsibilities and corresponding authorities actually are. Unless these attributes are well defined; unless those holding the final authority are able and willing to properly delegate and maintain a suitable operational authority; unless those holding such delegated authority feel able and willing to use their delegated authority freely as trusted servants; and unless there exists some definite means of interpreting and deciding doubtful situations --- then personal clashes, confusion, and ineffectiveness will be inevitable.

The matter of responsibility and its necessary co-equal authority is of such urgent importance that we might profitably recapitulate what has already been said, meanwhile taking a birds-eye-view of our entire structure to better envision how the principle does, and always must, apply in our every activity and attitude.

The first characteristic that any working structure must have is a point, or succession of points, where there is ultimate responsibility and therefore ultimate authority. We have already seen how, for A.A.'s world services, this kind of final responsibility and authority

resides in the A.A. Groups themselves. And they in turn have apportioned some of their ultimate authority through their G.S.R. to the Conference Structure and the Trustees.

We have observed how the Conference Delegates, directly representing the Groups, are in a position of ultimate authority over several committees of the General Service Conference (see Concept Eleven). The Local World Service structures (Districts and Intergroups) are free to follow that leadership and create similar committees also. Each Group, in accordance with Tradition Nine, is responsible to provide a representative on those local committees.

The principle of ultimate authority runs clear through our structure. This is necessary, because all of our service affairs and activities have to head up somewhere for final responsibility. The committee members report all successes and needs back to the Home Group. The Committee Chairperson reports back to District or Intergroup. Ultimate authority is needed so that each worker or each classification of servants knows where and who the final boss is.

If however, ultimate authority is not carefully qualified by delegated authority, we then have the reverse results. If there were no delegated authority, the Groups would be directing their "Trusted Servants" on every important vote. If there were no delegated authority the District or Intergroup would be directing the Committee Chairperson on every detail of operation.

Delegated authority can of course run amuck by assuming ultimate authority when clear cut descriptions of responsibility are not given. Self-centered executives will conduct themselves as the sole directors of service entities and would commence to run them by directives. This "Trusted Servant" would become a small czar, pushing the working staff about. In short, such a misuse of ultimate authority would add up to a dictatorship wherein nearly every classification of A.A. servants would have large responsibilities but no real or certain authority, and hence no capability of effective decision and leadership with which to operate. Big and little tyrannies and buck-passing would be the inevitable penalties.

Therefore it becomes clear that ultimate authority is something which cannot be used indiscriminately. Indeed ultimate authority should practically never be used in full, except in an emergency. That emergency usually arises when delegated authority has gone wrong, when it must be reorganized because it is ineffective, or because it constantly exceeds its defined scope and purpose. For example, if the groups are dissatisfied with a particular service committee at Intergroup, they can elect better committee members, or ask the Intergroup delegates to elect a better committee chairperson. If a Group is dissatisfied with their own "Trusted Servants" they can be censured or reorganized at a Group Conscience meeting, (see Concept One) or Group Business meeting.

These are the proper uses of ultimate authority, because they rightly discharge a truly ultimate responsibility. The influence of ultimate authority must always be felt, but it is perfectly clear that when delegated authority is operating well it should not be constantly interfered with. Otherwise those charged with operating responsibility will be demoralized because their authority to do their work will be subject to arbitrary invasion, and because their actual responsibility will be made greater than their real authority.

How have we structurally tried to restrain the natural human tendency of those in ultimate authority to usurp and take over the needed operational or delegated authority? Well, this has been a large order, and several structural devices have been required. Let us review them, noting how they apply.

In our structure we have tried to create at each level accurate definitions of authority and responsibility. We have done this by:

- (a) So-called legal means with clear written job descriptions in our Conference Charter, Bylaws, the A.A. Service Manual and pamphlets. Autonomous Groups are of course free to follow these examples.
- (b) Traditional means, your Group may well have existed before you were born.
- (c) Principles (the Steps, Traditions and Concepts) under which doubtful and seemingly or really conflicting situations can be interpreted and readily resolved.

Take the Conference Charter, it is not a legal instrument, but practically speaking it is the substance of a contract between the A.A. Groups and their Conference. The Charter makes clear in a general way that the A.A. Groups have delegated some of their ultimate authority and all needed operational authority to the Conference, which includes the District and the active local services. It is further suggested, in these present articles, that under the traditional "Right of Decision" the privilege of choosing which matters it will decide by itself and which it will refer back to the Groups for their own discussion, guidance or direction, is the tool to check the natural tendency of the Groups to over-instruct delegates (example: make the blind see, the lame to walk, or make every drunk get sober). The balance to "Right of Decision" comes with the Groups "voting participation" in the District meetings and Area assembly.

Now we come to the matter of conflicting authorities and to the question of how these conflicts are to be resolved. Most routine conflicts in the active services are easily settled, because we have provided ready communication between all service corporations (District, Intergroup and Area), the Grapevine Committee, and Intergroup Service Committees.

A condition to be avoided at all cost is double-headed business or policy management, the so called Co-Chairman. Authority can never be divided into equal halves. Nowhere does such split authority or double-headed management so bedevil a structure as in its executive departments. The vital need of providing one-headed executive management will be fully discussed under Concept Eleven.

In addition to the methods we use to make delegated authority equal to delegated responsibility, we have two more guarantees- the "Right of Appeal" and the "Right of Petition" these are found in Concepts Three and Five. As we know, executives are apt to over-boss their assistants. Therefore we use the Concepts of Appeal and Petition to ensure every worker doing a job, has an authority and a status commensurate with the responsibility involved.

To sum up: Let us always be sure that there is an abundance of final or ultimate authority to correct or to reorganize; but let us be equally sure that all of our trusted servants have a clearly defined and adequate authority to do their daily work and discharge their clear responsibilities.

All of this is fully implied in A.A.'s Tradition Two. Here we see the "Group Conscience" as the ultimate authority and the "Trusted Servant" as the delegated authority. One cannot function without the other. We well know that only by means of careful definitions and mutual respect can we constantly maintain a right and harmonious working balance.

Job Descriptions

Job descriptions are included as an addendum to this concept. Please note they are written on paper and not engraved in stone. Job Titles are given as a method of communication so that we know we are all talking about the same job. Any service the group wants to have can be included in a job description, even a song leader if the Group should ever want one. Alternate G.S.R. and Alternate I.G.R., are titles designed by District and Intergroup and are used as learning/replacement positions, but our group is only allowed one vote in their organization.

The group Vice Chairpeople are not one and two in importance or seniority. They each have specific duties and both report to the Chairperson. You may not be familiar with the terms Structural Capital or Intellectual Capital but you will remember who to go to this way; if a job produces results you can hold or touch, it reports to the Structural Vice Chairperson.

A lot of people worked hard for a lot of years to have this autonomous group and the supporting Conference structure ready to support you. We accept you just as you are now, because we know what you can become if we give you the opportunity.

Concept Eleven

Leadership - By All Members

While the A.A. Groups hold ultimate responsibility for A.A.'s World Service Administration, they could not meet their responsibilities until they had actually delegated most of the active ones. They should therefore always have the assistance of the best possible standing committees, corporate service directors, executives, staffs and consultants. Therefore the composition of these underlying Area, District and Intergroup or Central Offices, their service boards and committees, the personal qualifications of their members, the manner of their induction into service, the systems of their rotation, the way in which they are related to each other, the special rights and duties of our executives, staffs, and consultants, together with a proper basis for the financial compensation of these special workers, will always be matters for serious care and concern.

The long time success of our General Service Conference will rest not only on the capabilities of the Area Delegates themselves; it will depend quite as much upon the competent leadership and harmonious association of all "Trusted Servants" who must actively carry on A.A.'s local world services. Their quality and dedication, or their lack of these characteristics, will make or break our structure of service. Our final dependency on them will always be great indeed.

Far more than most of the Trustees, these local servants will be in direct contact with A.A. world wide, and their performance will be constantly on view. They will perform most of the routine labor. They will carry on most of our services. They will welcome the new member into our fellowship. They will often originate new plans and policies. Some of them will eventually become Trustees. Because this group of local trusted servants will form the visible image of world services, most A.A.'s will measure our service values by what they see and feel in them. Members of this local level of trusted servants will not only support the world leadership of the Conference Delegates and Trustees; in the nature of the case they will be bound to share world leadership with them.

Tradition Four tells us that "Each Group is autonomous except in matters affecting other Groups or A.A. as a whole". A.A. does not tell a Group how to structure itself. A.A.'s who gather together to have an A.A. meeting and choose not to affiliate themselves with the Conference Structure, are by their own choice not a part of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Tradition Five tells us that "Each Group has but one primary purpose- to carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers". If we are to support the Trustees of the General Service Board, and share leadership with them, we should know something of their internal structure of service. Being autonomous Groups we are free to utilize everything if we see fit to do so.

Fortunately we already have a sound internal structure of service at the level of the General Service Board, to show us what we must support on the local level.

Compare the two tables below.

GENERAL SERVICE BOARD

1. Nominating Committee.
2. Finance & Budgetary Committee.
3. Public Information Committee.
4. Literature Committee.
5. Former Policy Committee now General Sharing Session.
6. Cooperation with professional community.
7. General Service Conference
8. Archives.
9. International Convention / Regional Forums
10. Correctional facilities
11. Treatment facilities
12. International
13. Grapevine Inc.
14. World Service Inc.

LOCAL GROUP

1. Nominating Committee.
2. Treasurer.
3. Group representative to Intergroup Public information.
4. Librarian (or literature person).
5. Group business meeting and chairperson.
6. Group rep. to Intergroup C.P.C. committee.
7. General Service Representative.
8. Historian.
9. Intergroup Delegate
10. Group rep. to Intergroup H. & I.
11. Group rep. to Intergroup Hot Line.
12. Group rep. to Intergroup Unity.
13. Grapevine Representative.
14. Secretary (minutes, correspondence).

We may also wish to add:

15. Alternate Group Service Rep.
16. Alt. Intergroup Delegate.
17. Coffee maker (for each meeting).
18. Greeter (for each meeting).
19. Sponsor Coordinator.
20. Newsletter Rep. to Intergroup.
21. Vice Chairperson (or two) to help the Chairperson.
22. Meeting Chairperson (for each meeting).

It is for your benefit that this information has been gathered in The A.A. Service Manual and the pamphlet "The A.A. Group". If A.A. is to work on the local level you must be in unity with other A.A. Groups. We may not all be traveling in the same vehicle but we all must head in the same direction.

We wish to take note also of several more principles and problems which are common to all endeavors.

1. No active service can function well unless it has sustained and competent direction. This must always head up in one person, supported by such assistants as needed. A board or a committee can never actively manage anything, in the continuous executive sense. This function has to be delegated to one person. As a trusted servant that person has to have ample freedom and authority to do the job, and they should not be interfered with so long as their work is done well.

Real leadership ability cannot be plucked from any bush; it is rare and hard to come by. A special combination of qualities is required. The leader- must inspire by energy and example, thereby securing willing cooperation. If that cooperation is not forthcoming, our leader must act without favor or partiality. Our leader must comprehend and execute large affairs, while not neglecting the smaller. Our leader is being trusted to serve us with vision and take the initiative in plan making.

The use of leadership abilities implies certain realizations on the part of the leading trusted servant and those who work with him, otherwise there is apt to be misunderstandings. Because of their natural drive and energy, trusted servants will sometimes fail to distinguish between routine execution of established plans and policies, and the making of new ones. In this area they may tend to make new plans and put them into operation without sufficiently consulting those whose work is to be affected, or those whose experience and wisdom is actually or officially needed.

A good executive is a good salesman. But they often want the fast sell and quick results on those very occasions where patient consultation with many people is in order. However, this is far better than timid delay and constant request to be told by somebody or other what to do. The trusted servant who overdrives can be reasonably restrained by the structural situation, and definitions within which they have to work. But a weak and wobbly trusted servant is of little use at any time.

It is the duty of the good trusted servant therefore, to learn discrimination of when he should act on his own and when limited or wide consultation is proper, and when he should ask for specific definitions and direction. This discrimination is really up to him. Our privilege of making these choices is structurally guaranteed by the "Right of Decision" found in Concept III. We can always be censured after our acts, but seldom before.

In our Local World Services we still have two more important executive problems. One is the use of money as a tool to hire full-time top executives. We must not rely on a alcoholic member volunteer.

A chief-executive-in-fact should be constantly on the job, and ours cannot be. This should not preclude us from searching for a volunteer of outstanding ability and the necessary experience and caliber to fill the position. We should never settle for some well intention individual who will be incompetent in performance.

The second executive difficulty is inherent in our A.A. situation. All of our trusted servants are A.A. members; they have to be. Therefore the executives and their staffs are friends in A.A., members of the same fellowship. This sometimes makes it hard for an executive to give firm guidance and equally hard for his A.A. friends to accept it. Our A.A. executives find that they not only have to run a business, they must also keep their friends. In turn, those working under them have to realize seriously that we really do have a business to conduct as well as a cooperative spiritual enterprise to foster. Therefore a reasonable amount of discipline and direction is a necessity. Those who cannot or will not see this are not well suited for headquarters work. Although excessive apartness or roughshod authority is to be rejected in an executive, nobody should complain if he is both friendly and firm. These problems are not insoluble; we do solve them right along, mostly by the application of A.A. principles.

Problems of this sort occasionally crop up, but General Service Headquarters is not constantly beset with them. Because of the exceptional dedication of our people, a degree of harmony and effectiveness prevails that is unusual in the conduct of outside businesses.

2. Volunteer workers, how compensated: We believe that each executive, staff member or consultant should be recompensed in reasonable relation to the value of his or her contribution to the Home Group. Since we never charge anything for our Twelve Step work, our Groups can only hand out praise and gratitude. These being very dangerous to the alcoholic ego, the Group is in a position to know what amount will be proper. All service work is important, but only the Group, knowing the talents of individuals, can see the amount of effort, sacrifice, and often, personal growth that was required by each trusted servant. For many of us accustomed to going to great lengths to always being the center of attention, quietly working well, behind the scenes, is substantial personal growth deserving reinforcement from the Group.

3. Rotation of Trusted Servants. Our primary purpose for the adoption of rotation was the security and continuity of office. Our common welfare should come first. Any one of us could be here today and gone tomorrow. All Group members are expected to be engaged in some service position. Those who refuse to participate can be assigned to a research committee to find out how long a person can stay sober without service commitments. The average alcoholic is expected to possess the general ability to do, or learn how to do, any job in the Group. With some jobs, special skills (including leadership skills) may be required which will preclude some Group members from rotation in those positions.

In the business world, such an arrangement would be unworkable. It would practically guarantee indifference and mediocrity, because the usual money and prestige incentives would be lacking. In our entire operating situation, this is the sole major departure from the structure of corporate business. Consequently there should be proved and compelling reasons for such a corporate heresy, and there are. In our voluntary corporate structure we do not have an inferior class of employees. We have unity. We share in the Leadership,

the responsibility, the work, the rewards, and the gratitude. We remain citizens of our local communities. We recognize the seriousness of our illness but we are not defeated by it. Our recovery does not slavishly force us to become professionals, our recovery allows our membership in Alcoholics Anonymous to remain an avocation.

In our voluntary corporate structure we utilize rotation as a tool to prevent the collapse or demoralization of Groups from the sudden departures of people in key positions. When the remaining Group members know every assignment, there is no irreparable damage to the Group. Under such a condition replacements can be carefully chosen and trained at leisure. And the usual tendency to select less able associates is largely overcome.

By putting our membership on a complete parity, requiring everyone to be a trusted servant, the usual money and prestige incentives did not damage us at all. We A.A.'s had what the commercial venture often lacks; a dedicated desire to serve which replaces the usual ego drives. At the same time many of the temptations to destructive competition and office "politicking" were often removed. The spirit of fellowship improved immeasurably and found its way into our organization.

In the future - at those times when the rotation system does not work perfectly - there will be the natural demand to throw it out in the supposed interest of efficiency. Certainly our successors will be at liberty to try, but past experience surely suggests that they may be jumping from the frying pan into the fire.

The matter of time is one aspect of rotation we must consider. We already know that the more responsible the assignment, the longer the term of service must be, if we are to have effectiveness. For example, meeting level positions such as Coffee Maker, Greeter and Meeting Chairperson can be changed every three months. Most Group level positions such as Treasurer and Librarian serve for six months or a year. Group General Service Representatives serve for two years and take office January 1, regardless of the date of election. Group members may be asked to serve the larger A.A. fellowship for two years as Intergroup officer or Committee Director, District Committee Member, or Area Delegate, and Trustee must serve for four years.

Another matter of importance is training or qualifications for the job at hand. We need not fear too many Group members getting "old in the service". The emotional pace of "A.A. around the clock" is too strenuous for most of them to take for long periods of time. With the proper training or prior qualifications most of us can serve in our assignment as required. Service sponsors and "alternate" positions provide needed knowledge and time to learn new skills. Committees can be formed for jobs individuals should not try to handle. Our volunteers come and go for a variety of personal reasons. Whenever training is offered by your District, Intergroup or Area, you should encourage members to participate. If they have nothing to learn then they most certainly have knowledge to contribute.

4. Full "participation" of all members is highly important. It would be nice if we could employ others to do our work, but we cannot. At our Group level all our work is Twelve Step work of one type or another. The alcoholic you may be helping may even be yourself, and you wouldn't approve payment for that. In commercial corporate structures, employment for money - the employer-employee relation is the norm. Authority and money are deeply linked throughout our society. Possession or control of money spells control of people. Unwisely used, as it often is, this control can result in a very unhappy kind of division. This ranges those "with control" on one side of the fence and those "lacking control" on the other. There can be no reconciliation or harmony. When a part of that fence is taken down by those "lacking control" those "having control" are forced then to repair it at their own expense. To protect this investment the "haves" are forced to participate in full time guard duty at the fence and a state of war exists.

In our A.A. structure of service we who have sobriety must do more than stand guard over what we "have". We must all show the "just dry" how to find their way to the gate in the fence where all can enter. All who "have sobriety" must climb to the top rail and point the way to the gate.

It is possible for these "just dry" forces to defeat the good working relationships we would like to have. Indeed, Groups have died from them. Simply not drinking these "just dry" become "will nots". They will not follow our suggestions. Confusing their self centeredness for authority, they make demands. Being self-sacred, they willfully have no earthly talents or skills whatever, and demand that we must continue to do whatever it is we do, just don't bother them.

If we are fully aware of these tendencies, they can be the more easily overcome, and forgiven. We can be aware always, that any sound working relationship between adults (men or women) must be in the character of a partnership, a non-competitive one in which each partner complements the other. It is not a question of superiority or inferiority at all.

Add to this the further thought that no organizations' structure can fully guarantee the Group against the depredations of clashing personalities, that only the sustained willingness to practice spiritual principles in all our affairs can accomplish this; and we shall never need to have any fear for our future harmony.

The Six Warranties

General Warranties of the conference:

- in all its proceedings, the General Service Conference shall observe the spirit of the A.A. Tradition,
- taking great care that the conference never becomes the seat of perilous wealth or power;
- that sufficient operating funds, plus an ample reserve, be its prudent financial principle;
- that none of the Conference Members shall ever be placed in a position of unqualified authority over any of the others:
- that all important decisions be reached by discussion, vote, and whenever possible, by substantial unanimity;
- that no Conference action ever be personally punitive or an incitement to public controversy;
- that though the Conference may act for the service of Alcoholics Anonymous, it shall never perform any acts of government;
- and that, like the Society of Alcoholics Anonymous which it serves, the Conference itself will always remain democratic in thought and action.

The Concept here considered consists of Article 12 of the Conference Charter. There are good reasons for placing it in this context.

Taken as a whole, our Conference Charter is the substance of an informal agreement which was made between the A.A. groups and their Trustees in 1955. It is the agreed basis upon which the General Service Conference operates. In part, the Charter is an elastic document; its first eleven Articles can be readily amended by the Conference itself at any time.

But Article 12 of the Charter stands in a class by itself. An amendment or a cancellation of any of its six vital Warranties would require the written consent of three-quarters of all directory-listed A.A. groups. They would actually vote on any such proposals, and the considerable time of six months is allowed for careful deliberation. Although changes in the six Warranties of Article 12 have been made difficult, they have not been made impossible

Clearly all of these Warranties have a high and permanent importance to A.A.'s general welfare. This is why we believe we should permit change in them only upon positive evidence of their defectiveness and then only by common consent of the A.A. groups themselves. We have ranked them therefore with A.A.'s Twelve Traditions, feeling that they are quite as important to A.A.'s local world services as the Traditions are to A.A., as a whole.

The six Warranties of Article 12 are a series of solemn undertakings that guarantee that the Conference itself, and all who make themselves a part of its local structure, will conform to A.A.'s Twelve Traditions. That the Conference or any part of its local structure can never become the seat of great wealth or government; that its fiscal policy shall ever be prudent; that it will never create any absolute authority; that the principal of substantial unanimity will be observed; that it will never take any Punitive action; that it will never incite public controversy, that it can serve A.A. only; and that it shall always remain democratic in spirit. These Warranties indicate the qualities of prudence and spirituality that our General Service Conference, including its local structure, should always possess. Barring any unforeseen defects, these are the permanent bonds that hold the Conference structure fast to the movement it serves.

There are significant aspects of these Warranties that should be considered. Notice, for example, that all of them are counsels of prudence--prudence in personal relatedness, prudence in money matters, and prudence in our relations with the world about us. For us, prudence is a workable middle ground, a channel of clear sailing between the obstacles of fear on one side and of recklessness on the other. Prudence when practiced, creates a definite climate; in which harmony, effectiveness, and consistent spiritual progress can be achieved. The Warranties of Article 12 express the wisdom of taking forethought for the future based on the lessons of the past. They are the sum of our protection against needless errors and against our very natural human temptations to wealth, prestige, power, and the like.

Article 12 opens with this general statement: "In all its proceedings the General Service Conference shall observe the spirit of the A.A. Tradition..." Of all bodies and groups in Alcoholics Anonymous the Conference structure should above all feel bound by the A.A. Tradition. Indeed the conference is named "the guardian of the Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous." The Traditions themselves outline the general basis on which we may best conduct our services. The Traditions express the principles and attitudes of prudence that make for harmony. Therefore A.A.'s Twelve Traditions set the pattern of unity and of function that our General Service Conference structure is expected to exemplify at the highest degree.

The Six Warranties of Article 12 are as follows:

Warranty One: "The Conference structure which includes Area and District and each A.A. Group, shall never become the seat of perilous wealth or power."

What is meant by "perilous wealth or power"? Does it mean that the Conference structure should have virtually no money and no authority? Obviously not. Such a condition would be dangerous and absurd. Nothing but an ineffective anarchy could result from it. We must use some money, and there must be some authority to serve. But how much? How and where should we draw these lines?

The principal protection against the accumulation of too much money and too much authority in Conference hands is to be found in the A.A. Tradition itself. So long as our General Service Board, Area, District, and each Group, refuse to take outside contributions and holds each individual's gift to A.A.'s world services at a modest figure; we may be sure that we shall not become wealthy in any perilous sense. No great excess of group contributions over legitimate operating expenses is likely to be seen. Fortunately the A.A. groups have a healthy reluctance about the creation of unneeded services that might lead to an expensive bureaucracy in our midst. Indeed, it seems that the chief difficulty will continue to be that of effectively informing the A.A. groups as to what the financial and volunteer staffing needs of their world services actually are. Since it is certain therefore that we shall never become too wealthy through group contributions, we need to avoid the temptation of taking money from the outside world. We also need to avoid the temptation of letting Committee Directors continue to serve when there are no committee members to guide them and report directly back to the groups they represent.

In the matter of giving the group's General Service Representative (G.S.R.), the District Committee Member (D.C.M.), the Area Delegate or the Trustees of Alcoholics Anonymous and their staff enough authority, there can be little risk, either. Long experience, now codified in these Twelve Concepts, suggest that we are unlikely to encounter problems of too much service authority. On the contrary, it appears that our difficulty will be how to maintain enough of it. We must recall that we are protected from the calamities of too much authority by rotation, by voting participation, and by chartering. Nevertheless, we do hear warnings about the future rise of a dictator in the Conference or at the Headquarters. To Bill W., this was an unnecessary worry. Our setup being what it is, such an aspirant could not last a year. In the brief time he did last, what would he use for money? Our Delegates, directly representing the groups, control the ultimate supply of our service funds. Therefore they constitute a direct check upon the rise of too much personal authority. Taken altogether, these factors seem to be reliable safeguards against too much money and too much authority.

We have seen why the Conference structure can never have any dangerous degree of human power, but we must not overlook the fact that there is another sort of authority and power which it cannot be without: the spiritual power which flows from the activities and attitudes of truly humble, unselfish, and dedicated A.A. servants. This is the real power that causes our Conference to function. It has been well said of our servants, "They do not drive us by mandate; they lead us by example." While we have made abundantly sure that they will never drive us, Bill W. was confident that they will afford us an ever-greater inspiration as they continue to lead by example.

Warranty Two: "Sufficient operating funds, plus an ample Reserve, should be its prudent financial principle"

In this connection we should pause to review our attitudes concerning money and its relation to service effort.

Our attitude towards the giving of time when compared with our attitude toward giving money presents an interesting contrast. Of course we give a lot of our time to A.A. activities for our own protection and growth. But we also engage ourselves in a truly sacrificial giving for the sake of our groups, our Areas and for A.A. as a whole.

Above all, we devote ourselves to the newcomer, and this is our principle Twelfth Step work. In this activity we often take large amounts of time from business hours. Considered in terms of money, these collective sacrifices add up to huge sum. We do not think that this is anything unusual. We remember that people once gave their time as we struggled for sobriety. We know, too, that nearly the whole combined income of A.A. members, now more than a billion dollars a year, has been a direct result of A.A.'s activity. Had nobody recovered, there would have been no income for any of us.

When it comes to the actual spending of cash, particularly for A.A. service overhead, many of us are apt to turn a bit reluctant. We think of the loss of all that earning power in our drinking years, of those sums we might have laid by for emergencies or for the education for the kids. We find, too, that when we drop money in the meeting hat there is no such bang as when we talk for hours to a newcomer. There is not much romance in paying the landlord. Sometimes we hold off when we are asked to meet Intergroup, District, or Area service expenses. As to world services, we may remark, "Well, those activities are a long way off, and our group does not really need them. Maybe nobody needs them." These are very natural and understandable reactions, easy to justify. We can say, "Let's not spoil A.A. with money and service organization. Let's separate the material from the spiritual. That will keep things simple."

These attitudes are reintroduced to A.A. by almost every new member; they quickly disappear when the real need for a given A.A. service becomes clear. To make such a need clear is simply a matter of the right information and education. We see this in the continuous job now being done with good effect for our world services by Area Delegates, District Committee Members, and Group General Service Representatives. They are finding that money-begging by pressure exhortation is unwanted and unneeded in A.A. They simply portray what the giver's service really brings in terms of steering alcoholics to A.A., and in terms of our over-all unity and effectiveness. This much done, the hoped-for contributions are forthcoming. The donors can seldom see what the exact result has been. They know, however, that countless thousands of other alcoholics and their families are certain to be helped.

When we look at such truly anonymous contributions in this fashion, and as we gain a better understanding of their continuous urgency, "Bill W.," was sure that the voluntary contributions of our A.A. groups, supplemented by many modest gifts from individual A.A.'s, will pay our local service bills, and world service bills over future years, in good times at any rate.

We can take comfort, too, from the fact that we do not have to maintain an expensive corps of paid workers at World Headquarters. In relation to the ever-growing size of A.A. the number of workers has declined. In the beginning our World Service Office engaged one paid worker to each thousand of A.A. members. By 1991 we had only one paid worker to every twelve thousand recovered alcoholic. The present cost of our world services is today seen as a small sum in relationship to the present reach of our Fellowship. Perhaps no other society of our size and activity has such a low general overhead.

These reassurances of course cannot be taken as a basis for the abandonment of the policy of financial prudence. The fact and symbol of A.A.'s fiscal common sense can be seen in the Reserve Fund of our General Service Board. The Reserve Fund amounts to about one year's operating expense of our World Service Office. For groups the most widely held view seems to be, that a prudent financial reserve fund of three months operating expense is adequate. This Reserve Fund of the General Service Board has repeatedly prevented the severe crippling, and sometimes the near collapse, of our world services.

In about half of the years of our existence A.A. group contributions have failed to meet our world needs. The Reserve Fund, constantly renewed by book sales, has been able to meet these deficits -- and save money besides. What this has meant to the lives of uncounted alcoholics who might never have reached us had our services been weak or nonexistent, no one can guess. Financial prudence has paid off in lives saved. These facts about our Reserve Fund need to be better understood. For sheer lack of understanding, it is still often remarked:

1. The Reserve Fund is no longer needed.
2. If the Reserve Fund continues to grow, perilous wealth will result.
3. The presence of a Reserve Fund discourages group contributions.
4. Because we do not abolish the Reserve Fund, we lack faith.
5. Our A.A. books ought to be published at cost so these volumes could be cheapened for hard-up buyers.
6. Profit-making on our basic literature is counter to sound spirituality.

While these views are by no means general, they are typical. Perhaps, then, there is still a need to analyze them and to answer the questions they raise. Let us therefore try to test them. Do these views represent genuine prudence? Do we lack faith when we prudently insist on solvency? By means of cheap A.A. books, should we engage, as a fellowship, in this sort of financial charity? Should this sort of giving not be the responsibility of individuals? Is the Headquarters' income from A.A. books really a profit after all?

When these Warranties were written by Bill W. in 1960, our Headquarters operation was about breaking even. Group contributions were exceeding our service needs by about 5%. The A.A. Grapevine continued in the red. Compared with earlier days, this was wonderful. This was the period of greatest prosperity that America had known in Bill's lifetime. Perhaps in our lifetime also. If this is our condition in good times, what would happen in bad times? Suppose that the Headquarters income were decreased 25% by a depression, or that expenses increased 25% by a steep inflation. What would this mean in hard cash? We would be faced with a gaping deficit in twelve months time. If in such an emergency we had no reserve and no book income, we would soon have to discharge one-third of our paid workers and A.A. staff members. Much mail would go unanswered, pleas for information and help ignored. The Grapevine would have to be shut down or reduced to a second-rate bulletin. The number of Delegates attending our yearly General Service Conference would have to be drastically reduced. Practically and spiritually, these would be the penalties were we to dissipate our Reserve Fund and its book income.

Happily we do not have to face any such slash as this. Our present reserve and its book income could see us through several years of hard times without the slightest lessening in the strength and quality of our world effort.

Many believe that America can never see another serious business upset. We can certainly hope and pray that it will not. But is it wise for us of A.A. to make a huge bet -- by dissipating our own assets -- that this could never happen? Would it not be far better, instead, for us to increase our savings in this period when the world about us in all probability has already borrowed more money than can ever be repaid?

Now let us examine the claim that the presence of our Reserve Fund discourages group contributions. It is said that the impression is created that A.A. Headquarters is already well off and that hence there is no need for more money. This is not at all the general attitude, however, and its effect on contributions is probably small.

Next comes the question of whether A.A. as a whole should go in for what amounts to a money charity to individual newcomers and their sponsors -- via the selling of our books at cost or less. Up to now we A.A.'s have strongly believed that money charity to the individual should not be a function of the A.A. groups or of A.A. as a whole. To illustrate: When a sponsor takes a new member in

hand, he does not in the least expect that his group is going to pay the expenses he incurs while doing a Twelfth Step job. The sponsor may give his prospect a suit of clothes, may get him a job, or present him with an A.A. book. This sort of thing frequently happens, and it is fine that it does. Such charities are the responsibility of the sponsor and not the A.A. group itself. If a sponsor cannot give or lend an A.A. book, one can be found in the library. Many groups sell books on the installment plan. There is no scarcity of A.A. books; more than a million are now in circulation. We see no really good reason why A.A. services should supply everybody with cheap books, including the large majority who can easily pay the going price. It appears to be altogether clear that our world services need those book dollars far more than the buyers do.

Some of us have another concern, and this is related to so-called book "profits." The fact that A.A. Headquarters and most groups sell books for more than they cost is thought to be spiritually bad. Is this sort of noncommercial book income really a profit after all? In Bill W.'s eyes it was not. This class of income to the groups and to A.A.'s General Services is actually the sum of many contributions that the book buyers make to the general welfare of Alcoholics Anonymous. The certain and continuous solvency of our world services rests upon these contributions. Looked at in this way, our Reserve Fund is seen to be actually the aggregate of many small financial sacrifices made by the book buyers. This fund is not the property of private investors; it is wholly owned by A.A. itself.

Warranty Three: "None of the Conference members shall ever be placed in a position of unqualified authority over any of the others."

We have learned that this principle is of incalculable value to the harmonious conduct of our Conference affairs. Its application in our structure has already been extensively discussed under the Concept entitled "The Right of Participation," which emphasizes that our world servants, both as individuals and as groups, shall be entitled to voting rights in reasonable proportion to their several responsibilities.

Because this right of participation is so important we have made it the subject of this Warranty, thus providing insurance that Conference action alone can never overturn or amend this right. For any such purpose widespread group consent would be needed, which would probably prove difficult though not necessarily impossible for the Conference to obtain. We believe that our whole service experience fully justifies the taking of this stand against the creation of unqualified authority at any point in our Conference structure.

It is to be noted, too, that this Warranty against absolute authority is far more general and sweeping in its nature than a guarantee of voting participation. It really means that we of A.A. will not tolerate absolute human authority in any form. The voting rights urged under our concept of "Participation" are simply the practical means of checking any future tendency to an unqualified authority of any sort. This healthy state of affairs is of course also reinforced by our concepts of "Appeal and Petition."

Many A.A.'s have already begun to call Article 12 of the Conference Charter "The A.A. Service Bill of Rights." This is because they see in these Warranties, and especially in this one, an expression of deep and loving respect for the spiritual liberties of their fellows. May God grant that we shall never be so unwise as to settle for anything less.

Warranty Four: "That all important decisions be reached by discussion, vote, and, whenever possible, by substantial unanimity."

Here on the one hand we erect a safeguard against any hasty or overbearing authority of a simple majority; and on the other hand we take notice of the rights and the frequent wisdom of minorities, however small. This principle further guarantees that all matters of importance, time permitting, will be extensively debated, and that such debates will continue until a heavy majority can support every critical decision that we are called on to make in A.A., starting with our groups, and extending to all the other components of the Conference structure.

When we take decisions in this fashion, the Conference voice speaks with an authority and a confidence that a simple majority could never give it. If any remain in opposition, they are far better satisfied because their case has had a full and fair hearing.

When a decision taken in substantial unanimity does happen to go wrong, there can be no heated recriminations. Everybody will be able to say, "Well, we had a careful debate, we took the decision, and it turned out to be a bad one. Better luck next time!"

Like many very high ideals, the principle of substantial unanimity does, however, have certain practical limitations. Occasionally a Conference decision will be of such extreme urgency that something has to be done at once. In such a case we cannot allow a minority, however well-intended, to block a vitally needed action which is evidently in the best interest of A.A. Here we shall need to trust the majority, sometimes a bare majority, to decide whether Conference debate is to be terminated and a final action taken. In certain other cases, the majority will also have to exercise this undoubted right. Suppose, for example, that a small minority obstinately tries to use the principle of substantial unanimity to block a clearly needed action. In such an event it would be the plain duty of the majority to over-ride such a misuse of the principle of substantial unanimity.

Nevertheless our experience shows that majorities will seldom need to take such radical stands as these. Being generally animated by the spirit of “substantial unanimity,” we have found that our Conference structure can nearly always be guided by this valued principle.

In passing it should be noted that the Conference structure will sometimes have to decide, with respect to a particular question, what the requirements of substantial unanimity are going to be -- whether a two-thirds, three-quarters, or even a greater majority, will be required to settle a particular question. Such an advance agreement can, of course, be had on a simple majority vote.

Concluding the discussion on this Warranty, it can be said that without question both the practical and the spiritual results of the practice of substantial unanimity already have been proved to be very great indeed.

Warranty Five: “That no Conference action, ever be personally punitive or an incitement to public controversy.”

Practically all societies and governments feel it necessary to inflict personal punishment upon individual members for violations of their beliefs, principles, or laws. Because of its special situation, Alcoholics Anonymous finds this practice unnecessary. When we of A.A. fail to follow sound spiritual principles, alcohol cuts us down. Therefore no humanly administered system of penalties is needed. This unique condition is an enormous advantage to us all, one on which we can fully rely and one which we should never abandon by resort to the methods of personal attack and punishment. Of all societies ours can least afford to risk the resentments and conflicts which would result were we to yield to the temptation to punish in anger.

For much the same reason we cannot and should not enter into public controversy, even in self-defense. Our experience has shown that, providentially it would seem, A.A. has been made exempt from the need to quarrel with anyone, no matter what the provocation. Nothing could be more damaging to our unity and to the world-wide good will which A.A. enjoys, than public contention, no matter how promising the immediate dividends might appear.

Therefore it is evident that the harmony, security, and future effectiveness of A.A. will depend largely upon maintenance of a thoroughly nonaggressive and appeasing attitude in our public relations. This is an exacting assignment, because in our drinking days we were prone to anger, hostility, rebellion, and aggression. And even though we are now sober, the old patterns of behavior are to a degree still with us, always threatening to explode on any good excuse. If we continue to know this, Bill W., felt confident that in the conduct of our public affairs we shall always find the grace to exert an effective restraint.

We enjoy certain inherent advantages which should make our task of self-restraint relatively easy. There is no really good reason for anyone to object if a great many drunks get sober. Nearly everyone can agree that this is a good thing. If, in the process, we are forced to develop a certain amount of honesty, humility, and tolerance, who is going to kick about that? If we recognize that religion is the province of the clergy and the practice of medicine is for doctors, we can helpfully cooperate with both. Certainly there is little basis for controversy in these areas. It is a fact that A.A. has not the slightest reform or political complexion. We try to pay our own expenses, and we strictly mind our single purpose.

These are some of the reasons why A.A. can easily be at peace with the whole world. These are the natural advantages which we must never throw away by foolishly entering the arena of public controversy or punitive action against anybody.

Because our General Service Conference represents us all, this body is especially charged with the duty of setting the highest possible standard with respect to these attitudes of no punishments and no public controversy. The Conference will have to do more than just represent these principles; it will frequently have to apply them to specific situations. And, at times, the Conference will need to take certain protective actions, especially in the area of Tradition violations. This action, however, never need be punitively or aggressively controversial at the public level.

Let us now consider some typical situations that may often require Conference consideration and sometimes definite action:

Let us suppose that A.A. does fall under sharp public attack or heavy ridicule; and let us take the particular case where such pronouncements happen to have little or no justification in fact.

Almost without exception it can be confidently estimated that our best defense in these situations would be no defense whatever -- namely, complete silence at the public level. Unreasonable people are stimulated all the more by opposition. If in good humor we leave them strictly alone, they are apt to subside the more quickly. If their attacks persist and it is plain that they are misinformed, it may be wise to communicate with them in a temperate and informative way; also in such a manner that they cannot use our communication as the springboard for fresh assault. Such communications need seldom be made by the Conference officially. Very often we can use the good offices of friends. Such messages from us should never question the motives of the attackers; they should be purely informative. These communications should also be made in private. If made public, they will often be seized upon as fresh excuse for controversy.

If, however, a given criticism of A.A. is partly or wholly justified, it may be well to acknowledge this privately to the critics, together with our thanks -- still keeping away, however, from the public level.

But under no conditions should we exhibit anger or any punitive or aggressive intent. Surely this should be our inflexible policy. Within such a framework the Conference and the Headquarters will always need to make a thoughtful estimate of what or what not should be done in these cases.

We may be confronted by public violations of the A.A. Traditions. Individuals, outside organizations, and even our own members sometimes try to use the A.A. name for their own private purposes. As A.A. grows in size and public recognition, the temptation to misuse our name may increase. This is why we have assigned to our Conference a protective task in respect to such conditions. The Conference, as we know, is the "guardian" of the A.A. Traditions. There has always been some confusion about this term "guardianship," and perhaps we should try to clear it up.

To the minds of some A.A.'s, "guardianship" of the A.A. Traditions implies the right and duty on the part of the Conference to publicly punish or sue every willful violator. But we could not adopt a worse policy; indeed such aggressive public acts would place the Conference in the position of having violated one A.A. Tradition in order to defend another. Therefore aggressive or punitive action, even in this area, must be omitted.

Privately, however, we can inform Tradition violators, that they are out of order. When they persist, we can follow up by using such other resources of persuasion as we may have, and these are often considerable. Manifested in this fashion, a persistent firmness will often bring the desired result.

In the long run, though, we shall have to rely mainly upon the pressures of A.A. opinion and public opinion. And to this end we shall need to maintain a continuous education of public communications channels of all kinds concerning the nature and purpose of our Traditions.

Whenever and however we can, we shall need to inform the general public also; especially upon misuses of the name Alcoholics Anonymous. This combination of counter forces can be very discouraging to violators or would-be violators. Under these conditions they soon find their deviations to be unprofitable and unwise. Our experience has shown that continuous and general education respecting our Traditions will be a reliable preventive and protection in the years to come.

Feeling the weight of these forces, certain members who run counter to A.A.'s Traditions sometimes say that they are being censored or punished and they are therefore being governed. It would appear, however, that A.A.'s right to object calmly and privately to specific violations is at least equal to the rights of the violators to violate. This cannot accurately be called a governmental action. Some deviators have suffered rather severe personal criticism from individual A.A. members, and this is to be deplored. However this is no reason for us to stop reminding all concerned of the undesirability of breaking A.A.'s Traditions before the entire public. It can be said in all fairness that the difficulties of those who contravene the Traditions are chiefly troubles of their own making.

Another kind of problem that merits consideration is the occasional severe internal disagreement among us that comes to unwelcome public attention. For example, we once hit the headlines with a pretty hard-bitten lawsuit when two factions of A.A.'s were competing for the Possession of the A.A. name for Intergroup use, the name having been incorporated by one of them. In another instance in an overseas area there was some bad publicity when a considerable section of the groups there became convinced they ought to accept money subsidies from their country's government to promote A.A. work, the A.A. Tradition notwithstanding. This internal difficulty should not have surfaced before the public because there was certainly nothing about it that mutual understanding and good temper could not have readily handled. Fortunately this sort of episode has been infrequent and relatively harmless. But such difficulties do pose certain questions for the future. What should our General Service Conference do about this sort of thing?

Always remembering group autonomy and the fact that A.A.'s World Headquarters is not a police operation, the most that can be done in most cases is to make an offer of mediation. What the Tradition in this respect means, and what our experience with it has been, can always be offered as a matter of information. We can always urge the avoidance of any breakthrough of such disagreements at the public level. All parties can remember that unfavorable criticism or ridicule which might ensue from such conflicts can so reflect upon A.A. as to keep new prospects from joining up.

Then, too, a great many of these difficulties with the Tradition are of strictly local concern, there being no international implication. Many of them represent honest differences of opinion as to how the Tradition should be interpreted: whether a lenient or strict observance would be the better thing. Especially when operating below the public level, our experience with the Tradition reveals gray areas, where neither white or black interpretations seem possible. Here the violations are often so debatable and inconsequential they are hardly worth bothering about. Here we usually refrain from offering suggestions, unless they are insisted upon. We feel that these problems must be solved chiefly by the local people concerned.

There is, too, a grave problem that we have never had to face. This would be in the nature of a deep rift running clear across A.A. -- a cleavage of opinion so serious that it might involve a withdrawal of some of our membership into a new society of their own. They might make an alliance with an outside agency in contravention of the A.A. Tradition. This would be the old story of split and division of which history is so full. It might be powered by religious, political, national, or racial forces. It might represent an honest effort to change A.A. for the better. But it would certainly pose the Conference a question of what to do, or not to do.

Such a development is hard to imagine. We A.A.'s usually assume that we have too much at stake to succumb to this very ordinary ailment of the world about us. Yet this comforting assurance is no reason for refusing to give this contingency some calm forethought. If it ever came, such a development might be a terrific surprise and shock. Suddenly aroused passions flare, making any truly constructive solution immensely difficult, perhaps impossible.

Because society everywhere is in such a state of fission today, many of us have given this subject a great deal of consideration. Our considered opinion is this: that the best possible Conference attitude in such a circumstance would be that of almost complete nonresistance -- certainly no anger and certainly no attack. We have no doctrine that has to be maintained. We have no membership that has to be enlarged. We have no authority that has to be supported. We have no prestige, power, or pride that has to be satisfied. And we have no property or money that is worth quarreling about. These are advantages of which we should make the best possible use in the event of a threatened major division; they should make a calm and considered attitude of nonresistance entirely possible and highly practical.

Indeed we have always practiced this principle on a lesser scale. When a drunk shows up among us and says that he doesn't like the A.A. principles, people, or service management; when he declares he can do better elsewhere -- we are not worried. We simply say, "Maybe your case is different. Why don't you try something else?"

If an A.A. member says he doesn't like his own group, we are not disturbed. We simply say "Why don't you try another one? Or start one of your own." When our actors and cops and priest want their own private groups, we say "Fine! Why don't you try that idea out?" When an A.A. group, as such, insists on running a clubhouse, we say "Well, that sometimes works out badly, but maybe you will succeed after all." If individual A.A.'s wish to gather together for retreats, Communion breakfasts, or indeed any undertaking at all, we say "Fine. Only we hope you won't designate your efforts as an A.A. group or enterprise." These examples illustrate how far we have already gone to encourage freedom of assembly, action, and even division. To all who wish to secede from A.A. we extend a cheerful invitation to do just that. If they can do better by other means, we are glad. If after a trial they cannot do better, we know they face a choice: they can go mad or die, or they can return to Alcoholics Anonymous. The decision is wholly theirs. (As a matter of fact, most of them do come back.)

In the light of all this experience, it becomes evident that in the event of a really extensive split we would not have to waste time persuading the dissenters to stay with us. In good confidence and cheer, we could actually invite them to secede and we would wish them well if they did so. Should they do better under their new auspices and changed conditions, we would ask ourselves if we could not learn from their fresh experience. But if it turned out they did worse under other circumstances and that there was a steady increase in their discontent and their death rate, the chances are very strong that most of them would eventually return to A.A.

Without anger or coercion we would need only to watch and to wait upon God's will. Unless we make a problem where there really is none at all, there need be no difficulty. We could still go about our business in good cheer. The supply of drunks in our time will be inexhaustible, and we can continue to be glad that we have evolved at least one formula by which many will come to sobriety and a new way of life.

We have a saying that "A.A. is prepared to give all the knowledge and all the experience it has --all excepting the A.A. name itself." We mean by this that our principles can be used in any application whatever. We do not wish to make them a monopoly of our own. We simply request that the public use of the A.A. name be avoided by those other agencies who wish to avail themselves of A.A. techniques and ideas. In case the A.A. name should be misapplied in such a connection it would of course be the duty of our General Service Conference to press for the discontinuance of such a practice -- always short, however, of public quarreling about the matter.

The protection of the A.A. name is of such importance to us that we once thought of incorporating it everywhere throughout the world, thereby availing ourselves of legal means to stop any misuse. We even thought to ask Congress to grant us the unusual favor of a Congressional incorporation. We felt that the existence of these legal remedies might prove to be a great deterrent.

But after several years of deliberation, our General Service Conference decided against such a course. the dramatic story of this debate and it's conclusion may be found in our history book "Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age." Those early Conferences believed that the power to sue would be a dangerous thing for us to possess. It was recognized that a public lawsuit is a public controversy, something in which our Tradition says we may not engage. To make our legal position secure, it would have been necessary to incorporate our whole fellowship, and no one wished to see our spiritual way of life incorporated. It seemed certain that we could confidently trust A.A. opinion, public opinion, and God Himself, to take care of Alcoholics Anonymous in this respect.

Warranty Six: "That though the Conference may act for the service of Alcoholics Anonymous, it shall never perform any acts of government; and that, like the Society of Alcoholics Anonymous which it serves, the Conference itself will always remain democratic in action and spirit."

In preceding Concepts, much attention has been drawn to the extraordinary liberties which the A.A. Traditions accord to the individual member and to his group: no penalties to be inflicted for nonconformity to A.A. principles; no fees or dues to be levied -- voluntary contributions only; no member to be expelled from A.A. -- membership always to be the choice of the individual; each A.A. group to conduct its internal affairs as it wishes -- it being merely requested to abstain from acts that might injure A.A. as a whole; and finally that any group of alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an A.A. group provided that, as a group, they have no other purpose or affiliation.

It is probable that we A.A.'s possess more and greater freedom than any fellowship in the world today. As we have already seen, we claim this as no virtue. We know that we personally have to choose conformity to A.A.'s Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions or else face decay and death, both as individuals and as groups.

Because we set such a high value on our great liberties, and cannot conceive a time when they will need to be limited, we specially enjoin our General Services Conference structure to abstain completely from any and all acts of authoritative government which could in any wise curtail A.A.'s freedom under God. The maintenance of these freedoms in our Conference structure is a great and practical guarantee that the Conference structure itself will always remain democratic in action and in spirit.

Therefore we expect that our Trusted Servants will always try to act in the spirit of mutual respect and love -- one member for another. In turn, this sign signifies that mutual trust should prevail; that no action ought to be taken in anger, haste, or recklessness; that care will be observed to respect and protect all minorities; that no action should ever be personally punitive; that whenever possible, important actions will be taken in substantial unanimity; and that our Conference structure will ever be prudently on guard against tyrannies, great or small, whether these be found in the majority or in the minority.

The sum of these several attitudes and practices is in Bill W.'s view the very essence of democracy -- in action and spirit.

Freedom under God to grow in His likeness and image will ever be the quest of the members of Alcoholics Anonymous. May our General Service Conference structure be always seen as the chief symbol of this cherished liberty.

To a person, we of A.A. believe that our freedom to serve is truly the freedom by which we live -- the freedom in which we have our being.