

THE TRIANGLE

AA's Traditions and Concepts



AREA 40'S NEWSLETTER

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Concepts Overview

The Twelve Concepts of AA were a mystery to me as much as the Twelve Steps were a mystery upon my introduction to AA. The Concepts were not a very compelling mystery since they were seldom referred to. A simplified notion of service was part of my early training in sobriety; concepts of world service that provide principles like "the right of decision," the importance of hearing minority opinions, and "the right of appeal" were not brought to my attention. Only gradually did I notice how I had overlooked the third side of the

triangle of recovery, unity, and service. By way of a gentle nudge from my sponsor, I became involved with General Service. By way of that nudge, the Concepts took on their rightful place as the third leg of the triangle.

In 1962 the General Service Conference accepted the Concepts as part of the Third Legacy of Service. While recovery and unity are conscious elements in the process of living sober, the Concepts should not remain the domain of trusted servants in the general service structure. Many members are curious

about the Concepts and are ready to add this leg of the triangle to their program. I have found the Concepts essential in my service activities whether I think them worldly in scale or not.

As with the 12 Steps and the 12 Traditions, experience and actively implementing those spiritual principles into my life brought them alive. That ideal has also applied to the 12 Concepts. Only after years of general service and most recently participating at the General Service Conference did the Concepts come

alive and hold a more clear level of depth and weight. That clarity changes from murky to clear depending upon my willingness to learn.

I am grateful our Triangle editor has dedicated this edition to the Twelve Concepts. Only through the sharing by others of their experience, strength and hope do I learn how these wonderful spiritual principles can "add to" my life.

Scott W.,
Area 40 Delegate

Concept One (and a little of Two)

THE FINAL RESPONSIBILITY AND THE ULTIMATE AUTHORITY FOR AA WORLD SERVICES SHOULD ALWAYS RESIDE IN THE COLLECTIVE CONSCIENCE OF OUR WHOLE FELLOWSHIP

Well, here we are just around the corner from another election year in Area 40. This is where we AAs really have the responsibility of living up to what Bill and Bob handed over to us. "The AA groups today hold ultimate responsibility and final authority for our world services – those special elements of over-all service activity which make it possible for our Society to

function as a whole. The groups assumed that responsibility at the St. Louis International Convention of 1955."

So what does that mean to us as individual AA members, groups, districts, Areas, General Service Conferences and as a Fellowship? It means making sure we do our very best to choose the best possible "trusted servants" to serve Alcoholics Anonymous. It starts with me as an individual member. I can't always look to someone else in the group to do "it". "Tradition Two, like all the AA Traditions, is the voice of experi-

ence, based upon the trials of thousands of groups in our pioneering time. The main principles of Tradition Two are crystal clear: the AA groups are to be the final authority; their leaders are to be entrusted with delegated responsibilities only.... But it wasn't until 1951 that the first experimental General Service Conference was called to see whether Tradition Two could be successfully applied to AA as a whole, including its Trustees and founders."

Concept Two also points out that the groups are the ultimate authority in AA.

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Throughout this issue, references are made to "The AA Service Manual Combined with Twelve Concepts for World Service". The Service Manual contains information on the Twelve Concepts as well as the Twelve Traditions.

Concept One (and a little of Two) Continued..

With such authority comes a lot of responsibility. The “AA Railroad” is no longer a viable means of choosing trusted servants. We use to laugh at someone being pushed into a service position in this manner. We have come a long way and there are still millions coming who need this Program and Fellowship to be what our Founders left to us. It is irresponsible to just put somebody into a position because “it would be good for them.” Our First Tradition negates such reasoning. *“The group conscience of AA could not be heard unless a properly chosen Conference were fully trusted to speak for it respecting most matters of world ser-*

vice.” This also applies to groups, districts and Areas.

In our Service Manual you will find reference to the positions of General Service Representative, District Committee Member, Delegate, and Regional Trustee. Each one of these will tell you that they are charged with carrying the voice, or flavor of the people, Area or Region they represent. They are to be allowed to vote how they see fit given the information they receive while attending their respective meetings. They are exercising our responsibility in the Group Conscience of AA as a whole. What could we do better as responsible members of AA than

to do our very best in electing trusted servants who will in fact show up for two years, be prepared for the task at hand, and remain responsible to those who elected them. By doing this we will be living up to what Dr. Bob, Bill W. and a God of our understanding entrusted us with. I for one do not want to be responsible for any child born today coming to AA in the near future only to find some failing society that can't help its self let alone them.

Bob H., Past Delegate

Concept Three

As a traditional means of creating and maintaining a clearly defined working relation between the groups, the Conference, the AA 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”.

The “Right of Decision” is a valued and sometimes misunderstood necessity of all trusted servants in our Fellowship.

As the Concept states, we need a working relationship between all service entities and members of our Fellowship., from the individual members of our AA groups, District, Area, the General Service Conference, the General Service Board, the AA corporations and so forth. A prudent middle ground, where no one is the boss yet everyone has a say in the business at hand. Yet as importantly, an opportunity for each service entity to be trusted with the “Right of Decision”.

Our service structure, best outlined as an upside down triangle, shows the individual members as “stock holders” and best describes the AA groups as holding the ultimate authority and final responsibility for world services. Authority and

responsibility for world services held at the group level? Seems to be a bit of reach, but has been successfully accomplished since the first General Service Conference held in 1951 as the result of the Conference Charter and our 2nd Tradition, the principle of trusted servants. Those two principles have delegated to the General Service Conference full authority to manage and conduct AA's affairs.

This delegation of authority and management has suited our Fellowship well. The groups still retain the right to instruct their Delegate on any and all AA matters. However, that instruction would take the trust out of trusted servant and have the Delegate be a messenger, at best. So where is the prudent middle ground between ultimate authority and delegated responsibility? The answer to that question resides within the principle of the “Right of Decision”.

For example, Area 40's contribution to the General Service Conference (our Delegate) has a “sense of the Area” by the conclusion of our Spring Assembly regarding the General Service Conference Agenda Items. Our Delegate also has the “Right of Decision” when those items come up for vote on the floor of the Conference, or in other words, to vote contrary to the sense of Area 40.

My experience is the Delegate generally votes the sense of Area 40.

However, there are occasions when new information, a different point of view or new facts will be discussed. On those occasions, our Fellowship has guaranteed through the “Right of Decision” the opportunity for each trusted servant: GSR, DCM, Delegate, Trustee and so forth to vote their conscience keeping in mind what is best for AA as a whole. Without the “Right of Decision”, no matter what new information was available, our trusted servants would be mandated to vote as instructed without recourse. That would not serve our Fellowship.

To best summarize, I quote Bill Wilson. “Our entire AA program rests squarely upon the principle of mutual trust. We trust God, we trust AA, 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 implicit confidence.”

Scott W., Area 40 Delegate

Tradition One

Each member of Alcoholics Anonymous is but a small part of a great whole. AA must continue to live or most of us will surely die. Hence our common welfare comes first. But individual welfare follows close afterward.

My name is Curt, and I am an alcoholic. Thanks to God, the actions of AA, and sponsorship, I've been sober since July 22, 1993. And hopefully my actions will continue to show you that I'm grateful for my sobriety. I also serve as the GSR of my home group.

The first disclaimer I should make about what I write here is the same disclaimer for everything I've ever passed on in AA – that nothing you are about to read will be original. I've been sober for 12 years, enjoying the best life I've ever had, by taking actions that have been proven successful by other AA members ahead of me. I've inherited a contented, useful, sober life from all those happy sober alcoholics who came before me. I'd rather not take a chance on experimenting with what works or doesn't work. That's a promise I make to the men who have asked me to sponsor them along the way – I won't be experimenting with their sobriety either. We'll just stick to what has already worked for others.

In contrast to the 70-plus years of experience that surrounds me in my AA life, the newly sober alcoholics who formed AA's first groups could only learn by trial and error. Bill and Bob had no previous experience on which to rely. There were no wise old-timers from whom to gather advice. And in this context, the Twelve Traditions arose out of the painful failures of the early AA members and groups. A beautiful, fruitful set of principles grew out of

the manure of many mistakes.

The frequent missteps of early groups and AA members both created the need for the Traditions and helped distill their content. In the same way that Step One defines the problem of alcoholism for the individual, Tradition One defines the problem of alcoholism for our groups and AA as a whole. We must stay unified, we must work for our common good, or we will surely die. If you believe the words printed in black in the Big Book, the message is loud and clear – hang together, or die separately.

The bad news for us alcoholics is that the major dilemmas of our individual disease find their way into the heart of our collective problem. The powerlessness and selfishness that are the roots of our personal condition show up as defects that would destroy our hope for companionship and camaraderie as well. I know from personal experience (and thanks to a personal inventory) that my selfish ways were the source of much of the discord and suffering in my most intimate relationships. Incapable of looking beyond my own self-centered need for attention, recognition, and security, I emotionally bludgeoned the people I loved most into giving me what I demanded. I took until I had to leave, and left behind only confusion and bitterness. There is no question why alcohol became a solution when I took actions that only emptied an empty soul further.

When I arrive in AA, I am faced with an entirely new group of people, whose fellowship and support are vital to my survival. But I come here devoid of any skills with which to foster real connection with others. To complicate matters even further, must I remind you that Alcoholics Anonymous is full of alcoholics.

Like any other AA member, it soon becomes obvious that I have definite opinions about how my home group and, frankly, a lot of other home groups should behave. AAs in my group sometimes say things to me or to a newcomer or to another member that make the hair on the back of my neck stand up. There are service tasks in the group that are not done to my standards or members who fail to show up for their commitments. Or worst yet, some other alcoholic will claim to be having a happy sober life by taking a different approach to the Twelve Steps than I've been taught. Whatever the offense, large or small, my agile mind can find a thousand complaints, a million excuses, and a plethora of loopholes on which to base my resignation speech. I'm a quitter. I'll just quit.

But the same desperation that drove me to attempt life sober also drives me to return to my group (well since I only quit in my mind, I only have to return in my mind), to rejoin AA and attempt to live as a member among members. However, I'm going to need a sufficient substitute for quitting. I'll need a solution to being stupidly antisocial and suicidally judgmental.

In the same way that Steps Two through Twelve provide the solution and program of action to address the problem outlined in Step One, so do Traditions Two through Twelve provide the solution and program of action to counter the problem presented in Tradition One. Tradition One suggests that putting the good of the whole ahead of our individual needs is absolutely necessary for AA to survive. But how do we do that? What does it mean to put our common welfare first?

Tradition One Continued...

AA's power is in its practicality. In the same way that I have made amends (that is, changed my ways) in my personal recovery, so do I have to live differently among the groups of people with whom I live my sober life. Rather than gossip to others about how rude I thought someone else treated a newcomer, perhaps I should stick my hand out to anyone and everyone at the meeting who I don't recognize and greet them with the warmth and welcome that I have always craved myself. Rather than berate a group member whose service activity is beneath my standards, perhaps I should wash dishes with an enthusiasm and joy-

fulness that draws the newcomer on the fringe closer to the middle. What if service in my group and in AA looked like the thing all the cool kids were doing instead of an odious chore inflicted on the newcomer?

When I think that my group or my District or the Area has made a bad decision or otherwise taken action that I find unacceptable, sometimes I must consciously and deliberately yield to the conscience of the group. I must take my inventory and look to see my part. At each of these levels, I can strive to make AA more inviting to the newcomer, keep our organization simple, and focus on making AA a better place for the

still suffering alcoholics yet to come. Tradition Two even goes so far as to say that it is in the group conscience that I'll find God. Maybe I'm not the only, or even the best, channel of God's grace in AA after all.

So if I'm convinced of the problem presented in Tradition One, then I also have the hope given by the rest of the Traditions. I simply need to apply my will to taking the actions laid out in Traditions Two through Twelve and I'll enjoy the solution. I will be doing my part to insure AA's common welfare. I might even remember I'm but a small part of a great whole.

Concept Four

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

The key to harmony is participation. Our Big Book shares with us that we met on the common ground of love & tolerance and we are here to be of maximum service to God and our Fellows. Those principles come alive in the 4th Concept.

The application of this Concept, although it seems to fit only world servants can be as effective on a local level. For an example, let's apply this Concept to an Area Assembly.

Each classification of servants: GSR, DCM, Area Committee Chair, or Area Officer has a vote in proportion to the level of responsibility. Simply, as earlier stated there are no

second class servants in AA and consequently, no servant has a more authoritative vote than the next servant at our Assembly. Each classification of servant is encouraged to participate in committee meetings, workshops and breakout sessions to have their voice heard. And each classification of servant has a single vote at our Assembly.

This concept when applied to world servants has the same ideal. The Delegates, Trustees, directors & executive staff of our service corporations (AAWS and the Grapevine) all have a vote at the Conference. Again, no second class of servant, just different classifications.

Another reason for this Concept is to assure no group of servants will have authoritarian power over another. The "Right of Participation" not only gives this right but implies its use by every classification of world servant. Through Participation, each group of servants has their voice &/or vote heard. This Concept satisfies and more importantly assures that our trusted servants are

not only needed but will have equal treatment and a voting representation at our Conference.

Scott W., Area 40 Delegate



**Participation is the
Key to Harmony**

Concept Five

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.

The 5th Concept provides a principle to assure minority opinion & personal grievances are heard. This insistence to hear every voice has served our Fellowship well.

Most of us have sat through elongated, drawn out and what seems as though never ending debates on subjects that seem clear cut. I have found our process of debate and discussion to be one of our greatest resources to obtain a prudent middle ground decision on the matter at hand. Without the left or right, pro or con of a discussion, we very well may make hasty decisions that may not suit our Fellowship well. It is only through the process of an informed group conscience that we as a Fellowship can make our best decisions. That's the ideal we try to work towards.

Our decisions are based on facts and how the facts are presented to us. There are occasions when new information and in particular a different point of view can completely sway a discussion. Our procedures allow for an honest and open debate on all matters, but sometimes we fail as individuals to voice our opinion.

Tradition Nine

Each AA Group needs the least possible organization. Rotating leadership is the best. The small group may elect its secretary, the large group its rotating committee, and the groups of a large Metropolitan area their central or intergroup committee, which often employs a full-time secretary. The Trustees of The Alcoholic Foundation are, in effect, our AA General Service Committee. They are the custodians of our AA Tradition and the re-

Failure to voice our opinion, when it has not been previously stated does a disservice to our Fellowship. Our decisions are only as good as the information we have before us prior to taking a vote.

The Right of Appeal assures that the minority opinion is given opportunity to be heard. With an example of the Area Assembly when a vote is taken, those who voted in the minority (the non prevailing side of the vote) have an opportunity to state their case – the minority opinion. Often times a vote to reconsider is placed before the Assembly due to the compelling and sometimes new information shared at this point. Please, please if you have information that has not been shared during the process of debate; do not wait until the vote has been taken to share your opinion. Please state your information during the debate. Although the minority opinion is valued, often times through sheer exhaustion and a sense or imagined urgency of the voting body the opinion will not be given the full attention of the voting members. The well heard minority opinion during the process of debate will keep our Fellowship from making hasty decisions.

With the example of our world structure, the Right of Appeal encourages the minority to file a report

ceivers of voluntary AA contributions by which we maintain our AA General Service Office in New York. They are authorized by the groups to handle our over-all public relations and they guarantee the integrity of our principal newspaper, "The AA Grapevine." All such representatives are to be guided in the spirit of service, for true leaders in AA are but trusted and experienced servants of the whole. They derive no real authority from their titles;

whenever they feel the majority has made an error. And one step further when the minority feels the Fellowship has made a grievous error – not only file the opinion but take the action of presenting a minority report to the Conference.

In addition should the occasion arise, anyone in our service structure, paid or unpaid has the Right of Appeal for the redress of personal grievances. There should be no fear of reprisal or prejudice. Although this Right of Appeal has rarely been utilized, its mere existence helps quell unjust, authoritarian uses of power. Simply, through the Right of Appeal our service workers have the ability to keep the playing field even for all involved.

The minority opinion has great value in our Fellowship. It also has a great spiritual significance to remind everyone that we all have the same authority, the same voice and we are encouraged to participate in the process of service without the fear of our voice not being heard. Simply, the only mistake we can make is not stating our opinion in fear our voice will not be popular.

Scott W. , Area 40 Delegate

they do not govern. Universal respect is the key to their usefulness.

The least possible organization, that's our universal ideal. No fees, no dues, no rules imposed on anybody, one alcoholic bringing recovery to the next; that's the substance of what we most desire, isn't it?

But how shall this simple ideal best be realized? Often a question,

Tradition Nine Continued....

that.

We have, for example, the kind of AA who is for simplicity. Terrified of anything organized, he tells us that AA is getting too complicated. He thinks money only makes trouble, committees only make dissension, elections only make politics, paid workers only make professionals and that clubs only coddle slipees. Says he, let's get back to coffee and cakes by cozy firesides. If any alcoholics stray our way, let's look after them. But that's enough. Simplicity is our answer.

Quite opposed to such halcyon simplicity is the AA promoter. Left to himself he would "bang the cannon and twang the lyre" at every crossroad of the world. Millions for drunks, great AA hospitals, batteries of paid organizers and publicity experts wielding all the latest paraphernalia of sound and script; such would be our promoters dream. "Yes sir," he would bark "My two year plan calls for one million AA members by 1950!"

For one, I'm glad we have both conservatives and enthusiasts. They teach us much. The conservative

will surely see to it that the AA movement never gets over organized. But the promoter will continue to remind us of our terrific obligation to the newcomer and to those hundreds of thousands of alcoholics still waiting all over the world to hear of AA

We shall, naturally, take the firm and safe middle course. AA has always violently resisted the idea of any general organization. Yet, paradoxically, we have ever stoutly insisted upon organizing certain *special services*; mostly those absolutely necessary to effective and plentiful 12th Step work.

If, for instance, an AA group elects a secretary or rotating committee, if an area forms an intergroup committee, if we set up a Foundation, a General Office or a *Grapevine*, then we are organized for service. The AA book and pamphlets, our meeting places and clubs, our dinners and regional assemblies—these are services too. Nor can we secure good hospital connections, properly sponsor new prospects and obtain good public relations just by chance. People have to be appointed

to look after these things, sometimes paid people. Special services are performed.

But by none of these special services, has our spiritual or social activity, the great current of AA ever been really organized or professionalized. Yet our recovery program has been enormously aided. While important, these service activities, are very small by contrast with our main effort.

As such facts and distinctions become clear, we shall easily lay aside our fears of blighting organization or hazardous wealth. As a movement, we shall remain comfortably poor; for our service expenses are trifling. With such assurances, we shall without doubt, continue to improve and extend our vital lifelines of special service; to better carry out our AA message to others; to make for ourselves a finer greater society, and, God willing, to assure Alcoholics Anonymous a long life and perfect unity.

Bill Wilson, 1948 Editorial

Overheard at Meetings—The Traditions

"*Animosity* is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions. . ."

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

"Our leaders are but twisted servants. . ."

"AA as such ought never be organized, but we may cremate service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve."

"Our *lovers* are but trusted servants; they do not govern,"

THE TRIANGLE

Concept Seven

The Conference 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 purse for its final effectiveness.

At first reading Concept VII appears to be one of those “specialized” Concepts that is loaded with gobble-dygoon written and decipherable only by lawyers who understand “conference charters,” “bylaws,” “legal instruments,” and “world service affairs”. Despite this, it is actually quite important that this Concept be understood by the rank and file members of AA, as it identifies how AA has achieved, and maintains, a relationship of balanced authority between its members and their trusted servants. This is easily accomplished if one takes the time to look past the legal looking language to grasp the true spirit of what is being discussed here.

The easiest way for me to understand this Concept is to remember that AA is a spiritual program that needs a form of tangible or physical organization in order to operate effectively in the real world, just as our personal spirits or energy need our bodies to function as well. It is important that we keep a healthy balance between our spiritual and our physical sides, individually and as a fellowship.

Concepts I and II establish a clear distinction between the ultimate authority in AA, the groups, and the delegated authority, the trusted servants who work in the service structure of AA. While the remainder of the Concepts, in one way or another, speak to the relationship between

these two entities, Concept VII, more than any other establishes a point of balance between these two forms of authority in AA.

As it is written, Concept VII defines the relationship between the General Service Conference (GSC), or elected Delegates of AA, and the General Service Board (GSB), or Trustees of AA, and indicates from where each derives their authority, and how they exercise that authority.

The means by which the GSC exercises its ultimate authority is through the force of tradition and the power of the purse. The spiritual, or ultimate, authority of the fellowship is represented by a loving God as he expresses himself in the collective group conscience of the AA groups, as stated in Tradition II. Therefore, should the AA groups ever decide to alter or end the way they conduct their affairs, there is no person or organization (including the GSB, described below) who can deter them from doing so. Also, should the groups ever decide that their trusted servants have become unruly or untrustworthy, the choice can be made to stop sending 7th Tradition monies to them as a means of ending or restricting this activity. It is very important that this decision not be made without serious discussion among group members and it needs to be fully explained when enacted. Simply not sending money, without explanation, limits the power of the purse, in that the usual recipients have no idea why the money has stopped coming in, and may continue their activity oblivious to any dissatisfaction.

The GSB receives its delegated authority via AA’s need to have a physical representation in order to operate effectively in this world (this involves more than the individual 12th step work, and in fact facilitates 12th step work, by coordinating and

assisting our collective efforts to reach out to the still suffering alcoholic). The need for this physical representation requires having a legal identity in the real world. Just as each District needs a tax ID number in order to establish a checking account these days, AA itself needs a legal identity in order to conduct its business. Based on years of experience it has been proven to us that the best way to represent ourselves as a legal entity is through our Trustees, or the GSB. Along with being our legal liaison to the world, our Trustees are granted certain legal rights and responsibilities. This is the source of their authority, as they represent, in a legal sense, the physical organization of Alcoholics Anonymous.

While Concept VII identifies the balance between the spiritual, or ultimate authority and the practical, or delegated authority at the national level, this principle of balanced authority applies very easily to the Area or District level of the service structure.

The final paragraph of Concept VII in the AA Service Manual reads: “If, therefore, in the years ahead, the Conference will always bear in mind the actual rights, duties, responsibilities and legal status of the General Service Board, and if the Trustees in their deliberations will constantly realize that the Conference is the real seat of ultimate service authority, we may expect that in this way grave issues will always be resolved and harmonious cooperation will be the general rule.”

At the national level, the Conference, or Area Delegates, are the elected representatives of the spiritual aspect, or collective group conscience, of AA groups, while the

Concept Seven Continued...

General Service Board, or Trustees, represent the legal identity, and attend to the practical or delegated responsibilities, of this same collection of groups.

The GSR's are the elected representatives of the spiritual aspect, or collective group conscience, of AA groups at the District level, while the District Committee, the Officers and Committee Chairs, represent the legal identity, and attend to the practical or delegated responsibilities, of this same collection of groups.

Given the similar roles of the GSR and Delegate, as well as those of the General Service Board and the District Committee at their respective levels of service, the above quote out of the AA Service Manual takes on an interesting tone if the District positions are used in the place of their

national counterparts:

"If, therefore, in the years ahead, the GSR's will always bear in mind the actual rights, duties, responsibilities and legal status of the District Committee, and if the District Committee in their deliberations will constantly realize that the GSR's are the real seat of ultimate service authority, we may expect that in this way grave issues will always be resolved and harmonious cooperation will be the general rule."

As with all the Concepts, Concept VII - a beautifully constructed balance of authority - is applicable throughout our service structure. Of course, just as with the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions, the 12 Concepts are only guidelines for how we might function in this program. At any point, and with any of these 36 prin-

ciples, we may say individually or collectively, "You know, I just don't think this applies to me/us." In doing so however, we need to keep in mind, the past results we've attained from utilizing our own better ideas over those laid out for us in the principles of this program.

Concept VII encourages everyone in it's inverted triangle of service to proceed with the mindful understanding that we all have an important part to play in our collective effort to ensure that the hand of Alcoholics Anonymous will always be there whenever the still suffering alcoholic reaches out for help.

Gerry R,
Area Archivist

A Vital Link

It was a Saturday in May, 1935. An ill-starred business venture had brought me to Akron where it immediately collapsed leaving me in a precarious state of sobriety. That afternoon I paced the lobby of Akron's Mayflower Hotel. As I peered at the gathering crowd in the bar, I became desperately frightened of a slip. It was the first severe temptation since my New York friend had laid before me what were to become the basic principles of AA, in November 1934. For the next six months I had felt utterly secure in my sobriety. But now there was no security; I felt alone, helpless. In the months before I had worked hard with other alcoholics. Or, rather, I had preached at them in a somewhat cocksure fashion. In my false assurance I felt I couldn't fall. But this time it was different. Something had to be done at once.

Glancing at a Church Directory at the far end of the lobby, I selected the name of a clergyman at random. Over the phone I told him of my need to work with another alcoholic. Though I'd had no previous success with any of them I suddenly realized how such work had kept me free from desire. The clergyman gave me a list of ten names. Some of these people, he was sure, would refer me a case in need of help. Almost running to my room, I seized the phone. But my enthusiasm soon ebbed. Not a person in the first nine called could, or would, suggest anything to meet my urgency.

One uncalled name still stood at the end of my list--Henrietta S. Somehow I couldn't muster courage to lift the phone. But after one more look into the bar downstairs something said to me, "You'd better." To my astonish-

ment a warm Southern voice floated in over the wire. Declaring herself no alcoholic, Henrietta nonetheless insisted that she understood. Would I come to her home at once?

Because she had been enabled to face and transcend other calamities, she certainly did understand mine. She was to become a vital link to those fantastic events which were presently to gather around the birth and development of our AA society. Of all names the obliging Rector had given me, she was the only one who cared enough. I would here like to record our timeless gratitude.

Bill Wilson, January 1951

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Concept Nine

Here we are within just a few weeks of elections for trusted servants in our next rotation for Area 40. Many of us are reflecting on how we might serve, who might stand for positions within our home groups, districts and area committee. Concept Nine allows us to examine ourselves and think earnestly about providing our beloved fellowship with the best possible leadership at all levels.

“Good service leaders, together with sound and appropriate methods of choosing them, are at all levels indispensable for our future functioning and safety...” The architecture of our service structure is only as effective as the personal performance of the individuals who serve within the structure. In Concept Nine, we read about the handicapping condition of having good leaders trying to function in a weak structure. However, even more perilous is the weak leader trying to function in even the best of structures. Our co-founders and other early members and friends of Alcoholics Anonymous designed a sound and sane structure. The choosing of today’s good leadership is our job. This continuous task of selecting AA’s leaders is one each of us must perform. Some do the job through self-reflection and examination with the willingness make themselves available to serve. Others perform the job by

talking with and encouraging fellow members to serve, offering service in the form of support for those members stepping forward to meet the challenge of good service leadership. My experience in service tells me that both are important and that it is essential that we each take our turn in the two roles.

What is the most valuable general service position we will consider in the next rotation? In our fellowship, with the group member as the most significant person in the structure, the representative voice for those members could arguably be the most crucial trusted servant. The Group Service Representative (G.S.R.) must be elected with great care within our home groups. In this selection we cannot afford to lose sight of the inverted triangle in Alcoholics Anonymous.

Each of us has seen the model where the structure moves down to our delegates and trustees. Yet, it is often human nature to lose sight of the triangle and be blinded by the excitement of travel and serving at the conference level. In doing so, it is easy to believe the most important position we elect is the delegate. Certainly not to diminish the importance of strong leaders serving in the capacity of delegate, I would suggest that if we choose GSRs carefully, support and encourage them in their vital role, provide them with every possible

opportunity to participate in area and regional service functions, and ask for and listen to their reports and sharing, we build a strong field of delegates to serve in the future.

When these carefully selected and consistently supported trusted servants meet at Area Assembly, they use our Third Legacy procedure for naming our Delegate. This individual is not a senator from Montana but rather our contribution to the group conscience of Alcoholics Anonymous as a whole. As an assembly, we ask individuals to stand for this important position after a careful personal inventory of their dedication to this difficult and challenging job. Each one considering this service position need also evaluate his or her competence to serve with strong organizational skills and strength in both oral and written communication. We ask that both candidate and voting member set aside personal ambition, personal agendas, past feuds and current controversies. Depending on this time-tested tool of inventory conducted by those who would put their name on the board at our election assembly, “...Our assemblies need only to continue to act with care and in selfless good spirit.”

Following the discussion of Concept Nine in our service manual, there is an essay entitled

Concept Nine Continued....

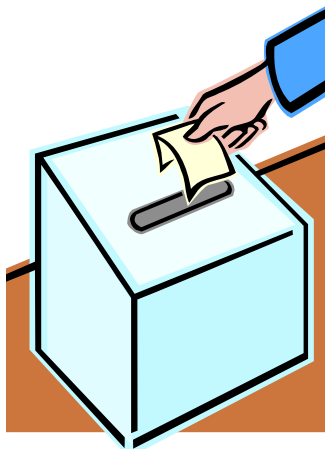
Leadership in AA: Ever A Vital Need. Before we elect our next GSR or DCM, before we come to assembly to choose a delegate, I encourage each of you to read this piece in its entirety. For now, let me close quoting a bit of the essay.

“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... A leader in AA 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... We shall be in continual need of these same attributes—tolerance, responsibility, flexibility, and vision—among our leaders of AA service at all levels. The

principles of leadership will be the same whatever the size of the operation... We thank God that Alcoholics Anonymous is blessed with so much leadership in all of its affairs.”

I look forward to the elections at my home group, in my district and at our next Area Assembly. Thank you for your willingness to serve.

Robbie S., Past Delegate



Concept Ten

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.

Recently, District 61 had a decision to make involving Concepts IV and X—would our District Committee chairs vote (as they had not done for over a decade) on district business matters? At every level, including district, the ultimate authority for AA services resides in the AA

groups themselves. Our groups have delegated some of their ultimate authority to their GSRs, voting at district meetings. Those GSRs exercised their delegated authority, with substantial unanimity, and decided that our committee chairs would not vote at district meetings, in keeping with our recent practice.

After that vote, I saw the exercise of service authority by the newly elected chair of our Attitude of

Homemade Definitions

Humility: something you haven't if you think you have.

Rigorous honesty: the courage to stop conning yourself.

Slip: a slow slide into the driver's seat, followed by an abrupt fall off the wagon. Or: a dry drunk that got caught in a sudden cloudburst.

Anonymity: washing the coffee cups, cleaning the clubrooms, or doing any other AA job without looking to see if anyone is noticing.

Complacency: a self-satisfied old chicken, nesting contentedly on a live grenade.

THE TRIANGLE

Concept Ten Continued...

new chair decided that noise and space problems made the initial plan unworkable. He contacted the two facilities available, got options from them, and came to the first committee meeting after his election with a choice for the committee to make between those options. By a substantial majority (just short of 2/3rds of the votes) the committee chose the date and facility option which the new chair considered less desirable. Our new chair has since gone forward to confirm the date and facility favored by the committee's collective conscience.

At district level, as at every service level, there must be a final responsibility for all of our service affairs and activities. We need to be clear about who has the ultimate authority—the trusted servants who exercise delegated authority have to know where and who the final boss is. For decisions about the Attitude of Gratitude function this November, the groups, speaking through their GSRs at district meetings, are the “final boss.”

But the groups, even through their GSRs at the district, could not effectively direct the committee chair and committee in picking and confirming where and when the function will take place. We very likely would take so much time in that process that we would lose the place and date to some other customer who could commit and sign a contract, while we were still running back and forth giving district the choices so that the GSRs could go to their groups and bring the decision back to district to pass on to the committee chair and committee members. And who would be willing to be a committee chair or committee member, acting only as a “gofer” waiting for directions?

Our committee chair, with no vote

at district meetings, exercised his delegated service authority, in accord with his job description, to revisit and change a tentative committee decision made before he was elected, but not by making the final decision himself. Instead, he did the work to get options that he believed would work better and brought those back to the committee. The committee made an informed choice between the options, which the chair is now implementing.

When district meets, the facilities plan for the November workshops, meetings, panels, dinner and speakers will be presented. Unless the GSRs, exercising their delegated authority from the groups, conclude that the committee chair and his committee have so misused their delegated authority from district, that the plan must be vetoed and a new committee chair found, that plan will be implemented.

Bill said it plainly: “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. . . . 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*.”

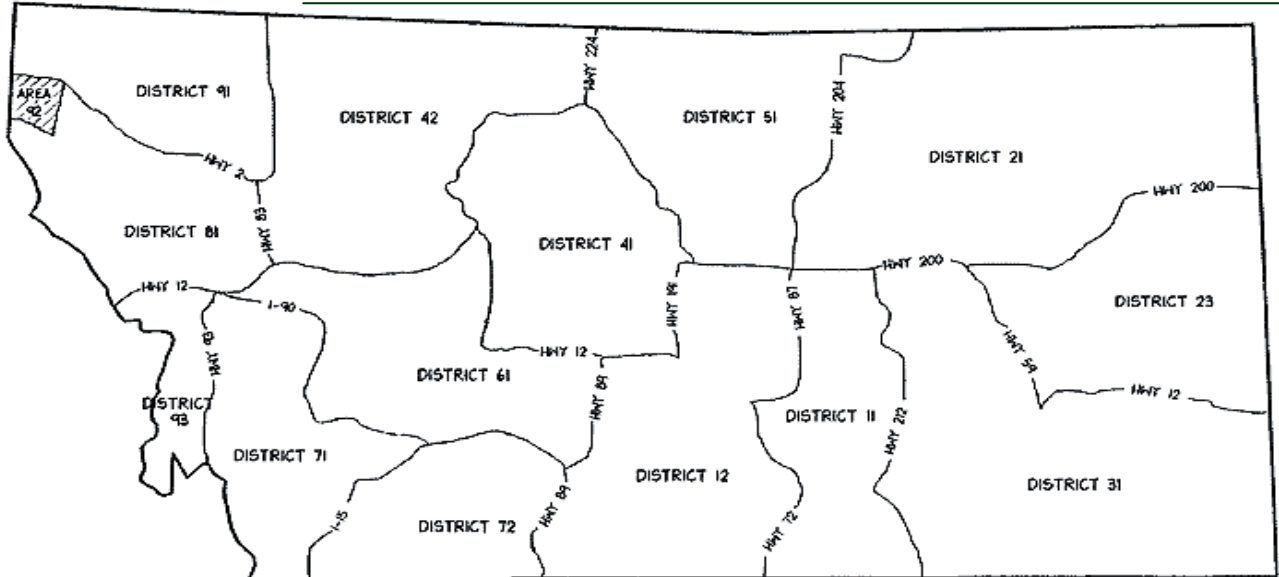
Delegated authority to get something done means exercising the authority to do it. Without the formal participatory authority to vote at district meetings, our committee chairs still exercise the very real authority to do the work described in their job descriptions and to report to district what they have done, what they are

doing and what they propose to do. We match our committee chairs' service responsibility with equal service authority. Our trusted servant job descriptions assure that none can doubt what their respective responsibilities and corresponding authorities actually are. Our GSRs are able and willing to delegate the authority to do the work to the committee chairs. Our committee chairs, by and large, feel able and willing to use their delegated authority freely as trusted servants. We have found that letting our committee chairs do their work without requiring district approval and direction except when they ask for it provides, for *each of their operational responsibilities a corresponding authority* to discharge that duty.

Bill also said that “unless there exists some definite means of interpreting and deciding doubtful situations—then personal clashes, confusion, and ineffectiveness will be inevitable.” When District 61 resolved, for the moment, the question of whether our committee chairs would vote at District meetings, we did so without any of the participants feeling the need to question the integrity, intelligence, heritage or hygiene of those who disagreed. We disagreed about what was best for AA, but we respect one another's views and continue after that decision to do the work we all share—to assure as best we can that the hand of AA will always be there when anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help.

Terry S., DCM District 61

THE TRIANGLE



District 11—Billings

District 12—Laurel

District 21—Wolf Point/Glasgow

District 23—Glendive

District 31—Miles City

District 41—Great Falls

District 42—Cut Bank/
Choteau/ Shelby

District 51—Havre

District 61—Helena

District 71—Butte

District 72—Bozeman

District 81—Missoula

District 91—Kalispell/
Whitefish/ Eureka

District 93—Bitterroot Valley

Triangle Tidbits

- Thanks to all of you who submitted articles for this issue of the Triangle. The next Triangle issue will be dedicated to the Fall Election Assembly. If you would like to share your experience with us, please do so by submitting an article.
- The next issue will come out in late August. Deadline for submission of articles is August 15. Send to the address below.
- I'm still looking for "You might be an alcoholic if..." and "Overheard at Meetings" to use. Please send one in if you have one.
- If you are having an event and would like it listed, please provide the information to the address below.
- Check your subscription date located on the mailing label. If your subscription has expired, please mail \$10 to the Triangle at the address below. Checks should be payable to Area 40. If your group cannot afford the subscription, you will continue to receive a copy.
- The mailing list is continually being updated. If your group is not receiving the Triangle, please send the correct mailing address to the address below.
- The Triangle's address is 4522 Shasta Lane, Billings, MT 59101 or Triangle@aa-montana.org.

Volume 14, Issue 5

Calendar of Events

- GREAT FALLS—Delegate’s Report—July 15- Brian M. 452-2568
- SHELBY- Delegate’s Report—July 16- Mike M. 873-5415
- PAINTED LAKES—Delegate’s Report—July 23- Mary H. 777-4226
- VALIER- Fun in Recovery Roundup- July 28-30- Ed M. 270-3349
- GLENDIVE—Lower Yellowstone**—August 19—Rich 377-9975
- MILK RIVER, ALBERTA—Corn Roast—August 25-27—Bud W. 424-2640
- BILLINGS—Fall Roundup—September 8-10—Don B. 656-0727
- LEWISTOWN—Area 40 Fall Election Assembly—September 16-17— Andrew W. 546-2828
- HAVRE- Mini Roundup- October 6-8- Craig E. 945-3889
- KALISPELL—Fall Refresher—October 14-15—Paul W. 892-0278
- SAN ANTONIO, TX—AA’s 75th Birthday Party—July 1-4, 2010

**Includes a Delegate’s report

If you would like your event listed here, please email the editor at Triangle@aa-montana.org or send it to 4522 Shasta Lane, Billings, MT 59101

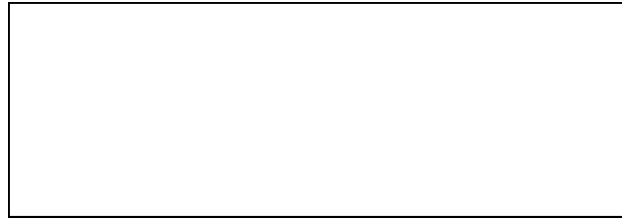
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