



The TWELVE TRADITIONS *Illustrated*

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The Twelve Traditions

A Distillation of A.A. Experience



As newcomers, many of us say to ourselves, “Let the group officers worry about the Traditions. I’m just an average member. They’re rules for running groups, aren’t they? And everybody tells me, ‘There are no rules in A.A.’!” Then we look closer — and find that the Traditions are *not* rules — and they are *not* just for officers. They have deep meaning

for each one of us, as the Twelve Steps do.

Like the Steps, the Traditions were not figured out in advance, as courses of action against future problems. The action came first. Pioneer A.A. groups, with nothing to go on except the trial-and-error-and-try-again method, soon discovered: “Well, that way didn’t work. But the other one did. And *this* one works even better!”

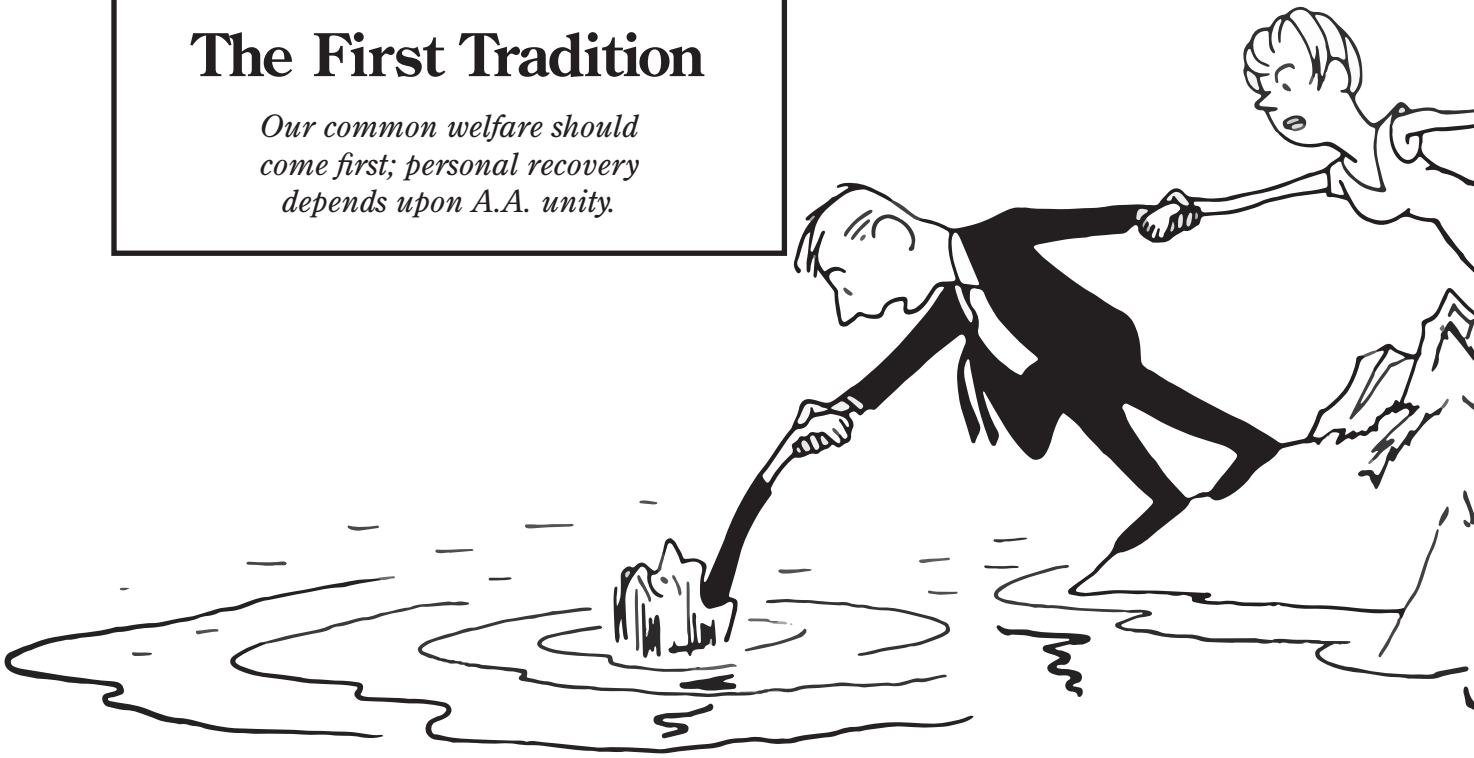
Both successes and failures were reported in letters to A.A. headquarters (eventually to become the General Service Office). In went these shared experiences of A.A.’s first 10 years, and out came the Twelve Traditions. In 1946, then in the “long form,” they were published in the A.A. Grapevine. By 1950, they had been condensed to their present form and were adopted by A.A.’s First International Convention.

“Our Traditions are a guide to better ways of working and living,” co-founder Bill W. said. “And they are to group survival what A.A.’s Twelve Steps are to each member’s sobriety and peace of mind.... Most individuals cannot recover unless there is a group. The group must survive or the individual will not.”...



The First Tradition

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



Our individual sobriety depends on the group.
The group depends on us. We soon learn
that unless we curb our individual
desires and ambitions, we can
damage the group.





Our brother the noisy drunk affords the simplest illustration of this Tradition. If he insists on disrupting the meeting, we “invite” him to leave, and we bring him back when he’s in better shape to hear the message. We are putting the “common welfare” first. But it is in *his* welfare, too; if he’s ever going to get sober, the group must go on functioning, ready for him.

Yet he is only one rare aspect of the problem. When we do get sober in A.A., we shed a few small bits of the Big Ego: We admit, “I can’t handle alcohol, and I can’t stay away from it on my own.” Fine so far! Then we find there is plenty of that Ego still with us. It may lead us to take other members’ inventories and to gossip about their supposed shortcomings. It may lure us into hogging the floor at every discussion meeting.

Oh well, it’s a selfish program, isn’t it? After all the miseries of active alcoholism, why shouldn’t we indulge ourselves a little? We all know one good reason why we shouldn’t: Self-indulgence of this kind is an immediate personal danger; it threatens the individual’s own sobriety. More than that, it threatens the very basis of our sobriety — the unity of the A.A. group. For a self-righteous gossip *can* damage the mutual trust that is vital to every group. And a compulsive talker *can* ruin the effectiveness of a discussion meeting — “I’ve stopped going to that group. Nobody but Joe can get a word in edgewise.”

When A.A. was very young, the first members clearly saw the preservation of its unity as a life-or-death matter for themselves and for the alcoholics still unrecovered. The First Tradition states this aim, and it is the common aim of all Twelve Traditions. When A.A. reached the age of 35, the aim was restated in the theme of the 1970 International Convention:

This we owe to A.A.’s future:
To place our common welfare first;
To keep our Fellowship united.
For on A.A. unity depend our lives,
And the lives of those to come.

Each of the other eleven Traditions explains one specific way to protect the unity of the Fellowship and the A.A. group. Those early members quickly recognized power-drivers as potential group-wreckers. And they’re still around — the members who are always sure that they’re always right — the members who are happily ready to assume all the burdens of leadership and grimly unwilling to share them, let alone give them up. But a group does need officers. How can we cope with this dilemma? Tradition Two provides the answer. ...

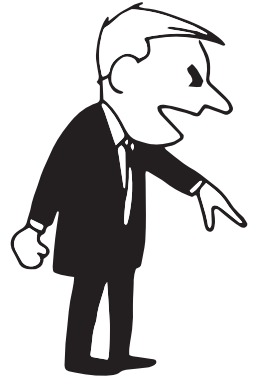
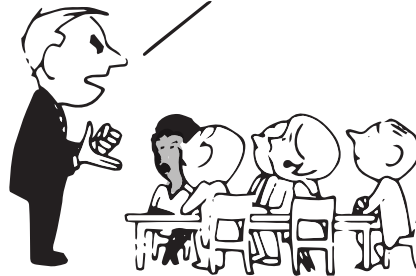
The Second Tradition

*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.*

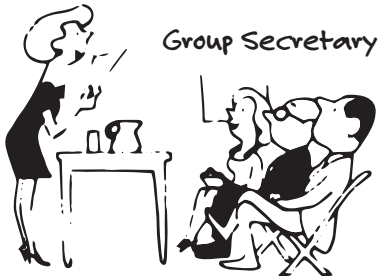
"Now that I've been
elected Secretary, I'll
show this group
some real leadership!"



"There's only one way
to do it and I'll tell you
what it is. . ."



Members of A.A. may be chosen to serve in many ways. . .



Group Secretary

Intergroup
Representative



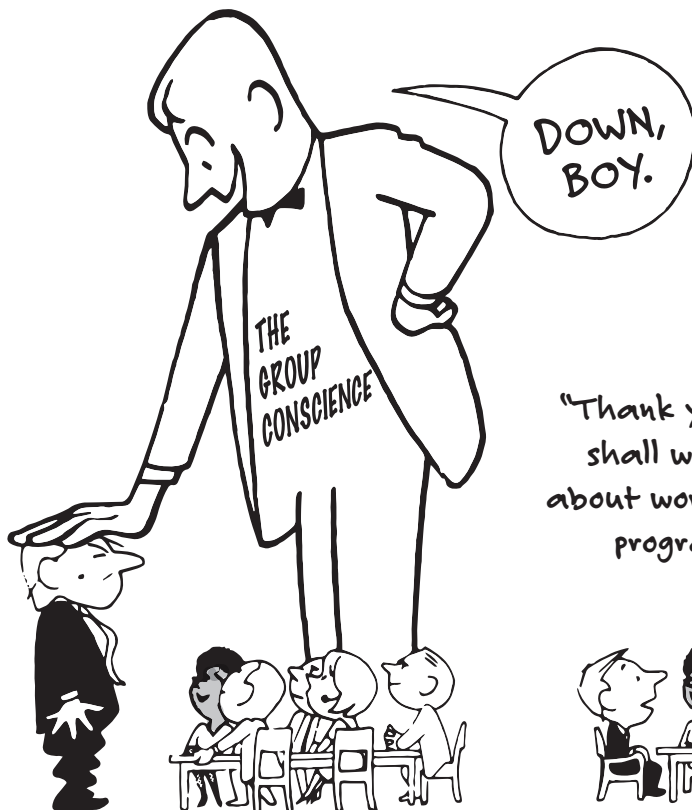
General Service
Representative



A.A. is both a democracy and, in Bill W.'s words, "a benign anarchy." A group elects its own officers — who have no power to *order* anybody to do anything. In most groups, most of the slate rotates out of office at the end of six months, and new officers are elected.

If a group wants to be a part of the whole A.A. service structure, it elects a GSR (general service representative, with a two-year term). GSRs elect area committee members and then join them in electing a delegate from their area to the annual General Service Conference. The Conference is about the closest approximation of a government that A.A. has; it produces opinions on important matters of policy; it approves the choice of some trustee nominees for the General Service Board and directly elects others. But neither the Conference

"... furthermore, we'll
take our money and
establish a fund...
I'll manage it..."



"Thank you. Now
shall we talk
about working the
program?"

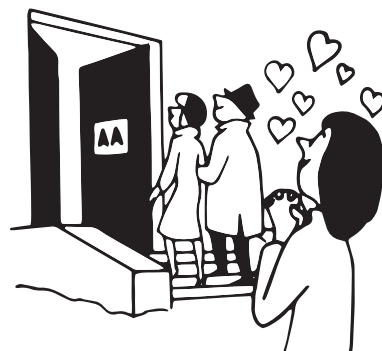


But they must
always remember
that they serve
for the good of
all, without authority over any.



nor the board can give orders to any group or member.

Then who's in charge around here? A.A. is a spiritual movement, and so the "ultimate authority" is the spiritual concept of the "group conscience." Its voice is heard when a well-informed group gathers to arrive at a decision. The result rests on more than arithmetic, a "yes" and "no" count. Minority ideas get thoughtful attention. What about that annoying character who's always sure she's right. If she's wrong, then she will — if she remembers the First Tradition as well as the Second — go along with the decision of the group conscience. Does this notion seem too cloudy? Let's think back to our first meetings. The presence we newcomers felt in those rooms was the same as the group conscience. And it was real — welcoming us in, setting up no barriers of rules....



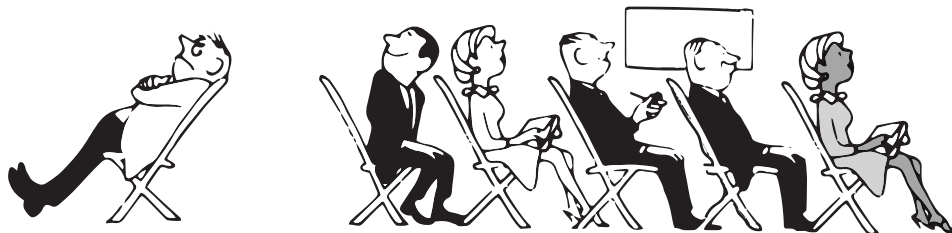
The Third Tradition

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



Isn't every organization entitled to have rules for membership? Why did A.A. decide to forgo this privilege, to be "inclusive...never exclusive"? That's easy. Early members tried it the other way, and it just didn't work. As the Fellowship was nearing its ten-year mark, the office that served as headquarters "asked the groups to list their membership rules and send them in," Bill W. recalled. "If all of these edicts had been in force everywhere at once, it would have been practically impossible for any alcoholic to have ever joined A.A. About nine-tenths of our oldest and best members could never have got by!" So the rule books went out the window and were replaced by one uncomplicated sentence: Tradition Three.

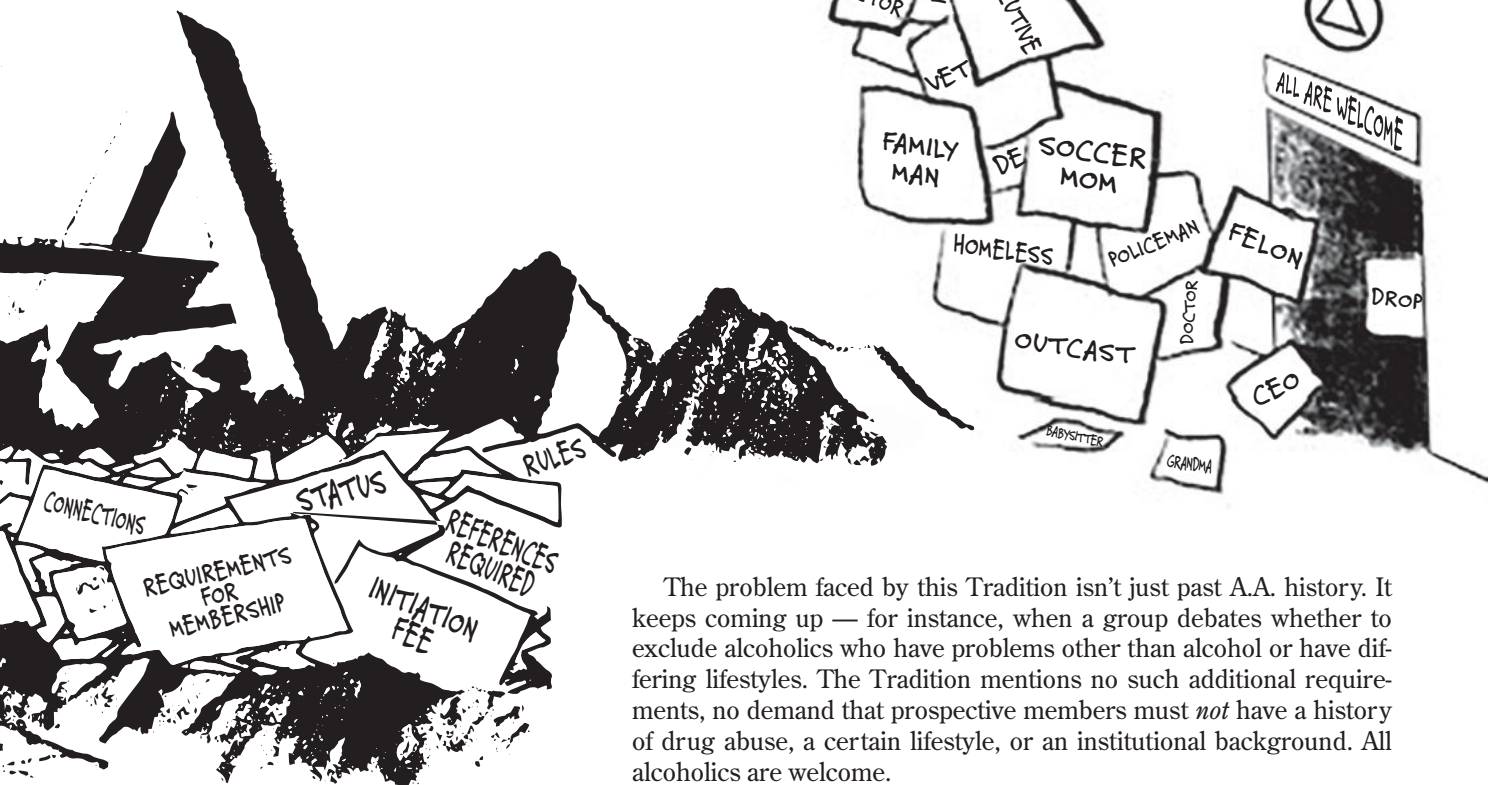
But, somebody may ask, isn't this Tradition itself a rule? It does state *one* requirement for membership. Let's read it again, and ask another question: *Who* determines whether or not newcomers qualify, whether they do want to stop drinking? Obviously, nobody except the newcomers themselves; everybody else simply has to take their word for it. In fact, they don't even have to say it aloud. And that's fortunate for many of us who arrived at A.A. with only a half-hearted desire to stay sober. We are alive because the A.A. road stayed open to us.



We've thrown away
all membership rules and
regulations that might keep you
out. We want you to have the
same chance for sobriety
that we have had.

"We aren't a bit afraid
you'll harm us, never
mind how twisted or
violent you may be."

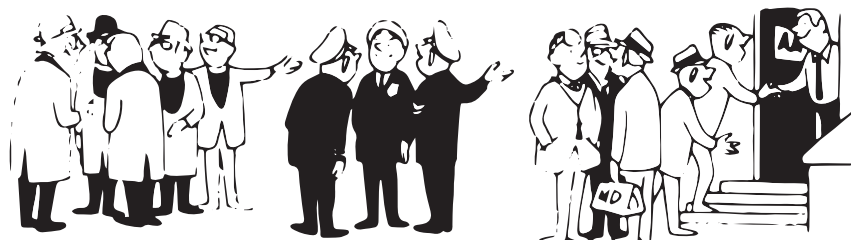
from Twelve Steps
and Twelve Traditions



The problem faced by this Tradition isn't just past A.A. history. It keeps coming up — for instance, when a group debates whether to exclude alcoholics who have problems other than alcohol or have differing lifestyles. The Tradition mentions no such additional requirements, no demand that prospective members must *not* have a history of drug abuse, a certain lifestyle, or an institutional background. All alcoholics are welcome.

What about the group that seems to impose extra requirements, beyond “a desire to stop drinking”? This might be a “special interest” group or collection of groups in which, for example, each member must be a physician — or a young person, a man, a woman, a priest, or a law-enforcement officer. By their own account, those attending special interest groups consider themselves A.A. members *first*. They attend general-membership meetings as well as those that fill their other individual needs, and they remain devoted to A.A.’s primary purpose.

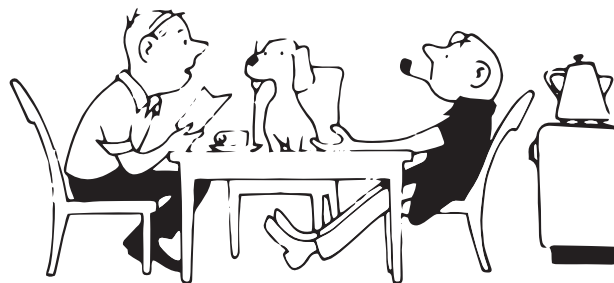
These “special interest” groups offer only one instance of the diverse and inclusive membership within our Fellowship. Our Traditions allow unparalleled freedom, not only to every A.A. member, but to every A.A. group.



The Fourth Tradition

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

There are all kinds of groups. . .
Little groups. . .



But wherever two or more
alcoholics are gathered
together to
practice A.A.
principles, it is
an A.A. group if
they say it is.



And you
are a member
if you say
you are!



A member who does any amount of traveling finds the A.A. spirit much the same everywhere. But apart from this inward kinship, there are vast differences among groups. Here, the traveler finds three members discussing the Steps in somebody's living room; there, 300 listening to speakers in a church auditorium. In one part of the U.S., respectful silence greets the speaker who begins, "My name is Ann, and I am an alcoholic." In another, everybody happily shouts, "Hi, Ann!" And in many other places, she may introduce herself with her full name — at a one-hour meeting or a 90-minute meeting. In each neighborhood in every part of the world reached by A.A., the local group is free to work out its own customs.

As always, freedom brings responsibility. Because each group is autonomous, it's up to each group to avoid any action that might harm A.A. And there *have* been such actions — or this Tradition would be unnecessary. "Implicit throughout A.A.'s Traditions," Bill W. wrote, "is the confession that our Fellowship has its sins. We admit that we have character defects as a society and these defects threatens us continually."

Blown up to multiple size, the Big Ego may inspire one group to take over all the public information work for its area, without consulting any of the other local groups. Once the group has decided, "We have all the answers," the lid's off. The group may then decide that, let's say, the Eleventh Tradition is an outdated technicality: "This is a competitive age! We're going to come right out and give A.A. some good, vigorous promoting!" To the general public, this one conspicuous group is A.A. Its antics reflect, not only on the ignored neighboring groups, but on the entire Fellowship.

In a way, the Fourth Tradition is like the Fourth Step: It suggests that the A.A. group should take honest inventory of itself, asking about each of its independently planned actions, "Would this break any Tradition?" Like the individual member who chooses to make the Steps his or her guide toward happy sobriety, the wise group recognizes that the Traditions are not hindering technicalities — they are proved guides toward the chief objective of all A.A. groups....

and big groups...



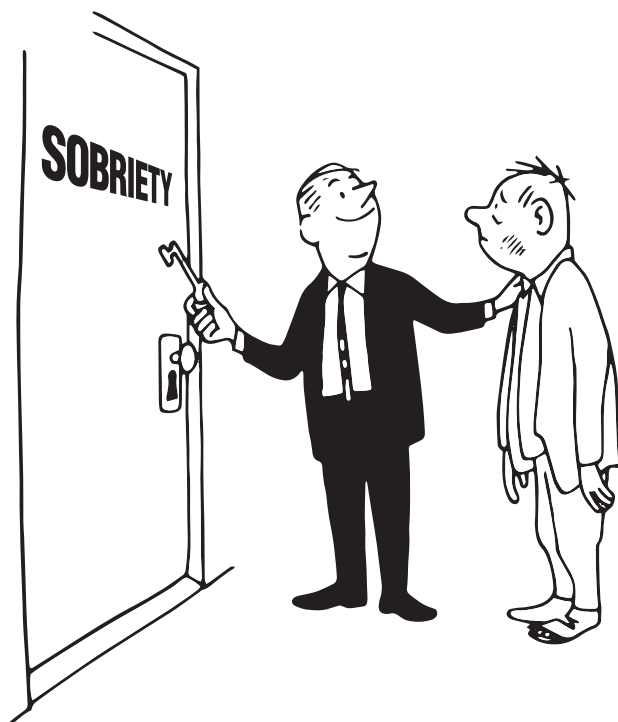
and off-beat groups...



The Fifth Tradition

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

No matter how different our own



I am responsible.

**When anyone, anywhere,
reaches out for help, I want
the hand of A.A. always to be there**

And for that: I am responsible.

personal concerns, we are all bound together by one common **RESPONSIBILITY**. . .

to carry the message
to the suffering alcoholic.



Every newcomer learns (some of us the hard way) that the business of staying sober must have top priority. If we fail at that, we can't succeed at anything else. The Fifth Tradition tells us that groups should remember *their* "one primary purpose."

Often, unthinking enthusiasm puts a group off the main track. One, for instance, offered an "expanded A.A. program" that included helping newcomers to find jobs. Tradition Five doesn't frown on the individual A.A. who tells another about a good opening. But when the group turns itself into an employment agency, newcomers may get confused about *their* primary purpose. A.A.'s function is to help them get sober — then they can find work for themselves.

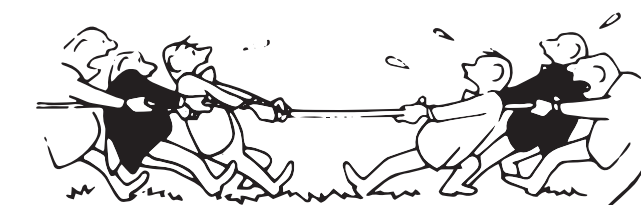
Using discretion, a member may lend a few dollars needed for a meal or a hotel room, or may even invite a broke alcoholic to be a temporary houseguest. But the A.A. group as a whole is not a friendly finance company, nor a welfare department, nor a housing bureau.

Even when acting on their own, as individual members, A.A. lay people certainly shouldn't award themselves honorary medical degrees and hand out diagnoses and prescriptions and amateur analysis of other people's neuroses. Exactly because this personal failing is so common, the A.A. group in all its dealings should be extra careful to emphasize that it is not invading the medical field. Through the personal experiences of its members, it is qualified to carry only one message: how an alcoholic can recover in A.A. That's all.

Yet one group recently felt itself equipped to set up an "*alcoholism* information center." The temptation is understandable; it was even stronger at the time this Tradition was written, because public ignorance about alcoholism as an illness was more widespread than it is now. Since then, other agencies have sprung up to assume the task of educating the general public on alcoholism. That is not A.A.'s purpose, but these agencies also are trying to help the active alcoholic. They are our friends — and Tradition Six marks the boundaries of the relationship....

The Sixth Tradition

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



We found that there are all kinds
of goals, motives and
ambitions. . .

...and the good
name of A.A. could be smeared!



The “related facility” may be an outside group combating alcoholism — or an enterprise that A.A.’s want to start. It was the latter that most often confronted the young Fellowship. Outside agencies were pretty scarce in those days, and some members thought A.A. should cover the whole alcoholism field. Led by a “super-promoter” (as the “Twelve and Twelve” describes him), one group built an all-purpose center, including a section for drying-out treatment. Picture any group tackling such a project! Arguments over cost, architecture, staff, fees, medication, and rules might even make the local paper. (And pity the poor newcomer straying into the group — “We’ll get around to you in a minute.”)

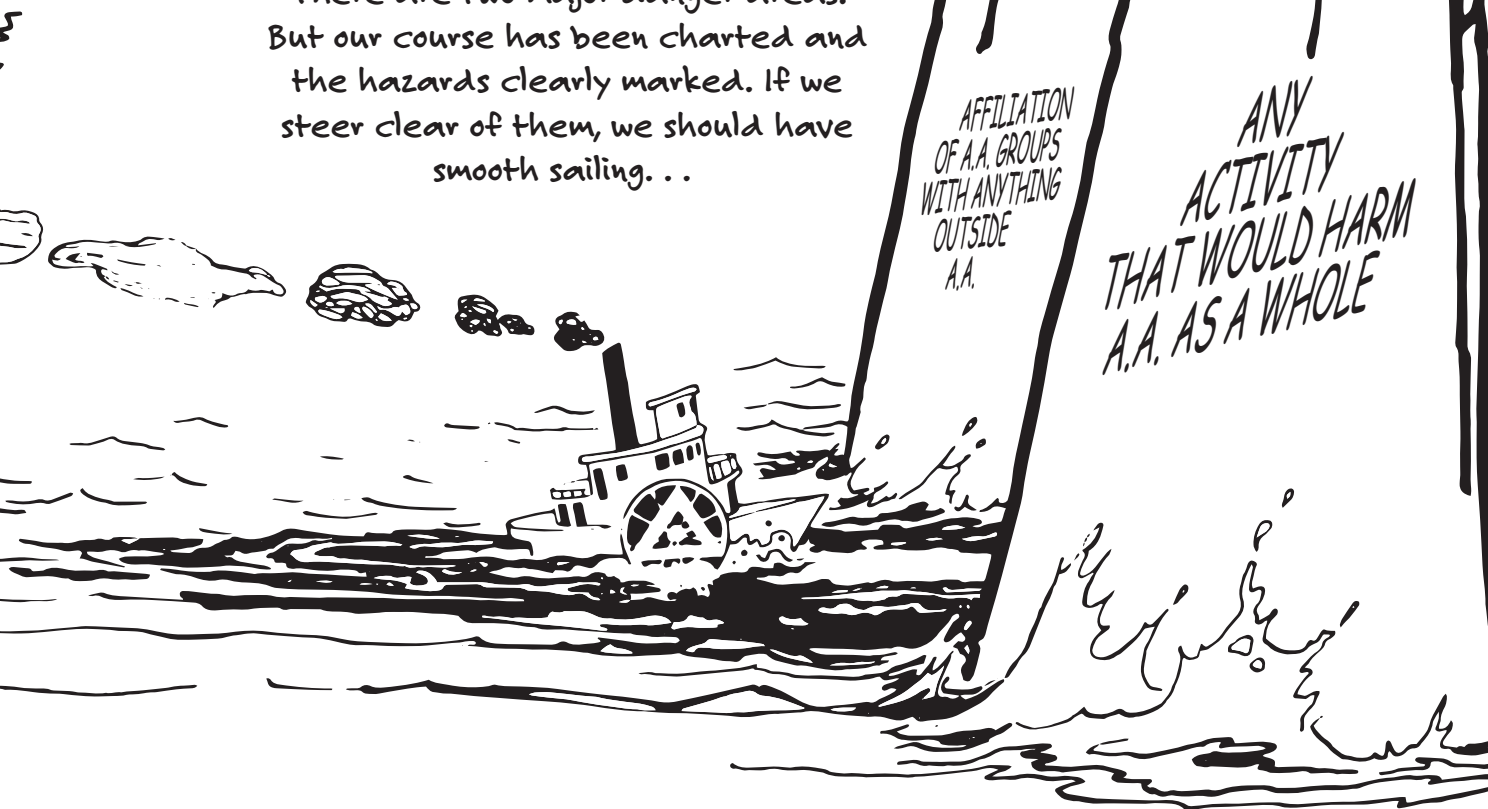
Though that ambitious center failed, some individual members have since founded successful clubhouses, rest farms, halfway houses, etc. The enterprises are run by these A.A.’s and patronized by other members or prospective members. But money and property *are* involved. Therefore, it has proved wise to keep the operation of the facility completely separate from that of any A.A. group, and to keep “A.A.” or terms like “Twelfth Step” out of the name.

Toward outside agencies dealing with alcoholism, the A.A. policy is “cooperation but not affiliation.” A group cooperates, for example, by welcoming referrals from clinics or by sponsoring A.A. groups in institutions. But in one area, money for a rehab was solicited *at an A.A. meeting* — implying affiliation. In another, A.A. was listed among beneficiaries of a United Fund drive....



A.A. members employed by outside agencies “wear two hats” — but Tradition Six cautions any such members against wearing both at once! On the job, they may be alcoholism counselors; they are *not* “A.A. counselors.” At meetings they’re just A.A.s, not alcoholism experts.

There are two major danger areas.
But our course has been charted and
the hazards clearly marked. If we
steer clear of them, we should have
smooth sailing. . .



The Seventh Tradition

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

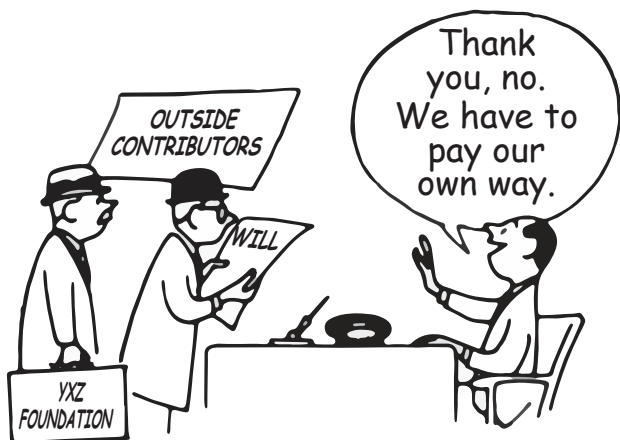
"Passing the basket" at meetings is our way of meeting our responsibility for the work of A.A. Our own contributions support the group, the General Service Office, and all A.A. activities



As active alcoholics we were always looking for a handout — in one way or another. . .



Part of our personal recovery came in making ourselves into responsible human beings



Experience has shown us, also, that A.A. as a whole needs to be self-supporting and independent

We do have to be practical. A group can hardly hold its regular meetings on a street corner, and an empty basket won't fill a coffee urn. As soon as we become active in a group, we learn how many expenses are involved in making its meetings effective. Then our horizons broaden. What about that intergroup or central office so many of us called to ask for help? Phone companies don't give free service. Beyond our own locality, we learn about the A.A. General Service Office and the work it does for groups everywhere. A.A. activity is self-supporting at all levels, and in every case the responsibility comes right back to us, the individual members, for we *are* A.A.

Perhaps, especially when we are very new, our contributions clink, rather than rustle. The first members were in the same fix, and it seemed to them that A.A. would need more outside help than the modest gifts then coming in.

The lure of money has led many astray.
It could happen to us.



Their plans required grand-scale philanthropy. (Tradition Six hadn't evolved yet; Bill W. recalled a scheme for "a chain of hospitals.") But John D. Rockefeller Jr., an early friend said, "I am afraid that money will spoil this thing." A few A.A.'s had already reached the same conclusion; gradually, this minority became a majority as experience showed that members themselves *could* provide enough to finance A.A.'s proper aim.

In its simplest application, Tradition Seven is easily understood; when we hear about a new A.A. group being started with funds from a Federal antipoverty program, our quick reaction is "Somebody goofed!" But then we come to "borderline" cases: Groups put on a raffle for the benefit of their central office and invite the public to buy tickets; a hometown paper runs an ad for an A.A. dance and show. Both projects would be routine

for any other society. For us, both mean that we've got the hand out again, asking nonmembers for money.

Often, of course, we don't have to ask. A.A. is now high on the worthy-cause list; GSO and groups politely turn down many unsolicited gifts and bequests. In Tradition Seven, there's a note of realism: Handsome gifts may have strings attached. We even put a limit of \$12,500 on the amount *members* may leave to A.A. in their wills and a limit of \$7,500 that they may contribute annually while living, so that none of us can buy influence in A.A., no matter how rich we are.

Money may pose a different problem if a group treasury grows too fat, beyond a prudent reserve. Squabbling over uses for the spare cash, groups have lost their unity and strayed from their purpose. But there's one simple solution that strengthens our unity and advances our purpose: Give the excess to A.A. activities and services....

The Eighth Tradition

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



Spiritual as it is, A.A. remains very much of this world. The Eighth Tradition, like the Seventh, focuses on a vulgar five-letter word that isn't actually mentioned in either: money. Many of us have had to explain to some cynical prospect, "No, I'm not a social worker. I don't get paid for talking with you. I'm doing it because it's the best way to stay sober myself."

This does not mean, of course, that the idea of turning professional has never entered any A.A.'s mind. In the lean years, Bill W. did think of becoming a lay therapist to earn money through his experience in helping alcoholics. But, with a strong nudge from the group conscience, he soon realized that he could never hang out a shingle reading "Bill W., A.A. Therapist, \$10 an Hour"! It became clear to the early members that no A.A. should ever ask or accept payment for "carrying this message to somebody else, person to person and face to face."



But new questions arose as membership grew and the word of hope spread, sending thousands of alcoholics in search of A.A. The first intergroups or central offices were usually manned by A.A. volunteers; now, most such offices are so busy that full-time employees are needed as well. Naturally, A.A.'s are better suited to such jobs than are nonmembers — but are these A.A.'s then being paid for doing Twelfth Step work? No. In the office, they are just paving the way for this work. Arranging to get a sick drunk into a hospital, telling a shaky newcomer where the nearest meeting is tonight, they are helping to make it possible for that alcoholic to hear the message “person to person and face to face.”

A similar development has taken place at the Fellowship's “headquarters.” Once a tiny office for one co-founder (Bill) and one secretary, it has grown into the present General Service Office, fully staffed, with a big mailroom keeping the lines of communication open throughout A.A. worldwide. The employees, both A.A. and nonalcoholic, are paid on a scale comparable to that in profit-making enterprises, so that the office force can function depend-

ably. And the A.A. staff members are in exactly the same position as the A.A. intergroup employees. Suppose you drop in at GSO one day when you're in New York. Staff members who pause to chat with you may have been working on next year's Conference or corresponding with a group in your home area, helping it to carry the message more effectively. For that, they are paid biweekly checks. But you may also hear them mention to other staff members plans for taking a newcomer to a meeting in the evening or for giving an A.A. talk to a neighborhood group the next week. For that, they are paid only with their own continuing sobriety.

In these office jobs and in other assignments, members are actually paid for their business and professional skills. Working at a GSO desk, on Conference-approved books and pamphlets, or on the Grapevine, these A.A.'s use their abilities as correspondents, managers, writers, editors, artists, proofreaders — as well as their understanding of A.A. from the inside. On occasion, volunteers have given their time and talent to all these services, and their contributions are deeply appreciated. But what if the Fellowship decided that all such assignments should be handled *only* by unpaid volunteers? In present-day A.A., there's too great a volume of work to be done in spare hours here and there, and only the rich or the retired could afford to work full-time as volunteers. If we tried to find in this limited group people qualified for particular tasks, obviously the field would be narrowed down — too often, down to nobody at all.



There would be another problem in using volunteers alone: It seems ungrateful — or, at least, it's socially awkward — to criticize or reject a job done for free. But paid jobs for A.A. get quite a going-over! Take our literature, for instance (like this pamphlet). Whatever the subject, we want to be sure that each piece expresses as clearly as possible the view of the group conscience of A.A. as a whole. So any new project must first be approved by the Conference. Once it is in process, the Literature Committee of the General Service Board keeps a careful eye on it at every stage. Frequently, drastic changes are required. The “finished” product then must be okayed both by that committee and by the Conference Literature Committee, and further revisions are often —

“Now wait a minute!” some old-timer may interrupt. “What's going on here? Didn't Dr. Bob say, ‘Let's keep it simple?’”...

The Ninth Tradition

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



The words “Let’s keep it simple” were the last Bill W. heard from his fellow founder of A.A., shortly before Dr. Bob’s death in 1950. Aware that “it” means our *recovery* program, Bill later wrote, “We need to distinguish sharply between spiritual simplicity and functional simplicity. ...When we get into questions of action by groups, by areas, and by A.A. as a whole, we find that we must to some extent *organize* to carry the message — or else face chaos. And chaos is not simplicity.”

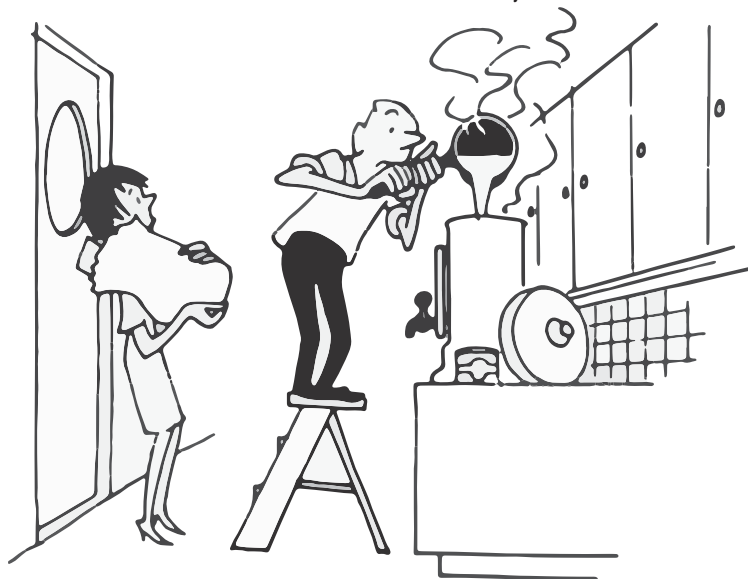
When Tradition Nine speaks of “A.A. as such,” it goes to the heart of the A.A. experience, to the “spiritual simplicity” of one alcoholic’s saying, silently perhaps, “Help!” and another alcoholic’s answering, “I know how you feel. We’re here to help you.” Such a relationship couldn’t be organized. Or could it?

A nonmember familiar with modern business procedures might examine the A.A. practice of sponsorship and see it as a haphazard operation. How about computerizing it? Then an A.A. behind an intergroup desk might say, “So you want help? First, you need the right sponsor. We have personality profiles of all our sponsors fed into our computer. We’ll match you up to the best one for you if you’ll just fill out this questionnaire. ...Where are you going? Come back!” *That* would be an attempt to organize “A.A. as such.” (Please — nobody get any ideas!)

But in “action by groups,” we find that we do need some degree of organization. If everybody thinks somebody else is going to make the coffee, what’s the result? No coffee! To avoid such a disaster, one or more members agree

WE DO SET UP COMMITTEES AND BOARDS . . .

But whether they make coffee. . . or help organize





to be responsible for preparing meeting refreshments. All the way from coffee-brewers to trustees on the General Service Board, those who take part in A.A. service work are assuming responsibility — *not* taking on authority. (Here, Traditions Two and Nine interlock.) Group officers are responsible to the members of the group; intergroup committees, to the groups in one locality; institutions committees, to A.A. groups in treatment facilities and correctional facilities; area committees, to all groups in their areas; Conference delegates and committees, to all groups in the U.S. and Canada; the General Service Office and Board and the board's committees, to all groups and members everywhere.

In an average business corporation, the board has final power to determine company plans and policy. Our board of trustees serves in a custodial capacity; trustees vote at the Conference — but as individuals, with one vote apiece. In industry, branch offices jump when the home office speaks. Our GSO is just a clearinghouse of A.A. information, offering *suggestions* based on experiences reported to it by groups.

And yet, with so small a degree of organization, A.A. miraculously does work! One reason may be that Tradition Five applies to each A.A. committee and board as directly as it does to each A.A. group. By cleaving to this “one primary purpose” in all its activities, the Fellowship retains “spiritual simplicity.” To diffuse that purpose, to embroil A.A. in issues apart from its true concern, would create dangerous complications....

groups in deepest Africa. . . THEY ONLY SERVE



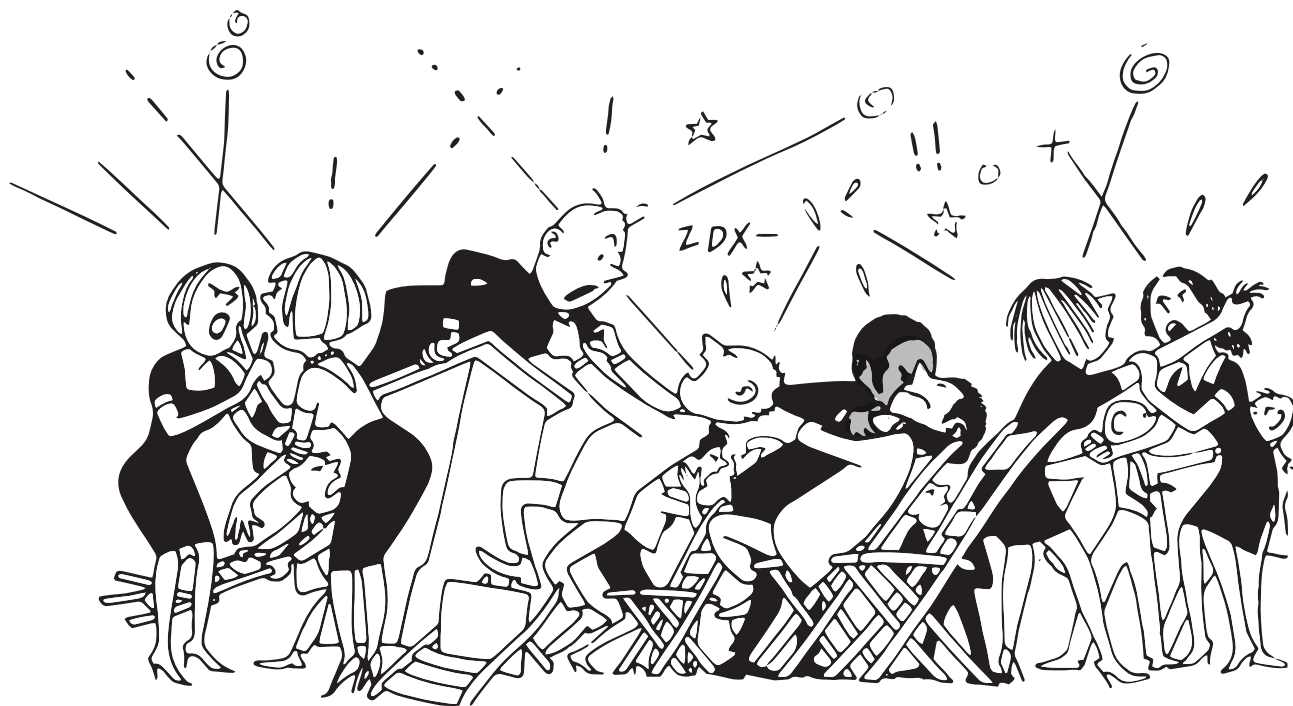
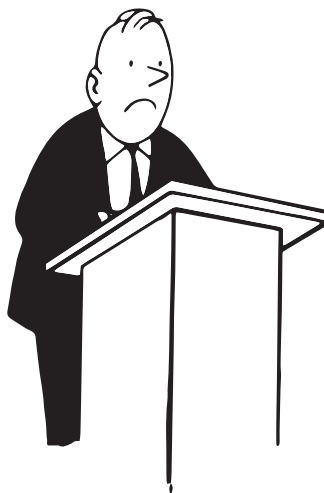
The Tenth Tradition

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

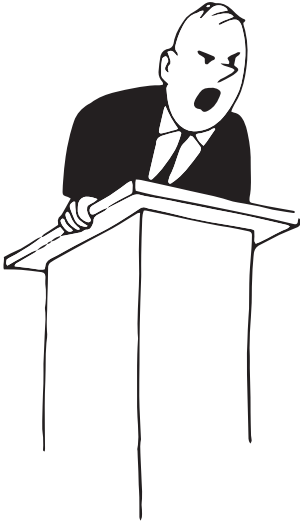
And so, thanks to A.A.
I have maintained a
happy sobriety for
ten years. I thank you.



But before I leave...



...I know I
speak for all of A.A.
when I protest the current
legislation before the
Congress! I refer to
that infamous piece
of rubbish known
as House Bill
No. X7-11-121!



...It must not pass!
And to that end I am
sending a telegraph
in the name of A.A.
and our group. . .



OH
YEAH?

SEZ
WHO?



How
could anyone
get sober or
stay sober in an
out-fit like
that?



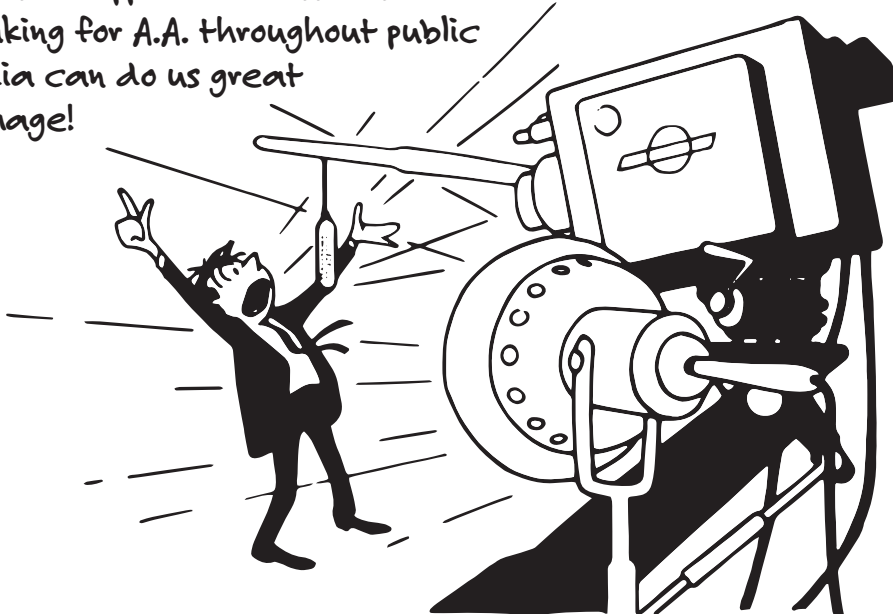
The Eleventh Tradition

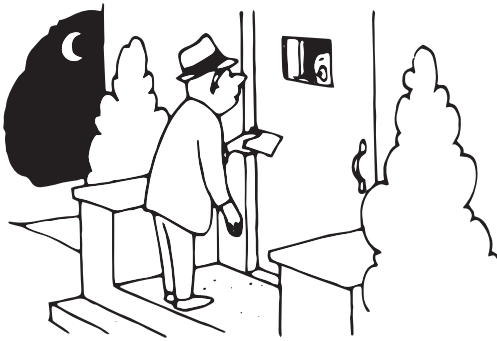
Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films.

Ours is not a secret society...
we carry the message
anywhere we can—



But we must ever be aware
that self-appointed messiahs
speaking for A.A. throughout public
media can do us great
damage!





Alcoholics who have recovered through our program are themselves the strongest attraction that A.A. has. When people are asked what led them to seek A.A. help, the answer given most often is: "An A.A. member." Their chances would have been slim if all of us had remained completely in hiding. But many of us have chosen to tell our friends, neighbors, employers, co-workers, doctors, or spiritual advisers that we are in A.A. — and when we do so, we are *not* breaking our anonymity in the meaning of this Tradition.

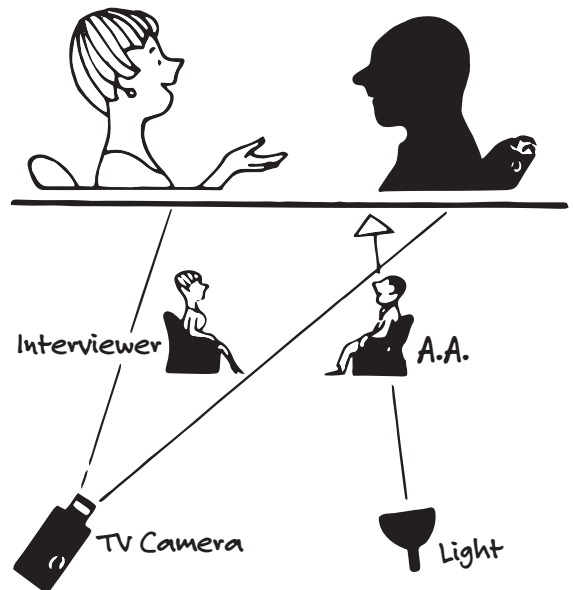
Suppose a sick alcoholic never has the good fortune to meet an A.A. How is such a person going to find us? The search will be difficult if the local group thinks *it* should be anonymous, too. The Tradition is talking about "*personal* anonymity," remember? Alcoholics will not be attracted to A.A. if they don't know that it exists or if they have distorted, unfavorable impressions of its members or its program.

Giving the general public an accurate picture of A.A. is the chief job of our public information committees. In addition, they often carry the message to certain groups — from police officers to personnel directors — whose work includes contact with active alcoholics.

How to Be Anonymous on Television

Information about A.A. is being offered to the public through all the communications media, in print and over the air. On radio, it's easy to guard members' anonymity, of course. But TV (not in wide use when the Traditions were written) is another matter. According to a Conference opinion, members are breaking their anonymity when they are identified on TV as A.A.'s and their faces are shown — whether or not their names are given. And yet this medium, with its vast audiences, cannot be ignored.

Different techniques have been employed to preserve anonymity on TV: masks; screens; back-lighting that shows A.A.'s only as silhouettes; camera angles showing them only from the back. The "shadow" method diagrammed here is simple, relaxed — and appropriate. For we are not selling personalities — we are explaining A.A. Personal anonymity breaks in the public media not only may discourage timid prospects; they may threaten the anonymity-breaker's own sobriety, by violating the spirit of the A.A. program and Traditions....



The Twelfth Tradition

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

Let us always remember
that anonymity—not taking credit
for our own or others' recovery—
is humility at work.



Anonymity, as we observe it in A.A., is at root a simple expression of humility. When we use the Twelve Steps to recover from alcoholism, we are *each* trying to achieve real humility, to put our self-respect on a solid base of truth, rather than on fantasies about ourselves. When we use the Twelve Traditions to work together in A.A., we are *all* trying to achieve humility; as individual members, by recognizing our true place in A.A.; as a fellowship, by recognizing A.A.'s true place in the world.

Tradition One reminds each of us that we are not recovering on our own, that we should control our personal desires and ambitions in order to guard the unity of our group and our Fellowship. We ought not (Tradition Two) fancy ourselves as big shots in A.A., no matter what office we hold.

All of us are just alcoholics together, and in our groups we are not entitled (Tradition Three) to rule on the qualifications of other alcoholics seeking the same help that we've had. Yes, a group needs humility too. It may make its name public, but in the *spirit* of anonymity it should see the Whatever Group as merely part of a bigger whole (Tradition Four), careful in every enterprise to consider the welfare of all the other groups that make up A.A. In both group and individual activities, we should remember what the full name of our

Fellowship is. It does not represent any established religion, nor is it a new religion. We are not evangelists or gurus out to save humanity; we are anonymous alcoholics trying to help other alcoholics (Tradition Five).

In the rising battle against alcoholism, we ought not let our pride in A.A. mislead us into linking our Fellowship with other agencies, in order to bid for a share in their power, prestige, and funds. If we keep Traditions Six and Seven in mind, we will instead direct all our efforts toward A.A.'s own unique purpose.

When we go on Twelfth Step calls, we should not tell ourselves how noble we are for doing such valuable work without pay. The meaning of Twelfth Step work cannot be measured in money (Tradition Eight), and we *have* received advance pay for it, in coin of far greater worth — our very lives. In the same Tradition, it's suggested that a service center maintains A.A. humility by paying its employees decent wages — rather than considering A.A. so virtuous an outfit that employment there is a favor.

When we are given special responsibilities within A.A., Tradition Nine defines these as opportunities to *serve*, not titles to flaunt. The humility of the Fellowship itself is safeguarded by Tradition Ten, with the refusal to set ourselves up as general authorities, swinging our collective weight around in the public arena.

We do not want to sell our program as a "surefire remedy" in the extravagant terms of a promotional campaign (Tradition Eleven), or dramatize it by identifying noted people in A.A., thereby implying that recovery has been for each of us an individual accomplishment. As Tradition Twelve reminds us, we have something stronger than our human personalities to rely on. Our principles come first — and they are not our own invention. They reflect eternal spiritual values. With this Tradition, both as individuals and as a fellowship, we humbly acknowledge our dependence on a power higher than ourselves.



This we owe to A.A.'s future:

To place our common welfare first;

To keep our Fellowship united.

For on A.A. Unity depend our lives,

And the lives of those to come.

