

Member Retention Committee Report **Fall Conference Los Angeles 2011**

Purpose

Through an exchange of ideas, the retention committee will create a new document suggesting ways that members, meetings, Intergroups and ISO can increase retention in Gamblers Anonymous.

Suggestions

Overview:

The committee has divided our report into specific sections offering guidelines to address the time frame and circumstances of a person's involvement in the fellowship. The recurring theme at each stage is involvement in the program, and a commitment to the spiritual principles developing throughout one's life in Gamblers Anonymous. Each Meeting has the option to designate a person responsible for helping a new member who enters a Gamblers Anonymous Meeting, assisting the member who returns to GA after returning to gambling, and overseeing the Meeting's retention procedures which support those who are long term GA members. It is suggested that a "Retention Chairperson" or "Retention Representative" be selected by each Meeting.

New Members:

The person entering a GA meeting for the first time is typically motivated by three factors: 1) a loved one has said, "Get help or get out" 2) a court has ordered a person to attend GA to help overcome a gambling problem 3) a person on his/her own has identified how gambling has overwhelming, negative consequences in his/her life, and is seeking help to change a pattern of compulsive gambling. In any case, the person is experiencing great stress, anxiety, and fear. The tone and the atmosphere of the meeting room are vitally important. A handshake, a smile, a warm initial greeting offered with direct eye contact will foster a comfortable feeling to the person suffering serious personal, financial, and legal problems from this baffling disease. The Retention Rep can provide introductions to the members, ask the person to sit next to him/her during the meeting, and briefly outline the meeting procedures. The representative can secure the new member's contact information, and provide the "new member packet". At the conclusion of the meeting, along with one or two other members spend a few minutes answering specific questions the new member may have as a result of attending his/her first meeting. This may be an ideal time to offer information the person may provide to a spouse, parent, or significant other regarding help for them through the Gam-Anon program.

Followup contact by fellow GA members by telephone calls and/or emails are vital to the retention of a new member. It is suggested that for at least the first week, a new member receive contact daily by members. The group secretary and/or the retention representative may assign members or secure volunteers to commit to making the contacts to insure daily, positive interaction and support.

Some meetings find that providing a "temporary sponsor" is helpful to a person during the crucial period of recovery. Once the new member becomes familiar with the program and various members, he/she may then be able to request a specific member to be his/her sponsor who the person is able to identify with based on age, gender, and other commonalities.

There are meetings that successfully offer "90 Day Meetings" headed by an experienced member who meets for a portion of a meeting's time with those with less than 90 days of abstinence as a separate group. There is a GA approved booklet available outlining the details of such a meeting.

Referral by the retention representative or by the group secretary to the Pressure Relief Chairperson during the first month may be a helpful course of action, too. When the new member is offered a Pressure Relief Group Meeting to alleviate legal, financial, employment and personal pressures, he/she will benefit from the stability it will provide in his/her life in the GA program.

Suggesting adherence to our basic concept of "One Day at a Time" will reinforce the strength one gains by attending GA meetings. The many hours spent outside of the GA meetings are when the new member will be tempted to gamble. The greater the support we offer and the tools we suggest to suppress urges to gamble are critical to the new member's success in the GA program. Many members follow the plan of 90 meetings in 90 days to achieve success by filling the void of lives that had been consumed with non-stop, compulsive gambling prior to entering a Gamblers Anonymous meeting.

Involvement in basic meeting responsibility may help the new member feel accepted and a part of the group dynamic. After a few meetings, the person may help with setting up the room and the GA literature, making coffee, or assisting with cleanup at the conclusion of meetings. If there are meeting social events or a mini conference scheduled, encouraging the new member to attend these activities will, again, aid in the person's recovery and retention.

All members are cautioned to be careful when addressing the needs of new members. Comments that begin with: "You **must** do...." "The **only way** you will succeed is....." "You **have to**...." are deadly, harmful approaches to helping the person. Well-meaning, devoted GA members sometimes forget what our role is when attempting to be helpful.

Returning Members:

The typical comment made by a returning member is that he/she can stop gambling without attending GA meetings. Experience shows the opposite is more likely to occur. Without the support of other members and without the commitment to regularly attend meetings, a compulsive usually returns to gambling.

Unlike the new member, the person who has participated in the GA program, but returns to gambling requires our support equally, but may have to be approached differently. All of the suggestions offered to a new member included in the first section will certainly assist the returning member as the person re-enters a meeting room. The biggest challenge to retention of the returning member is preventing another relapse. Immediate involvement with a sponsor and commitment to working the Steps to Recovery is strongly suggested. Regular contacts with the returnee daily by members who are familiar with the person and his/her circumstances may help change the destructive pattern of relapsing. The positive encouragement offered daily by fellow members may lessen the impact of strong urges to gamble. Relapses often worsen strained personal relationships and compound financial pressures. The urgency of a Pressure Relief Meeting is heightened after a relapse. If enabling behavior has been demonstrated by a spouse, parent, or other significant person in the life of the returning member, suggesting that such a person make contact with Gam-Anon is recommended.

Again, involvement in GA activities will assist the member in maintaining abstinence. Once the person is back into the program, the group members may encourage the returnee to volunteer for group responsibilities. Those in the program who are serving at all levels are less likely to relapse.

Long Term Retention:

The overall issues that will keep an individual focused on successful recovery are often self-generated, but a group that is vibrant and disciplined will provide the energy to keep the long time member active in the program. Retention will be enhanced when Intergroups sponsor conferences, open meetings, workshops, and various social activities that offer members the opportunity to be of service and to develop positive relationships in the fellowship.

The Board of Trustees Retention Committee has the responsibility of reviewing and updating a document to offer helpful suggestions to the membership on a regular basis.

Vinny B. – Area 12, New Jersey
Committee Chair