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Trustee Line for January 2014

A PDF version of this issue to distribute to your rooms, or to print out for easier reading, will be available after 1/31/14.

Thoughts From The Trustees - Current and Past

The subjects listed below are themes that have been submitted by other Trustees. You may respond to any of them, or start an entirely new subject

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Misconceptions Regarding Attraction vs. Promotion

1/1/14 - 1:19 PM

Yes, there are many things I like to bring up on the Trustee Line, but I do so to try and get something started each month. This month I am going to try and filter out some of the objections people will have to an item that will be submitted for the Houston agenda, which by the way, closes in 6 weeks.

Many of you know that GA received a donation of \$217,000 from the will of a deceased member's estate. I've heard many disturbing things about this money and how members feel that GA has enough money and they don't have to contribute to ISO any longer. Ordinarily, I would agree to that, if our objective was to build up the cash reserves at ISO. But the reality is something very different.

Sure we have Unity Step 5, which outlines our primary purpose, but it is not our only purpose and certainly not the only thing we need to deal with. If you look at Article III of the Guidance Code, we also have 4 objectives:

- 1 - To contact compulsive gamblers no matter where they may be and help them overcome a gambling problem.
- 2 - To carry the message of Gamblers Anonymous to the compulsive gambler who still suffers, through the medium of personal contact, telephone, mail, newspapers, films, radio, television, houses of worship, charitable organizations, service clubs, and by whatever dignified method that is approved by the Board of Trustees within the framework of the Unity Program.
- 3 - To distribute Gamblers Anonymous literature to compulsive gamblers and to any person, organization or institution which desires some.
- 4 - To encourage interest and knowledge of the activities and program of Gamblers Anonymous with the peace officers, educational institutions, penal institutions, judges, probation officers, parole officers, doctors, newspapers, motion picture companies, radio broadcasting companies, television broadcasting companies, houses of worship, charitable organizations and service clubs of the world.

GA is not about accumulating money, it is about these objectives, which means we can't have an extra \$217,000 sitting in the account collecting interest. What better way to utilize the money than to start billboard advertising. This deals very directly with objectives 1 & 2. But nothing is that simple in our Fellowship, because the mere mention of any kind of advertising evokes a very emotional response that we are violating Unity Step 11 because we are

'promoting' when we advertise.

That is the conventional thinking that happens when we just read the headline of Unity Step 11. I urge those who feel that way to look at the Red Book and read what is written about that Step. Promotion is making claims about how great we are. Attraction is letting everyone know if they have a gambling problem, we can help. Notice that we can 'help', not cure them or boast about how many members have arrested their gambling or any other claim. Attraction is part of the 4th objective in the Guidance Code.

Think about this. When we put out flyers about GA, how is that any different than putting that information on a billboard. We need to do that in its simplest form. There will be an agenda item on the Houston agenda that addresses this issue. It will also contain a billboard add for a merit vote that is simple yet direct. It will be an add that will fit for any area in Canada and the US who belong to the National Hotline. Do yourself a favor and familiarize yourself with the writings of Unity Step 11. Don't come to Houston saying that billboard advertising is promotion. It's not - period, the end.

Lastly, it is unrealistic to think that all \$217,000 is going to go into advertising. There will be many obstacles in ironing out such issues, namely where such billboards will be placed. Remember, this is not an amount that is available for us every year. It was a one-time donation. But approving the ad will allow local areas to do these ads where it will impact their meetings the most. One possibility is putting the ads in the glass enclosed bus stops, for example. The important thing is that we clear the way local areas to use approved, branded billboard type ads to help carry the message. As the 2nd objective states, "...and by whatever dignified method that is approved by the Board of Trustees within the framework of the Unity Program." Let's get onboard with this concept to show everyone that we are carrying out our responsibilities as Trustees.

David M. – Area 12, New Jersey

1/6/14 - 5:06 PM

Dear fellow trustees:

I agree with David that GA should look to utilizing this additional funding to do some things that may have been cost prohibitive in the past and certainly would benefit our primary mission, to carry the message. I also agree that utilization of a portion of these funds for billboards, signs at transportation hubs, TV advertisement, etc. should be reviewed. I think there may be a great opportunity here and hope there will be a continuing discussion at the next conference.

Step 11 is about attraction, which does require that the public at large is made "aware" of GA and knows how to contact us. The website, our PR flyers, speaking engagements and other efforts of the local area public relations are how "attraction" is currently made. I can not see how billboards or signage are any different in providing "attraction".

Billboards and signs in public places would serve well to inform and demonstrate to the public that we are we are active, available and ready to help. There is a different impact from a billboard or signage people see day after day which may "attract" someone to making a call. This will also inform the general public on a large scale, which would carry well past the actual period the ad is running.

Personally, if I reflect on the many (so, so many) rides on I-95 and the NJ Turnpike, I can only imagine if there was a sign telling me about a place called GA for help with a gambling problem. With so many people traveling or on mass transit and seeing the message of hope and 855-2- CALL-GA, day after day, for a month or more straight could be a real positive impact on bringing in new members and for general public awareness. I did not know GA existed until I called the 1- 800-GAMBLER # on the back of the lottery ticket.

For general information and some context for this discussion on billboards, I am adding the following statement from a website that provides contacts for Billboard advertising. "On average, billboards rent for \$500.00 to \$8,000.00 a month. The normal contract requires a minimum six- month rental. There are other one-time costs (art, printing, etc.) which average around \$480.00 to \$1,000.00."

Therefore, it seems from this info that the cost can be \$5,000 – \$8,000 per month in the major cities and perhaps \$500-\$1000++ per month in more rural areas. Given this info, I'm not sure if this is actually feasible for the major city highways as the costs would really add up quick. This would all seem to have to be more of a "one time" situation and may not be sustainable for any significant period. That all being said, I think what David is intending is a great

idea. There is something to consider here and there may be an opportunity to really provide "attraction" on a grander scale. This definitely warrants more discussion.

This has also made me think that we should also discuss the need for the development of professional quality public service announcements. These could then be used by local areas as part of PR and sent to local radio stations and Public Access TV stations in an audio/digital format that they could accept. Any thoughts on this would be appreciated. These, of course, are items that should be brought to and spearheaded by the Public Relations committee.

Wishing you all well,
Paul C. - Area 14, Long Island, NY

1/13/14 - 8:28 PM
David,

I'm neither for or against a GA billboard being displayed at the moment. I am a little skeptical of the effectiveness of it. I think the best recruitment of GA are things like financial issues, failing marriages, and all the other things many of us faced in our addictions. GA isn't too hard to find once we reach that point in today's day and age IMO. I do have a few questions that may convince me of the benefits of having a GA billboard.

Has there been a GA billboard displayed in the past?
If yes, was there a spike in new members in the area noticed?
If no, will we be able to monitor its effectiveness if we do decide to put a billboard up?

I might be in favor of trying a GA billboard to see if it is effective. On the other hand I would question if it would be a good idea to spend money on something unproven. One last point I want to make...I used to just turn off all the anti smoking ads when they would come on tv and the radio. I finally quit smoking when the dentist told me I needed \$20 thousand dollars worth of dental work done.

Joe T. - Area 2, Northern California, former trustee

1/26/14 - 10:46 PM

I'm impressed with the quality of submissions to the trustee line recently, plenty of food for thought. On the primary issue raised in this topic, Attraction, I agree completely that advertising the availability and accessibility of G.A. is not only completely within the rights but also the responsibility of the fellowship.

Sure, there will be debate and discussion as to how the liquid assets of the fellowship are utilized by the corporation on our behalf, that's as it should be and the only real likelihood of lasting damage is if it's not discussed and debated, and those who spurn the opportunity to engage now, right now, then go on to a never ending critique, a possibility already referred to by others above.

I don't go along at all with the idea that it is easy to find G. A. already and that we should pay less attention to that area. I think, particularly under present circumstances, it is incumbent on us all, to see if this is a real opportunity to not only attract but also to define and improve our offering.

My approach and input will revolve around not just fundamentally supporting the concept of removing the outdated stance against advertising, at all levels, but also to discuss how we can clarify exactly who we are.

A brief example of the latter part is this, what do people find when they see references to G. A. at present ?

Are they as likely to find something that is not actually the fellowship but purporting to be the fellowship by virtue of using the name and logo while offering something else to suit their own ego, need for power or just to feed the addiction related need to appear omnipotent and special ?

I'm referring specifically to the blatant use of the name and logo, by a relatively small number of people, for example in the business, telecommunications and virtual world, to provide something that purports to be G. A. but has no reference point within the fellowship or corporation.

I will be clarifying these points at a later stage, for anyone who is interested, in the meantime I am referring more specifically to at least one telephone conference call offering I have come across which resembles or appears more like a recipe for megalomania, disunity, misguidance and world dominance by one or more personalities than it resembles any set of principles of recovery,

unity or guidance. It appears to have no reference point in the fellowship yet, as I referred to earlier, it can be found by an unsuspecting new member and, by virtue of being found behind the unauthorized use of the name and logo, appear to be G. A.

These and similar issues of the effective commercial use of the Intellectual property by people for other purposes need examination. We can only change what we do, I hope to be able to whip my thoughts into shape soon and generate discussion on these matters.

I nearly forgot to mention a suggested use of some funds that I will be making to the B.O. R. again once I whip my thoughts into shape, surrounding the protection of the intellectual property on a wider scale.

I support the concept of advertising as a legitimate tool of attraction and will be happy to engage in debate on where, when, how, how much etc. I'm just looking through the bye laws at the moment, a little uncomfortable at the idea that we just elect the members of the B.O. R. to a position of responsibility and then they decide, I prefer the two way responsibility approach. I'm sure there must be something in there somewhere about the liquid assets, I must improve my knowledge of such things.

Great trustee line this month, as usual.

Odie. B. - Area 36, Ireland South - East

1/27/14 - 2:33 AM

I just want to make a few more points on this topic:

-I've been driving around the San Francisco Bay Area for a few weeks now looking for large billboards advertising for any 12 step program. I didn't see any. There are 12 step programs way larger and more resourceful than GA..but still..no billboards...

-I like the concept of our friends (outside entities) doing the promoting for us.

-I still stand by my statement that GA is easy to find in 2014 once one decides he or she may have a problem. If a compulsive gambler can book a flight to Vegas, find the most secluded Indian casino in the middle of nowhere, book a boat cruise, they can surely google gamblers anonymous..My God how did you old timers with 30-40 years find GA before smartphones and internet? Where there's a will there's a way...

-I think in today's society there is a wide awareness of addiction and 12 step programs. I think the only obstacles for any addict to seek and find a program is unwillingness and not a lack of visibility on the part of 12 step programs. GA isn't for people who need it, it's for people who want it.

Joe T. - Area 2, Northern California, former trustee

1/27/14 - 8:39 AM

Joe,

I'm actually sorry today is the 27th of the month, because this January issue will go into the archives on Saturday when February starts, and most people won't think about clicking anything other than the current month's issue. This thread certainly needs more time for others to respond.

You bring up 4 points that strongly run against the grain, at least for me.

Your first item is that you don't see any other 12-step programs advertising on billboards in your area. Is that a statement if no one else is doing it we shouldn't? Are we only to follow the crowd of other programs? We can't innovate unless AA does something first? That is what I am getting out of this part. I'm aware that billboard ads can be very expensive and for the time they are visible, the cost/benefit analysis might not work. But what about an area that has the ability to negotiate a very low-priced term to make billboard ads worthwhile? What about putting smaller versions of the ad into bus stop shelters, or hundreds of other places? We should have such an ad approved by the BOT for those types of situations. It doesn't cost us anything to have it available for any area that feels they want to go in that direction to carry the message of hope. Also, because you don't see any ads in the Bay area, is that the indicator that there aren't ads elsewhere in the country?

On the second item, I will speak from my situation in New Jersey with the Council on Compulsive Gambling and try to refrain from really unleashing a diatribe about their efforts locally. I have no idea about any of the councils throughout the country, but they all have their own agendas. If you really like

their actions, then maybe you should bring an agenda item to the floor of the BOT to disband the national hotline, with reasoning that the councils throughout the country are better funded and equipped to do our job.

Sure they are advertising in all the casinos and other gambling venues, with their funding from the gambling establishments, but their procedures are all about completing certain tasks to hit benchmark numbers that will justify even more funding. I've called our local number for the council and got put under the hot lights with a survey where the volunteer grilled me with lots of personal questions. Does the person calling the hotline in extreme crisis have to go through this? Is that how we treat our callers when they call our GA hotline? Last time I checked, GA doesn't do that. The council volunteer, or paid individual (that's for another time), then pushed me toward getting to one of their therapists because I would get a certain number of sessions paid by the state. I was not given the option of going to a GA meeting until very far into the telephone call, and me asking a lot of questions first.

If you are advocating that we sit by and allow people who are in an emergency and have found the strength to seek help, to become prey to this kind of treatment, with the understanding that we will ultimately benefit from their function on their hotline(s), then I'm not really sure how to characterize that way of thinking, without becoming somewhat inappropriate. The various councils throughout the country function in their own way, whether we agree with them or not. That is why we have Unity Step 10. But we have a Guidance Code and you might want to take a refresher by reading the 4 parts of Article III – Objects, Section I, which outline the specific and primary purposes for which the Fellowship of Gamblers Anonymous was formed.

Your third point is an exceptionally huge leap of faith. You are working on a premise that anyone can search for Gamblers Anonymous. That would be great if we could control the thinking of people in such a condition, but it is foolish to think that way. Who says people will realize they have a gambling problem and type that in? Why not be open-minded and approach this from the standpoint that any kind of search could be used. Why not look at a search on 'gambling problem'? Our website is the first item on the second page. Are you saying that people in distress are going to scroll through the other listings until they get to something that says Gamblers Anonymous? Really? Just typing in the word gambling into a search bar offers many other optional searches, none of which cover GA, unless someone is predisposed to do that.

Your last item is probably the most shocking – 'GA isn't for people who need it, it's for people who want it.' I'm around this program for over 25 years and have seen 'quite a few' people come into the program on their first night. People don't walk through the door with a sign that says 'I don't need GA, I want it.' Those who have managed to stumble through the door have no idea what is happening to them other than they are in crisis and need help. I crawled under the door of my first meeting, because I had no idea what to do after looking question 20, right in the face. Want versus Need? Really? This thread was about getting people in the door. People who stay in the rooms must want the benefits of abstinence and recovery, but you must know a different breed of people in your area, who come in to their first meeting with such a clear focus about 'wanting'. Back in New Jersey, we have people coming into the rooms for the first time, who couldn't find their assholes with a road map, a mirror and a flashlight. Yes, that's a bit graphic, but the short form is they have no clue. That's our job as GA brothers and sisters; to take them by the hand and help them find the 'Want'. But first we have to get them in the door and accept them for the pile of confusion, distress and unknown, that we all were at our first meeting.

David M. – Area 12, New Jersey

1/29/14 - 7:31 PM

Just wishing to give my perspective on this, it seems clear that giving each area the choice of using advertising as a legitimate tool of attraction, letting the people who need G. A. know we exist and where we are, is the right and proper thing to do.

Sitting around waiting for the dreamworld gambler to arrive off the plane from a plush casino, take out his spanking new smartphone with the confidence of a person on a mission, having just had a spiritual awakening and realizing they should just search the internet for Gamblers Anonymous because that's exactly what they want? I don't think so.

I had quite a few trips to the dreamworld in the old days, never met that guy or gal. Never saw them come through the door of a meeting either.

Doing a search for Gambling Problem California means quite a scroll to encounter Gamblers Anonymous, try "I have a gambling problem, Northern

California " it's an even more arduous task to get past (our friends are in the way, lol)

There is no shortcut in the homeland of this fellowship, nor anywhere else, there is no shortcut or lazy way anywhere. The time has come to stand up and be counted. Lives depend upon it, let's get it done.

As for the courage, conviction, commitment and foresight of the 30 and 40 year (not so old timers) that protected and preserved the principles for everyone, in the face of a greater social stigma than we will ever again face, Hats off to you, respect and gratitude.

Odie. B. - Area 36, Ireland South -East

1/30/14 - 8:01 PM

David M,

I will clarify some of my statements a little further and make some new ones as well.

1) GA is not for people who need it but for people who want it.

I've seen a lot of people who have come and gone in GA in my 9-10 years in the program. If GA is for people who need it (assuming everyone who walks into GA needs it)then all of them should still be in GA. Instead our membership is only a fraction of those people who I believe want it. I don't know what the estimates are...3 million compulsive gamblers in the world (a fictitious number) than surely GA would be much larger if GA was for people who need it.

2) I don't see any 12 step billboards in the SF Bay Area

Yes I believe AA is a much larger program, with more literature on 12 steps, way more members who work the 12 steps, and wrote the 12 traditions due to trial and error. AA invented 12 step program! So yes I think it would be wise to use them for reference. GA has been referring to the AA since our existence. Just look at our day at a time book and yellow combo book and see how much of AA's DNA is in it.

3) GA should leave it to our friends to recommend/promote us.

When I made this statement I meant to say recommend. When I said our friends I meant doctors,hospitals , judges, etc. I understand there are numerous outside entities out there. A lot of these entities create roads (I might agree with you David some of those roads could be bumpy) that lead to GA. I think one member on the trustee line mentioned he called 1-800- gambler. I'll state the obvious that we aren't suppose to have an opinion on outside issues. I don't believe we have any control over what outside entities do or say nor should we try to. Your implication that outside entities can create confusion for a compulsive gambler seeking help and make it difficult for him or her to distinguish GA from other organizations does not convince me that a GA billboard would lessen their confusion. That implication also suggests that GA is the only way to recover from compulsive gambling, which may be true,but we shouldn't take that stance..at least publicly.

Having said all this I am learning that I am the minority opinion on many issues (the 12 steps, cap on donations, billboards, and probably many more. I know your only intention is to try to help the compulsive gambler who still suffers which is good. So good luck at the BOT getting this agenda passed. Is it appropriate to say good luck in GA?

Joe T. - Area 2, Northern California

1/30/14 - 10:45 PM

I have to know this, about when Bill went to the hospitals to " Give them the medical angle first and give it to them hard "

N. B. THEM being those who neither asked nor wanted, due to their entirely understandable state through active addiction

Well, when Bill went to SOFTEN THEM up, seeing as they didn't yet realize they needed help and, clearly, they didn't want it,

What I just have to know is this, Did BILL use a solid piece of timber to soften THEM up, which is what he was sent to do, if so, was that the first BILLBOARD ?

Or was this attraction in its purest form? lol.

There's more than one reason we shouldn't waste time at this stuff but, as it

stands, as ruled at San Diego, we are the board of Trustees, we can talk about anything we want, so doubtless we will, until that changes.

Joe, if you really want A. A. to elect you to talk for them, I don't think they can. Just in case, I suggest you check if they even know the true origins of the steps.

Odie B. - Area 36, Ireland South - East

The Big Donation

1/1/14 - 5:43 PM

Hi All,

First and foremost, happy new year to all!

Unfortunately, I am finding such misunderstandings regarding the \$217,000 donation left by a deceased member. After the Trustee report at our November Intergroup meeting, some members went back to the rooms and told the membership that ISO no longer needs money. Of course, this could not be further from the truth but this is the unfortunate message that is getting out there.

I received phone calls that one Intergroup representative went to multiple rooms, talked about the donation and she told members that ISO no longer needs money and to donate the money to our local Intergroup. Even our local Intergroup Chairman said last month as reported in our minutes "The rooms give tons of money to ISO and bring nothing here".

Truth be told, our local Intergroup is running a budget deficit (I would be happy to discuss my opinion as to why with you in private), however, there should not be an "Us vs. Them" mentality when referring to local area Intergroups and ISO. It is all "us" and there should be no "them". Unfortunately, that has not been my experience of late.

I was wondering if anybody else was experiencing this and if you are how are you addressing the issue?

Once again, happy new year to all and looking forward to seeing you in Houston!

Tom Z. - Area 14, Long Island NY

1/7/14 - 10:26 AM

Dear fellow trustees;

I appreciate this topic in that it points out that there may be some uninformed reactions to the "large donation". [I understand the 7th Tradition from AA speaks more directly to the problematic issues that can result from large donations, just an FYI]

While I had not heard anyone in our area saying that ISO no longer needs money, at our next Intergroup meeting I will discuss the issue to ensure everyone understands that this donation does not warrant any reduction in support to ISO. Whenever there is mis-information or incorrect perceptions in an area, we should just do our job to get out the correct information; based on principles, not personalities.

I am also writing to set the record straight. Long Island Intergroup maintains a commitment of \$100 per month to ISO (~20-25% of what LII takes in monthly from room donations to LI Intergroup). In all our recent discussions regarding our treasury and budget expenses, no one (not even our current Chairperson) at Intergroup suggested to reduce our current commitment to ISO.

Moreover, to cast aspersions that certain individuals at LI Intergroup have an "US vs Them" mentality in regard to supporting ISO is really just part of the on-going divisive statements against LI Intergroup and certain trusted servants. I am not one to cast stones...but something had to be said here...I will leave it at that.

Wishing all well in recovery! Happy and healthy new year.
Paul C. - Area 14, Long Island, NY

1/8/14 - 8:33 PM

Dear Fellow Trustees:

I stand by my statements in my previous post:

"that I received phone calls that one Intergroup representative went to multiple rooms, talked about the donation and she told members that ISO no longer needs money and to donate the money to our local Intergroup. Even our local Intergroup Chairman said last month (as reported in our minutes) "The rooms give tons of money to ISO and bring nothing here".

To Paul C., I say to you that the Chairman of LI Intergroup makes those comments and you do not see an "Us vs. Them" mentality in regard to supporting ISO? That is the message the Chair is sending to the body and the membership on Long Island...and you see nothing wrong with that? And you don't find THAT divisive? It appears to me that my discussing it is divisive but the actual comments are not. Sorry, I do not see the logic.

I am grateful that you "set the record straight" regarding Long Island's 100 dollar monthly donation to ISO not being eliminated or reduced. I was the proud sponsor of that by-law in February 2010 and I am happy to hear that that commitment will remain unchanged and fulfilled.

However, please do not make it sound as if LI Intergroup is donating 20-25% of their monthly room donations to ISO because that is simply not the case. An envelope is handed around the room at Intergroup and at the end, Intergroup makes up the difference between the envelope and 100 dollars. It varies monthly, but it certainly is nowhere near 20-25% of the monthly room donations as you stated it is.

Paul, please don't talk about the "divisive statements against LI Intergroup and certain trusted servants". Last month, our Chairman (according to the minutes) started the meeting with an apology for his previous months' behavior to the body "he lost it and apologizes" and a former Trustee said (his opinion)" We have poor representation in our Trustees. He doesn't see any reason for Trustees. (He) said that he has not seen anything that has helped us."

These are the types of behaviors that prevail at Long Island Intergroup. There has been an assault against the Trustees and ISO for quite some time. I am happy to hear that you will "discuss the issue to ensure everyone understands that this donation does not warrant any reduction in support to ISO." Maybe this will help the former Trustee who said that he has not seen anything that has helped us. You can only hope.

I am very grateful that these behaviors were exposed on the June 2013 Trustee Line. These types of behaviors affect GA as a whole and hopefully one day will stop. But as I always say, I don't gamble on anything.

Stay Warm!
Tom Z. - Area 14, Long Island, NY

1/10/14 - 1:23 PM

The following is provided to back-up the statements I made that were refuted.

Total room donations = room donations + collected at LII

Dec 2013 = \$395 + \$17 = \$412 $\frac{\$100}{\$412} = 24.2\%$

Nov 2013 = \$519 + \$25 = \$544 $\frac{\$100}{\$544} = 18.4\%$

Oct 2013 = \$452 + \$20 = \$472 $\frac{\$100}{\$472} = 21.1\%$

Therefore, I think 20-25% was a fair representation.

Tom, perhaps if the 2 rooms you are involved with on Long Island which, at your behest, recently removed themselves from our Intergroup, didn't stop donating to Intergroup 18 months ago, these percentages would be a bit lower. I know you will say there is only good reasons for them to have stopped donating and making that move. [sorry I had to get down in the mud here]

I never said I agree with these other statements that you now brought up. However, everyone has a right to their opinion based on their own observed behaviors of the current Trustees. I have learned to accept criticism without acting out or the need to cry "foul" in the public square.

You chose to characterize and broadcast to all of the Trustees these individuals opinions as "US vs. Them" (meaning LI Intergroup vs. ISO); that to me is divisive and declaring a divide that does not exist. That is not to say there weren't other unhealthy statements made in the past by others at Intergroup, but nothing directed towards ISO.

I think if we try dealing with issues by presenting them based on principles, not personalities; it would be healthier for everyone.

**Closed Meetings - New Members and Support Attendance
Question**

1/9/14 - 10:01 PM

At a recent group consciousness meeting in Tulsa an interesting question was posed about closed meetings.

For at least ten years, and probably longer, there has been a tradition in most Oklahoma meetings that if a new member attending a closed meeting for their first meeting has family or friends along for support then that support is allowed to stay and attend that meeting. The new member and their support are informed that normally the closed meeting is only for compulsive gamblers but there is this one time exception made.

The origins of this have been lost in the years since its inception but the assumption is that an early meeting came to this decision by group conscience and when new meetings started they continued this tradition.

The question brought up was this:

Should a meeting that allows this to automatically happen when a new member shows up with support be listed and considered to be a closed meeting or should it be listed and considered an open meeting?

I know when I first came to GA I had no idea what the terms "closed" and "open" meant; my guess was that "closed" meetings were not open to new members so I went to an open meeting instead. Anyone not familiar with 12 step terminology could easily make the honest mistake of bringing someone along with them to their first meeting.

I'd be interested on how other areas handle this situation at a closed meeting.

Thanks and looking forward seeing all y'all in Houston!
Kent C. - Area 7C, Oklahoma

1/15/14 - 9:18 AM

Kent,

I was waiting for others to chime in on this subject, but that doesn't seem to be the case, plus I enjoy writing (there's a news flash, huh?). Here's my take on this subject, for what it's worth.

Meetings should be listed in 3 categories. Open, Closed and Closed with exceptions. The ISO website only has provisions for open or closed meetings. I suppose that's the way meetings are run on the west coast. Open is self-explanatory but a closed meeting has to exactly what it is – closed to members of Gamblers Anonymous and those who are coming to their first meeting because they suspect they may have a gambling problem.

Closed meetings with exceptions is a classification that allows for group conscience to modify the conditions upon which other people may attend the meetings, but should be memorialized in the room's format to outline the conditions that are allowed. Without this, then the meeting is clearly a closed meeting. I understand that the meeting you cite made an exception 'on the fly'. That is a problem for me, if the room is listed as a closed meeting. Group conscience notwithstanding, if I go to a closed meeting, I am expecting to be completely safe from outsiders and risks of anonymity breaches. If I go to a closed meeting with exceptions, then I have abrogated my rights to outsiders with the group conscience decision to admit other people.

In my area in New Jersey, the vast majority of rooms are closed with exceptions. Fewer meetings are open and even fewer than that are closed. My homeroom allows new members to have support people sit in the new member's first meeting. The understanding is that if any existing member has a problem with giving therapy with such outsiders in the room, those people will be asked to step in the hallway for members who are uncomfortable speaking in front of these people.

Halfway through our meeting we get to the new member. We ask the support people to leave the room. The new member must be given an opportunity to not feel the additional pressure and anxiety from those who attend in support. So the new member is alone with the rest of the members in the room during the 20 questions, his/her own therapy and comments from the room members. The support people are readmitted after that. We have found that there is an immediate bond of trust that is built with the new member and room.

I feel it is also incumbent on me to say that we are also strict about people who are mandated by the courts to attend GA meetings. No room is legally bound to accept anyone from such situations. We initially accept all such people if they are new members and ask the person the 20 questions. Before the person gives therapy, we tell them to state their name, whether or not they think they are a compulsive gambler and the date of their last bet. We are clear that an admission of being a compulsive gambler or not, is not a prerequisite for being a part of our room, but if they say they are anything but a compulsive gambler, we ask if they have a desire to stop gambling. Should they say no, we stop and tell that person that they will have to attend an open meeting. It sounds harsh, but we are talking about protecting the integrity of the rooms by upholding Unity Step 3.

The bottom line is that all procedures should be outlined in written room format. The explanation of that is in the Group Handbook on pages 8 & 9, the October '10 revision. The room format is not the opening announcements that are read before the meeting. It is a written document that reflects the group conscience on every aspect of how the room operates. Few rooms in GA have such a document. Have a format (business/group conscience) meeting and put together a written format. Then you won't have to wonder what to do, as it happens. The room will be prepared by referencing the room format. Done and done.

If anyone wants to see a room format, I will be glad to send you my homeroom opening announcements and room format. Use it as a template to formulate one for your room(s) with our best wishes.

David M. – Area 12, New Jersey

Why Isn't There a Cap in GA on What Individual Members Can Donate and on What Members Can Leave in Their Will?

1/13/14 - 12:55 AM

I read this yellow combo book at almost every single GA meeting that states that I don't have a money problem and that adherence to spiritual principles seems to solve my problems. From my experience...the book is correct. Does this apply to GA as a whole? Well I think that has yet to be proven. I am of the belief that it is healthy for GA at all levels to have just enough money to function (which I believe ISO has been doing before the \$217,000 donation). To be quite simple I think we're better off being poor than rich. I guess we'll all have to wait and see if that big chunk of change will play havoc for years in GA.

Another point I want to make is what if GA turned down \$200,000 from a non GA member. What is to prevent that person from donating that money through a current GA member or better yet decides to join GA themselves because the suddenly have a desire to stop gambling? I think it is a good idea to put a cap on individual donations and money we accept from a will. I know other 12 step programs do so. Anyways, just my 2 cents. I'm far from the leading authority on how GA should function. I'll put this item on the trustee poll to see if it might have any legs to put on the agenda at the next BOT meeting.

Joe T. - Area 2, Norther California, Former trustee

1/13/14 - 8:44 AM

Joe,

I'm glad someone brought up the subject of the 217,000 lb gorilla in the room, because I believe there are many other facets to this issue that need to be raised. Hopefully, between the 2 of us, we can stimulate others to chime in with their thoughts.

This donation is not about a gambling problem, so I can't see the tie in with the first question on page 12 of the Combo Book. Compulsive gambling remains the same as outlined in the Combo Book. What needs to be done is to recognize the validity of the By-Laws of Gamblers Anonymous, as they cover the corporation of Gamblers Anonymous, not the Fellowship of Gamblers Anonymous. More specifically, Article VII, Section 1, which states: "...the Board of Regents who shall have complete charge, management and control of the International Service Office (I.S.O) and property of this Corporation..." GA has \$217,000 of new property for the BOR to take charge of, manage and control. That's a scary thought, which for me brings up the question of whether or not the BOR members are equipped to make such decisions.

Strangely enough, this subject brings into clear focus an issue I had written

about in the past. That is the qualifications and disclosures of the nominees for the Board of Regents. We have seen BOR mini-resumes that address the members' qualifications from their time in GA. That's not the crux of how we should be election BOR members. Instead, it should be covering the business knowledge each BOR nominee has and would be bringing to the BOR. Sure that would limit some members from attaining a position on the BOR, but we need qualified people at the helm of the corporation and we are not voting for them on that basis. As you sow, so shall you reap.

That sub-topic is going to be needed now, because the BOR will have the sole determination as to how to deploy the donation of \$217,000. If you have an opinion about that, petition the BOR and let them know your ideas. They meet on the 3rd Saturday of each month. Of all our GA members, I would only guess that a mere fraction of our membership will do that directly to the BOR. However, there is more certainty that many more will just complain and bitch about it with others.

On the subject of allowing the ISO to function with just enough money, I think that is a statement that holds no merit, unless those making it come to the understanding that the constant money pressures that exist with contributions that seem to always be coming in less than the operating expenses, which increase every year. The ISO is overstressed with its annual budget it has in place every year and is taxing the current resources we have. Getting a big contribution is a one-time event and does not materially change the operating budget on an on going basis.

The real question remains what distribution model the BOR will employ to deal with this large contribution. If you are pleased with the BOR members and their ability to make such decisions, then reflect your ideas for what should be done with the money and then sit back for the 9 BOR members to make that decision. To eliminate the post-distribution moaning and groaning by the members, the BOR should open a forum for the members to make suggestions for how to spend the money. A telephone conference call open to all GA members, would be the most effective way to get this done as it will stimulate a great level of ideas for the BOR to ultimately consider. Unfortunately, I don't believe that will happen, knowing the previous actions of the BOR and decisions that involve the rest of the Fellowship and the use of technology.

Sure GA would turn down a non-member based contribution of any amount. We can't occupy any time trying to play detectives to trace money and its sources. If the scenarios you outline regarding deliberate acts to 'get around' Unity Step 7 were to actually happen, then whomever is responsible for being part of that, will have to deal with their own recovery and the deceit involved in the process you mentioned. I know of numerous members at open meetings who take money from non-members as contributions and then put that money into the basket saying it's his/her money. This happens more than most members know throughout the Fellowship at the room and Internet levels, so it would be safe to assume that it can happen at the ISO level. We can do our best to stop it, otherwise we would need to modify our Unity Step 6 to add the word paranoia.

Finally, I am very concerned that the BOR will just make a series of decisions on what to do with the \$217,000 without vetting the issue within the Fellowship. The members of GA will only find out about it – after the fact, and that is when the ugly part of Unity Step 6 will kick into place. Members will bitch about the choices and then the acrimony will be in full effect. That's when we will be face to face with the uncomfortable aspect of money being both a problem and a divisive component to Unity Step 1 – our common welfare and unity. That's when the clarity will focus about the money really not being a problem, but the lack of pre-emptive communication by the BOR before the decision being the problem. In the public sector, there is always a hearing period before big projects are started. Shouldn't we give that same right to our members?

David M. – Area 12, New Jersey

1/15/14 - 1:16 PM

Greetings, Brothers and Sisters,

As to "The Big Donation" and discussion of a 'cap' on donations: Blah – Blah – Blah!!

I think we're spending much too much time and emotion on how to regulate what members give to GA (notice I didn't say 'ISO'), and how it should be spent. The member who bequeathed this money to us left it to the 'fellowship', I'm sure. However, all 'fellowship' money, unless otherwise directed, probably should go through ISO. This discussion should for the most part be taking place at the Board of Regents level, and I'm sure it is high on their agenda.

We (me and others) elected the BOR members. Do we really think they are going to waste the money? I believe they will seek only to ensure that it is put to good use to provide only what is needed to benefit the membership. If I didn't believe that, I'd be strongly campaigning for their removal.

One of the biggest mistakes is trying to micro-manage. Once we ask people to lead, we should let them lead. This includes allowing them to make decisions on our behalf for the good of all. Each month in our ISO Bulletin, every penny is accounted for. As long as we maintain this level of transparency, I'm not too worried. The BOR knows full well that they are answerable to us, and that we are watching.

As to limiting the amount a member can give to GA? How would that work? What if we came up with a limit (we'd need many extensions of discussion time on that agenda item.) and then someone left us more in their will? Would we have to give the excess to another program? Would they be allowed to take it? Some day one of our 'millionaire' members will die and thoughtlessly leave us a 7-figure amount. Do we say "no thanks"?

I believe that the member who left us the money did so out of gratitude to the fellowship that gave him/her so much, so it could be used to help others. To him/her and all others who may want to do the same, I say "Thank you".

I look forward to seeing you all in Houston.

Your friend in recovery,
John B, Trustee - Area 13, Philadelphia

1/15/14 - 3:35 PM

Why would GA need a million dollars? We can't buy members. If someone wants to give back to GA than be of service. You want to carry the message to the compulsive gambler? Work the steps, sponsor someone, guide them through the steps... It's the most cost effective way to carry the message it would contribute more to the growth of GA than any amount of money would.

Joe T. - Area 2, Northern California

1/17/14 - 2:52 PM

Hi All,

I have little fear about Gamblers Anonymous being left too much money so I will address the other direction this thread took as to what to do with the money.

I wouldn't be adverse to low cost advertising on billboards but it is with the caveat that the advertising be geared towards directing people to the National Website (for information) and more critically to feature what I hope could be a newly developed Mobile Application. This committee was formed in Orlando and admittedly I have not checked in on any progress (or lack thereof).

If we want to reach out to the greatest number of people while providing an incredible resource to members (both new and old), the development of a mobile app is crucial. Given the GPS technology, think about the possibilities of a person being able to open the app, click a button and immediately have a hotline number as well as directions to the next and closest meeting to where they are standing or any other info we choose to include.

Given how long and how many objections it took us to get into the 1990s with telephone meetings (not to mention further challenges that remain on the Houston Agenda), I wonder if this can ever be accomplished.

That said, we can't say we don't have the resources needed to fund this and I implore everyone to get behind this as quickly as possible.

Looking forward to Houston
Steve T. - Area 14, Long Island, NY

1/20/14 - 9:51 PM

I think the big donation is a really nice and generous act. The person obviously wanted to give back to the program that saved their life. I do not think there should be a cap on donations. As I mentioned in a previous post, I just hope that the donation does not dry up donations to ISO. By putting that message out there hopefully we can carry the message back to the membership and continue to stress the importance of consistently donating to ISO.

In the interest of full disclosure, Steve T. is a friend and sponsor of mine. With that said, I think his idea of a mobile app is a great idea! To have somebody driving home from a gambling establishment, downloading an app and going to

their first meeting could actually be a life saver. I think it is something we truly have to consider. Tom Z. - Area 14, Long Island, NY

1/22/14 - 12:28 PM

I thought "money was not our problem". 3 of the 4(Now 4 out of 5 subjects in the line) wrote about \$\$\$\$. All of those wanted to suggest how to spend the \$.I think they all overlooked the facts

- 1.that we are an International Fellowship
- 2.Billboards,"local radio"."tv" etc are not too good on " route 66"
- 3.Can a Compulsive Gambler think about saving for a rainy day ?
- 4.We use to have a Cap (\$ is not our problem)
- 5.What happened to –principles before personalities ?

XOXOXO

Bill B. - Area 15, New York

1/29/14 - 7:02 PM

I don't really get the " We don't have a money problem " that keeps getting mentioned in a good few topics and posts lately. In fact I can honestly say that I have never met a Compulsive Gambler who didn't have both a money problem and a problem with money. Certainly, the vast majority of new members I meet are so acutely aware of the financial side of the problem that, as new members, we tended to see it as a larger part of the jigsaw than it turns out to be, usually.

The big picture seems to be rather, as our literature says " Not Just a financial problem " That signifies to me a complete acceptance that we not only have a money problem but also a problem with money, as part of our overall problem.

Members who arrive at the door, in my experience, who are not yet at the point where they don't have the price of a telephone call let alone a spanking new smartphone, still realize the problem they had with their money not falling into its proper place,the lost opportunities, the insecurity, instability of financial mismanagement, the disastrous mal-prioritization of who they should have spent their money on instead of being the "Hail fellow well met people pleaser " to people who, at the end of the day, didn't matter as much as the souls who suffered at our mismanagement.

Those of us who arrive at the door of G. A. having spent our own and just about anyone else's we could get our hands on,not having the price of a phone call as we arrive, we don't have a money problem either ? Really.

Looks like I wasted a lot of time in recovery dealing with the financial inventory in step four, making amends on a financial level as best I could, climbing down off my false pride perch and asking for help in handling money. Not being able to handle money responsibly was as much, if not more, of a money problem for me as any lack of money.

What other addiction lets you have one hundred bullets at the start of a session, ten thousand bullets pass through your hands during the session yet invariably not one bullet remains at the end ?

I don't get either the suggestion that paying off all the debts solves any more than a small part of the problem, long after the debts are paid the money problem element remains in the shape of a propensity to return to irresponsibility and mis- management.

We don't have a problem with the ammunition for our smoking gun and our attitude to the ammunition, Really ?

Or maybe, just maybe, the word "Just " in " Not just a financial problem "is in there for a reason.

That's just me looking at the principles of the issue, as opposed to the personality driven side that comes up with things like " Each group should be self governing. Period " which is just a recipe for anarchy and nothing to do with Unity step four.

I prefer to read the full sentence.

Maybe I would have been better off taking the shortcut. Nah, there is no shortcut. (Is there ?)

Regarding the Topic issue, a cap on donations, I don't see where we have the right to tell members what they can do in their last will and testament.

Odie. B. - Area 36, Ireland South - East

new version