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Trustee Line for February 2011

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A PDF version of this issue to distribute to your rooms, or to print out for easier reading, will be available after 2/28/11.

Thoughts From The Trustees - Current and Past

The subjects listed below are just a listing of 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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Contact Information on the ISO Website

2/1/11 - 12:01 AM

At my intergroup, I received a suggestion that I would like to bring to the present trustees for a response.

How about putting on the meeting list that is on the GA web page, a contact name and number for each individual meeting? This would allow prospective members to get in contact with a member that attends that meeting so when that member comes to that meeting they will be able to recognize that member and be a little more comfortable. I would like to hear any responses on this so I can relay this to my intergroup.

Thanks for your input,
Ian S. - Former Trustee, Area 6D. Atlanta, Georgia

2/20/11 - 5:12 PM

Ian,

With technology improving by the minute, I believe it would be a bad idea to put such information on any GA website. Cross-referencing applications could very well have the name of the person whose phone number is listed, available at the click of a mouse. Although I see the advantages of being able to have someone meet the new member and what additional comfort levels that might add to the experience, it extracts a heavy risk for breaching anonymity.

Hopefully, in Cherry Hill, the alternatives to the current Erlang Hotline system will be unveiled and with that, much greater levels of opportunity to connect a GA member together with a prospective new member.

Guidelines for Celebrating Anniversaries

2/1/11 - 8:56 AM

I would like some feedback on an issue that has come up in a couple of GA rooms. Certain rooms are incorporating into their room Guidelines, additional rules for celebrating anniversaries. One room added a rule that "You must make 6 out of the prior 8 meetings in order to celebrate in this room." Other rooms keep a meeting list where only members on the meeting list are considered members of the room and would only then be able to celebrate in that room.

I found the following related statements in the Past Trustee Decisions:

21 - Board consensus is that it is appropriate for a member to celebrate his/her "pinning" or anniversary in any group/room. Montreal, 2000

40 - Board consensus is that a GA room cannot have stricter guidelines pertaining to pinnings and celebrating successive anniversaries than what is contained in the Guidance Code. New Orleans 2004

48. - A straw vote was taken and it is the consensus of this Board (73-2) that a room cannot require all or a percentage of the meetings to be in the home room. Fort Lauderdale, 2006

As stated above in the Past Trustee Decisions, it seems clear that rooms should not have be able to have their own rules above the requirements in the GC: "Abstinence from gambling and regular attendance of at least thirty-nine (39) Gamblers Anonymous meetings (exceptions can be made, via group conscience decisions, for medical reasons) in the prior 12 months is required for pinnings and for all successive anniversaries..."

I also do not agree with the position that anyone is a member of a particular room. I am a member of GA, a worldwide fellowship, and should have a right to a seat in any room on any day. Anniversary celebrations are based on one's own admission regarding their abstinence, as well as their own admission as to attending 39 meetings in the past year. Such a celebration should not be denied by any room.

The reasons expressed by members for including additional requirements was the concern that they do not want members who were not attending meetings regularly leading up their anniversary, to still be able to celebrate in the room. Some believe that sets a bad example. Moreover, some do not want fund the costs of pins for individuals that are not "members" of the room. Some believe that a room should not be obligated to hold the celebration for individuals that do not demonstrate a commitment to the room by regular attendance.

Therefore, my questions are; does any person who declares the desire to stop gambling and (by their own admission) attended GA 39 meetings in prior 12 months have the right to celebrate in any GA room they choose? Does the room have the obligation to calender and hold the celebration? Does that room have the obligation to purchase the pins and/or medallions? I'd like to know if you have any similar situations in other rooms, as well. Thanks.

Wish you all well in recovery.

Paul C. - Area 14 Trustee, Long Island, NY

2/1/11 - 10:38 AM

Paul,

Let me start off with a few house cleaning items. First, as of Kansas City '09, there is a new section on the Rules and Procedures Manual, number 28, which states:

'Requests for straw votes for a decision on any item brought to the floor, are not allowed, as they neither adopt nor reject the item.'

Robert's Rules goes a bit further about Straw Votes:

'Straw Polls Not In Order. A motion to take an informal poll to 'test the water' is not in order because it neither adopts nor rejects a measure and hence is meaningless and dilatory.'

The big argument that the BOT faced in previous years was an attempt to throw out the Past Decisions because many of the items contained within were not consistent in how they were formed, for example motions versus straw votes. The reality is that when you see a Past Decision in that booklet that contains the phrases 'consensus' or 'straw vote', the item is meaningless.

Let me give you an example. When a motion to have all speakers at the BOT meetings who come up to the microphone wear blue hats, fails, the record does not reflect anything other than the motion failed. There is no decision that is memorialized. If someone wants to wear a blue hat, they can. No one can call for a point of order saying that we voted that item down and the speaker can't wear a blue hat. I know it's a ridiculous example, but it's going to make more sense in a moment.

The same situation under a straw vote would be very different. Upon the count of the Trustee votes, the minutes would reflect something like this: 'Board consensus is that it is NOT appropriate for BOT members to wear blue hats when speaking at the microphone.' The point is that straw votes show an opinion that doesn't necessarily exist. The opposite of what was voted might not be the correct position.

So Paul, can you make the same inferences if you eliminated your 3 past decision items listed in your submission? There is no language in the Guidance Code that prohibits such a provision of making 6 out of the 8 prior meetings to celebrate in a particular room. The Guidance Code item you cite, Article 7, Section 4, does not contain anything regarding the individual provisions for a member to be able to celebrate in a specific room.

What is necessary here is to have each room adopt a written format, as to the rules from group conscience for that room, covering how the meetings are run along with numerous other issues, including what constitutes a member of each room. We passed this in Louisville. If you need a copy of that item, let me know. If this is not done, you have the possibility of someone walking into the room for the first time and running for office, or being able to vote on group conscience issues. There should be a definition of what it takes to be a member of that particular room. It's not about shutting anyone out of the room, or restricting anyone from a meeting. That would clearly be a violation of the Unity Steps.

I am a firm believer that a member who is assigned a sponsor should only get one, or two, from the room in which that member has 'put his/her roots down'. It requires a commitment that the member will call that one room his/her 'home room'. It's not a life commitment, because it can change if there are problems for the member in that particular room. I'm not saying that this should be the only meeting the member should attend, but that room should be a priority. In order to be a member of this room, the person should declare this, and should be prepared to abide by the room's home room requirements. If the definition for this is clearly in place and the member who wants to celebrate doesn't meet the requirements, then it is not the room that is at fault, but the member's non-compliance with group conscience, specifically regarding the ability to celebrate in that specific room.

In my home room, we do not have any such problems, because it is known by all and in our written format. When it comes to calling in the calendar to Intergroup, we ask those members who appear to qualify for an anniversary if they are going to celebrate with us or another room. If they don't meet the room's requirement, they are advised of that well in advance of the calendar posting deadline.

The bottom line is that until the Guidance Code is specific about this provision regarding actual celebrations within the individual rooms, it is the group conscience of the room that takes precedent. To answer your questions:

1. The member has the right to 'request' to celebrate in any room of their choosing, but the room's decision, hopefully based on written group conscience, should prevail.
2. The room holding the celebration should be responsible for notifying Intergroup or the Calendar Coordinator
3. The room holding the celebration has the obligation to purchase pins/medallions, or course, unless otherwise stated in the room

format.

I hope what I have written sheds some light on the issue. Having said that, we do have about a month left for the addition of new agenda items for the Cherry Hill agenda. Maybe Area 14 should come up with something that makes these situations more of a black and white issue.

David M. - Area 12, New Jersey

2/2/11 - 8:34 AM

David, thank you for the informative posting regarding the subject and the issue of voting (consensus or straw) under the Past Trustee Decisions. I appreciate the explanation regarding voting and Roberts Rules, I see the problem with how straw voting on a specific issues can cause a problem and are out of order. I also do certainly appreciate your reminder of the need for room guidelines in "written format". A very important tool to provide Unity and structure in any room. I do look forward to that new literature being applied.

I would be interested to hear of any examples from your room, as well as others, on any "written format" or "guidelines" regarding additional criteria for celebrating in a particular room (outside or in addition to of the GC statement of 39 meetings minimum.)

I do stand by my belief that if we diverge from sticking strictly to the requirements of the GC on this issue (even if imposing only stricter rules), we risk the ability for personalities to govern something as important the recognition and celebratation of one's abstinence.

I understand each room is different in terms of general accepted "room conscience" guidelines and know all of these rooms on LI work quite well, despite any differences. However, these sort of rules would allow a room to have differing standards with respect to a very fundamental GC issue; as to what is required for recognition of achievement in the GA Program and Fellowship. This can easily become an issue that affects GA as whole.

I will consider submitting an agenda item to add language to the GC not allowing a GA room to have stricter guidelines pertaining to pinnings and celebrating successive anniversaries than what is already contained therein. I'll post it to the poll and see what the thinking is amongst the Trustees (that do vote, at least).

Going back to the issue of the "straw voted" or "consensus" items in the Past Trustee Decisions, as we know our Trustee Responsibilities include item #3: Uphold the Guidance Code, and all decisions made by the Board of Trustees (not fulfilling this affects G.A. as a whole).

I am now concerned that the posting or publishing of these votes as part of Past Trustee Decisions is misleading and misrepresents what constitutes "all decisions made by the Board of Trustees". What am I to uphold with respect to Trustee Decisions? Is it just the decisions that state "board consensus" or "straw vote" that we are not to uphold? This should be clarified and the posted Past Trustee Decisions should come with a disclaimer.

I found the Past Trustee Decisions informative and guiding. My general opinion on this is I think there should be some mechanism for Trustees to hold a set of "Rulings" or "Decisions" that compliment the Guidance Code and can be used for further guidance on perhaps more specific issues than what the GC or other literature would include. Not sure if this could work within Roberts Rules.

I appreciate the discussion and hope to hear from other Trustees, as well.

Thanks

Paul C. - Area 14, Long Island, NY

2/2/11 - 9:19 AM

Paul,

Although I could easily have this dialogue with you directly, I think it is important to air it out on the Trustee Line, especially in view of the problems with the Past Trustee Decision Booklet, which is the source of a lot of confusion for many Trustees and members alike.

Responding in kind to your points, first, I think that much of the efforts of the BOT for voting in favor of new literature, either approved or appropriate, gets lost at the conferences, as very little of it appears in the rooms subsequent to their approvals. The piece that was approved about written room formats is going into the Group Handbook, but will only be there when the next printing is done. Who knows when that will be. Did the Trustees come back from the meeting in which it was approved and distribute it to all the rooms in their areas? I gave up handicapping when I came into GA in 1988, but I would venture a guess that few rooms know about this significant change.

I have sent you an email, under separate cover, with the room format from my home room. I hope you find it helpful, as we have taken all the subjectivity out of how a meeting runs and all the procedures we follow. This eliminates personalities, unless there is a new issue that needs to be decided by the room. When that happens, we have a format meeting, and the results of group conscience, providing it doesn't violate the Guidance Code, get added to the written format. By the way, we have a very specific provision about the requirements to celebrate in my home room.

Celebrations are a very personal thing and nobody wants to tell that person that they can't celebrate, but what do you do if someone contacts your room Secretary 2 weeks ahead of a day that this person wants to celebrate? You have no other plans for that date. Do you say yes or no? A celebration of an anniversary is a special event and should be shared with people who know the person and have seen the person give a commitment to that room. That is my personal feeling and it is not written anywhere in GA literature. My answer is no, because the members of my home room have decided they don't want this type of situation. If you are having a format meeting, should this same person who has never been to your room be allowed to vote on things that affect your room? I say no. Should that same person be allowed to run for an office in your room? I say no. That's because a member of the room should be defined. Don't confuse that with the requirement for being a member of GA. Nobody should be turned away from attending any room, or from giving therapy. Group conscience is important, but should take a subordinated position if it comes close to violating the Guidance Code.

I understand the differences between the rooms that you speak of and how it might affect GA as a whole. It is a valid argument and reinforces the need for more clarity from the BOT. Just keep in mind that the current provision just speaks to what it takes to celebrate, it doesn't deal with where and how, etc. Nobody is going to deny a member their anniversary date, but the other issues I mentioned are crucial to sort out. Then there is the problem of rooms feeling obligated to purchase pins and medallions for the celebrants when the room treasuries might not be able to support it. Those are secondary points, but part of the thinking.

The straw votes are absolutely confusing for many. No disrespect intended toward you, but you based your initial premises on 3 of those decisions. Many Trustees carry those straw votes into the rooms and tell the members that these are the decisions of the BOT, when they are clearly not. It points to a lot of misinformation. Here is something to really mess up your head. I have found many of the items posted in that booklet to be misquoted from the actual minutes of those meetings. Oh boy, more problems.

Paul, it sounds like you might want to request the Chair to form a new committee to clean up the Past Trustee Decisions booklet, so that there are no points of confusion. Hope this helps you and others.

David M. - Area 12, New Jersey

2/2/11 - 1:58 PM

After reading both Paul & David's posting to the current Trustee Line, I would like you remind people that I have posted an agenda item for the Cherry Hill Trustee Meeting, under New Business #8..

. "Establish a new Board of Trustees listing on "Past Trustees Motions". All agenda items that receive a motion and are passed that don't have a designated destination in GA literature, will become part of the Past Trustee's Motions. The Executive Board of the Board of Trustees will have the right to add items to the Past Trustees Motions at its discretion. Said listing will be posted on the Trustee website, and updated after each Trustee conference"

Hopefully it will pass and then we will no longer have a Past Trustees Decisions that contains, Straw Vote items, which by the way we have not updated this Booklet since the Fall of 2006, it will only contain items that are done by motions only, no more options.

Joe B. - 6C, North & South Carolina

Updating the ISO Website

2/5/11 - 2:26 PM

Hi All,

This past week, I have spoken to 2 people who went on vacation and decided to go to a GA Meeting. They went to the ISO Website, found the meeting they wanted to go to and then went to the meeting. One person was a new person in program and the second was a member with many years of abstinence and recovery.

Unfortunately, both had the same result. In one case, the meeting was closed and in the second case, the meeting day was changed.

I am requesting that people reading this take a few minutes to look at their local meeting list on the ISO Website and take the necessary action to update them if need be.

I understand that mistakes can and do happen, but the thought of a new person (or a traveling member who needs a meeting) going to a listed meeting on the ISO Website that no longer exists is very disturbing to me.

Thank you.

Tom Z. - Area 14, Long Island, NY

2/20/11 - 5:23 PM

Tom,

It's getting to the point where we collectively become compulsive 'lazy people'. Where are the Trusted Servants in each area who should be reviewing the ISO website? I believe it is incumbent on someone in each area to take on this responsibility to make sure the local area meeting lists agree with the ISO site's listing of the meetings.

We talk about helping the compulsive gambler who still suffers. It makes for a flashy statement of how concerned we all are about them, yet we ignore the very basics of what foundation work needs to be in place to make helping the compulsive gambler a reality. I have learned over my years in the Fellowship, that a situation only becomes a problem for us when it affects us each individually. Think about that for a moment. The Board of Trustees spends most of its efforts combating problems that have already come up. It seems we are always trying to maintain damage control to make sure the same situation doesn't happen again.

However, how many times have we heard members, trusted servants and Trustees repeat these nauseating words... 'If it isn't broke, don't fix it'. This is all too familiar from people who don't want to think ahead to prevent problems like this meeting list situation. I hate to say it, but maybe it needs an agenda item for Cherry Hill. That's right GA...behind the curve, once again.

David M. - Area 12, New Jersey

GamAnon and the Quest for Clarity
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2/7/11 - 7:20 PM

To all my Brothers and Sisters,

I have been reading with much interest all of the recent posts regarding Gam-Anon. Should we include them in our steps, how much should we support them, are they an outside enterprise, are combined GA/Gam-Anon meetings violating the guidance code, etc. Let me say first that I appreciate

everyone's opinion on this issue. Gam-Anon has obviously helped a lot of people, and no doubt has saved many marriages and other family relationships. I believe Gam-Anon is an invaluable asset to those that attend that fellowship and probably to the GA members to which they are related or support.

After reading all of the posts, it is obvious that this is a "hot-button" issue, and there is a lot of passion on both sides. It seems that this topic will most likely dominate the Cherry Hill BOT meeting. This is not necessarily a bad thing, because of the afore mentioned passion, and also because I believe it is time to put this issue to rest once and for all (at least in theory). Before I go on, let me state that when someone expresses to me their honest thoughts on an issue, and in that process does not attack me or my opinions personally, it is impossible to offend me. I hope that others reading this feel the same way, as I am sure my opinions will be the opposite of many of my Brothers and Sisters.

Since this is such an important issue, and I have had very little experience with Gam-Anon, and I really did not have a solid opinion yet, I decided to re-read all of the posts, really think about what this all means, and most importantly, did some research by studying the Gam-Anon website. And before I begin quoting from the Gam-Anon website, let me assure all those reading this that I read all the information provided, and did not cherry-pick the items that seemed to support my position and leave out other items that would not support it. I tried to convey the pertinent information regarding this issue that I read from the exact words put forth from the very organization we are discussing.

Since I am on the subject of their website, let me start there.

On the Gam-Anon website, under the heading "About Gam-Anon":

Gam-Anon's purpose is three-fold: to learn acceptance and understanding of the gambling illness; to use the program and its problem solving suggestions as aids in rebuilding OUR lives (caps added by me), and upon our own recovery, to give assistance to those who suffer.

This wording seems to express that Gam-Anon is about helping their members, just as GA is about helping our members.

Under the heading "Suggestions for the Newcomer":

10: Gamblers Anonymous is a program for the compulsive gambler. Loved ones should not interfere.

14: Do take an honest inventory of YOUR character defects and work on them. (caps in their original text).

Sound familiar? Seems that that are suggesting to stay out of our business and take care of their own character defects. To me, that is clearly what GA is also all about.

After reading the above, it seems obvious that Gam-Anon is about helping themselves and others who suffer from the same problems. Yes, Gam-Anon would not exist if not for compulsive gamblers, but that fact is beside the point. They wish to help themselves, just as we strive to help ourselves.

Now, let me turn to Gamblers Anonymous.

Unity step 5 states that "GA has but one primary purpose - to carry its message to the compulsive gambler who still suffers". ONE primary purpose. Therefore, all our efforts should work to that end.

Unity step 6 states that "GA ought never endorse, finance or lend the Gamblers Anonymous name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property or prestige divert us from our primary purpose". I have heard it argued that Gam-Anon is related to GA. Fine, I will accept that. However, the step is very clear on this point. "related facility or outside enterprise". Gam-Anon is both. Therefore, if we do any of the things listed in this step, we will be diverted from our primary purpose. If we can't work towards our primary purpose, then we have no purpose.

These two steps alone(which by the way are very similar to the original AA wording, which we all know, or should know, came from the blood, sweat, tears and much trial and error of that organization) should be enough to put

this issue to rest. (By the way, I am in no way endorsing doing things the AA way. We are NOT AA, we are GA, with our own way of doing things in manners that work for us. I was just using them for reference as to the origin of our program).

But if more reasoning is needed, consider this: Poll question 14, which asks in a very direct manner if the members of the BOT would be in favor of adding Gam-Anon to Unity step 6. The answer so far is overwhelmingly no.

There are many other things I could write in support of my opinion, but you are probably already tired of reading this, and I really think no more needs to be said. I understand the passion of those that want to fold Gam-Anon into GA. Their hearts are in the right place as they most likely have family that has been helped by Gam-Anon. But if we are really "Gamblers Anonymous", we need to stay that way and resist including any other outside enterprises into our fellowship. Again, we are GA, not AA, NA, OA, SA, or any other A's. Those programs have absolutely no bearing on what is right for us. Yes, feelings will be hurt, but by no means intentionally (I would hope). It will take a lot of work to remove Gam-Anon from all of our literature. So what, if it is important, then the hard work will be well worth it. Let's get back to our primary purpose and carry the message. Let's continue to uphold the sacred (yes, I said sacred) tenants of the program that saved our lives. Let's get on with RECOVERY.

Your Brother in Recovery,
Levi B. - Area 2, Northern California

2/8/11 - 3:50 PM
Dear Fellow Trustees,

Levi, you listed some very important facts about this "hot issue". I too have read the posts regarding GA and Gam-Anon and I agree with you 100%.

I believe it's time that we (GA members) start loving ourselves again and not continue feeling guilty for what we did to our families. We need to make amends for how we hurt our families, lied to them and did so many other things that brought them pain. But changing our literature to include Gam-Anon is never going to remove the pain and hurt we've caused them.

I would hope that the Cherry Hill Conference trustee meeting can focus on GA and what's best for "our members and organization" and not weigh down our meeting by trying to combine GA with Gam-Anon. And most importantly, we need to remember "principles before personalities." It is what it is! Two separate organizations each working our own recovery.

Thank You,
Jo K. - Area 8D, St. Louis, MO

2/21/11 - 4:12 PM

As a longtime member of Gamblers Anonymous, I did not find it necessary to go to the GamAnon website to find out what they are all about. By having a relationship with GamAnon, are we endorsing, financing or lending the Gamblers Anonymous name? To endorse means to approve of or support. This is not causing any problems, to the best of my knowledge, of money, property or prestige in any way, shape or form over the many years of the two separate entities cooperation, and it is not diverting us from our primary purpose for either fellowship.

Almost since the inception of the Gamblers Anonymous program we as a fellowship have obviously approved of GamAnon as it appears in our literature. We have worked in conjunction with GamAnon in many areas on many occasions, with International and Mini Conferences requiring joint signatures or GamAnon signatures on conference bank accounts. Why is this so if we are not somehow in a relationship? All this has worked well for many years and has helped both the Gamblers Anonymous and GamAnon fellowships. We have the same basic goals, although we are separate entities. What are we afraid of? What really has to be drastically changed? In our Gamblers Anonymous Group Handbook on the inside of the back page - next to last sentence - "GamAnon is several years old, and is not directly affiliated with Gamblers Anonymous, though cooperation is essential and consistent." ESSENTIAL in the dictionary I looked at is defined as Indispensable; most important; pure; being of the best kind. CONSISTENT is defined as compatible; a whole made up of harmonious parts. I couldn't have

defined it better! In our Gamblers Anonymous Pressure Relief Group Meeting Pamphlet and Financial Forms on page 1, 3rd paragraph, 2nd sentence - "There should be at least one other Gamblers Anonymous member and a GamAnon member present " Lastly, In our Gamblers Anonymous Pressure Relief Group Meeting Handbook, page 2, Members of a pressure relief group committee, sentence # 7 "It is strongly suggested that a GamAnon member participate in this meeting."

Respectfully submitted for your consideration,
Bob W. - Area 12, New Jersey

2/28/11 - 1:12 PM

Start loving myself? Are you kidding me? I loved only myself and gambling for a long time and nearly destroyed myself and my family.

Feeling guilty about how I disrespected, neglected and infected my family? I don't dwell on feeling guilty. But I will never forget what I did to myself and my family, because if I do forget it's not if I will go back to gambling it's just when!

Changing our literature to exclude Gam-anon, in the few places it appears, is going to be costly and I'm not talking about money.

Gam-anon and gam-ateen saved my family and taught them how to deal with me.

Ronny W. - Area 17, Connecticut, Current Trustee

Past Trustee Decisions and the Guidance Code

2/10/11 - 6:11 PM

Past Trustee Decisions/Guidance Code

This submission is not intended to be a history lesson or make waves, or offend any other members' opinions. I do believe that more awareness regarding our Gamblers Anonymous Fellowship History would benefit all members of the BOT as they discuss new and old issues and how those decisions might affect Gamblers Anonymous as a whole. The BOT in the past made two critical negative decisions without consulting or seeking opinions from individual GA groups and their members. Those decisions were the beginning of the move for Trustee supremacy (of course, justified by good intentions) over the thoughts and opinions of the membership who elected them not only to serve as Trustees, but more importantly, "Trusted Servants" to serve the rights of the membership.

The first decision was made at the Browns National Conference in 1979. This decision violated Guidance Code, Article VI, Members, Section 1--The decision stated:" no member, no group, no intergroup, can instruct a National Trustee how to vote on any issue before the Board" It should be noted that Past Trustee decision was chosen to be added to the Guidance Code in 2007 as the only Past Trustee Decision (even though it violated the Guidance Code) they found worthy of addition to the Guidance Code. The issue was defeated by a slim margin 65 yea to 35 nay votes. The issue did not meet the 2/3rd majority necessary for passage The concern I felt at that time questioned was how and on what basis 65 Trustees acting as guardians of the Twelve Steps of Recovery and Unity would try to reinstate a decision made 28 years earlier that was a violation of the Guidance Code. Did the BOT members in 1979 consult the principles of the Fellowship in making that previous decision? Did the BOT in 2007 seek to consult Fellowship Principles in deciding to bring that past decision back to life?

The second equally serious effort to lessen the principles of Fellowship occurred in 1983 or 1984 when the BOT again on their own volition (see 1979 decision) removed the principle of the word "suggested" from the preamble to the Twelve Steps of Recovery. The original wording was "These are the Steps which are suggested as a Program of Recovery." The removal of the word "suggested" was a serious blow to Fellowship Principles as the Trustees at that time showed their willingness to ignore the thoughts of the membership as a whole. That attitude for some Trustees continues to this time. The Trustees endorsed the idea that the BOT has authority and command over individual groups and individual members without their

permission. The Fellowship Principles that protect the freedom and equality of all GA members deserved a better fate. There can be no justification to further weaken the Spiritual Principles of Kindness, Generosity, Honesty, and Humility. Those principles in our GA literature are described as the highest and finest qualities of the human mind and apply to all GA members including the Board of Trustees and Board of Regents.

Three major items in the Trustee Guidelines worthy of discussing for clarity, intent, and execution are,

Item #2. Be a living example of the precepts of Gamblers Anonymous and personally work the Steps of Recovery and Unity.

Item #3. Uphold the Guidance Code and all decisions made by the BOT. (not fulfilling this affects Gamblers Anonymous as a whole.)

Item #17. Bring all upcoming agenda items to the attention of all groups in your area prior to all BOT meetings for input that will guide all the trustees from your area at BOT meetings.

Our GA literature states “The “Ultimate Authority” is the concept of “Group Conscience” and in that context the Guidance Code is subordinate to “Group Conscience” and the Guidance Code is subordinate to the Spiritual Principles of the Twelve Steps of Recovery and Twelve Steps of Unity that guide all our recoveries..

The Guidance Code in reality suggests a format or roadmap for all Gamblers Anonymous members’ conduct in the Fellowship including the BOT, BOR, and ISO. There are specific principles in the Guidance Code that all GA members, GA groups, and GA Service Boards are asked to honor. Our GA literature and Guidance Code contain the principles we need for continued Recovery and Unity which are paramount to the welfare of ourselves and our Fellowship. The Guidance Code is a tool---not a sledgehammer!

The Guidance Code is not to be construed as a legal document. Therefore, it does not represent legality in any form. The main purpose is to explain the aims, purpose, and service structure of the Fellowship. It was never intended to enforce any authority.

The Guidance Code cannot override Unity Steps One, Two, Four, or Nine. The Guidance Code is a valuable tool but it should not be used as a sledgehammer particularly in casting possible threats of consequences that include punishment for GA members. We as individuals, or as groups should look for ways to attract more members—not for ways to expel members, punish members, or turn away anyone who desires to stop gambling which is the only requirement for membership in Gamblers Anonymous. We together, in common purpose, are a Fellowship. We need each other for all our mutual recoveries. There should be a reasonable discussion about these issues without emotional arguments breeding disunity.

Gamblers Anonymous is a Fellowship based on Democratic and Spiritual Principles. Gamblers Anonymous is not a Corporation that replaces the concept of Fellowship. The mantra of Corporation or jurisdiction over our Fellowship by some members of the BOT is opposing the Spiritual Principles of Fellowship. Those members of The Board of Trustees who propose corporate rules and regulations as replacement for Program Principles cannot take place unless a majority of current Board of Trustee members allow that to happen. The foundation of Fellowship cannot be allowed to crumble under the weight of personal opinions. We, as individual members including past and current members of the Board of Trustees have the responsibility to seek what is BEST for our Fellowship in continuing to be a beacon of HOPE in the darkness that is compulsive gambling.

Yours in Recovery, Unity, Faith, and Hope for the purpose of our Fellowship,
George W. - Past Trustee Area 12, residing now in Area 16.

2/19/11 - 5:50 PM

It amazes me that there is so much focus spent on past trustee decisions. Every vote taken at a trustee meeting is a decision that was made in the past. Every word changed in our literature is a decision made by the trustees and it all happened in the past. The problem is when you declare a decision made in the past as current.

For instance the wording on page 17 has been changed numerous times since I have been in the fellowship which leads me to believe it has happened before I got here. If I take the minutes from a past trustee meeting I will no

doubt find that the correct wording as of that vote on page 17 is different that it states in the current combo book but to argue that the current book is wrong would be ludicrous. Decisions have been changed. The most current is the correct decision.

The other question I have is what method is used to find out what the fellowship as a whole (group conscience) thinks about any issue or wording other than a vote of the trustees? I have not heard of one. If there is no other method in place to get the opinion of Gamblers Anonymous members, how could anyone possibly know that the Board of Trustees made a decision that differs from the group conscience as suggested by George W. Was every current member telephoned? Can you speak every language currently spoken in the fellowship?

Carol K. - Area 9, Michigan

2/20/11 - 6:04 PM

On your soapbox about the Guidance Code and the Spiritual Principles, once again, eh? Why don't I nip this in the bud. It's been 32 years since the 1979 decision to, how did you put it... 'move for Trustee supremacy over the thoughts and opinions of the membership who elected them not only to serve as Trustees, but more importantly, Trusted Servants to serve the rights of the membership.'

Where do you get this stuff? You continually write as if you are quoting chapter and verse from our literature. Maybe it's time you starting citing your exact sources, because you may actually have some people who read your postings think that you have everything authenticated. The fact is, embellishment is a long suit for you.

Having said that, maybe it's time you stop complaining about that item and all the 'critical negative decisions' and right the wrong that those miscreants passed in Browns in 1979. If you are so hell-bent on pointing it out along with all the deleterious aspects of that decision, then submit an item to either reverse it, modify it, or whatever will make you sleep better at night. As they say in Cape Kennedy...Shoot or get off the Pad.

The same goes for your disparaging remarks about removing the word 'suggested' from the Program Of Recovery. Again, either get over it or do something to change it. Speaking for myself, suggested should not appear anywhere except for where it does right now. Suggested meeting procedures and suggested room formats. The program is the program and it is not suggested, nor should it be. We are compulsive gamblers and if you give us the 'out' by saying that it is suggested, nobody is going to do anything they should do. Suggested is about taking your will back and ignoring Recover Step 3. You basically give carte blanche to any member who is not doing the 'right thing' to say... 'stick it in your ear...this is only a suggested program.' Maybe that's how you run your program, but the people that I know in this program follow the Recovery Steps as a way of life that is not optional.

Group conscience is exercised every time the Board of Trustees convenes. If an area does not exercise its rights to indicate to the Trustee how it feels then shame on the area and its members. In fact, if you read the Red Book under Unity Step 2, you will see this: "We shall be held responsible if we elect irresponsible Trusted Servants who cannot serve the group in the manner determined by the 'Ultimate Authority' which is the spiritual concept of 'Group Conscience.'" Why didn't you cite that part of the Unity Step? If you don't like how your Trustee is acting or voting, then don't re-elect that Trustee. But that's not how it's done, because electing a Trustee is mostly about popularity, not whether or not the Trustee can or has performed well at the job. Don't get me started - that's a whole different subject.

The Board of Trustees is not abandoning any Spiritual Principles, but it is plugging many holes that exist in the Guidance Code, By-Laws, our literature and numerous other things. It is your opinion that the Guidance Code is overriding Unity Steps 1, 2, 4 and 9. It represents structure for the Fellowship, lest we dissolve into a group of individual power mongers who control their areas. People who do what they want without any regard for structure, which includes using non-approved literature and disavowing any responsibility to follow the Guidance Code, built on the concept of Group Conscience. GA should be reasonably the same where ever you go. You advocate anarchy. Strength and control by the individuals. I think I have said it before, but if that's a problem for you, then maybe GA is not the right

Fellowship for you.

I love this Fellowship. After 22+ years, it keeps on giving me the structure to continue my recovery one day at a time. Stop trying to turn it into a worthless dish rag. It's put up of shut up time. Either get agenda items in for Cherry Hill to change all the seriously wrong things that you maintain have happened to this Fellowship, or keep your sermons to your own area. I'm sure the members on your area bask in the sunshine of living in the world of what you think GA should be about.

David M. - Area 12, New Jersey

2/23/11 - 12:43 PM

David;

Is it really your position that anybody disagreeing with you should leave our fellowship? I am serious about this question. I find little in your philosophy or understanding of the fellowship that I agree with, but I still think of you as a brother and a fellow member of GA. I do believe that your intent is to improve GA; I just believe that most of your methods are wrong and in fact have retarded our growth. I find George's writings refreshing and relevant; they remind me of the things that my sponsor, Dan B., taught me many years ago. I believe that education is the path to enlightenment, and that George's writing will and can help educate new members about our history. With that education, they might just agree with some of us that the steps are in fact suggested, and the steps must take precedence over the guidance code. No amount of votings by a few elected trusted servants will ever change that. Your position is that if the groups cared about these things, then they would have acted. I believe they cannot care about these things, until they know about them.

Paul N. - Area 2, Northern California

2/23/11 - 1:39 PM

Paul,

I like having the opportunity to say that you are right. You are right that there is little you and I agree upon, but that is an old song you and I have sung in 2-part disharmony. However, I don't want you to come down with a bout of 'George W-itis' and start making statements out of context, which you did above. You could have tied that statement into what I wrote in the next to last paragraph with my initial response to George.

What I dealt with was about how people do what they want in GA and their area and ignore the Guidance Code because they do what they want to do. For those people, making this a 'suggested program' is very convenient. Such philosophy and application is detrimental to GA as a whole. I won't mention a name, but if anyone feels that way, then yes, maybe they should find another program to help them with their gambling problem. The reason is that such people are like a cancer in the midst of those who want to genuinely deal with their problem. Part of that is structure. Spirituality by itself does not heal all wounds.

You did catch me by surprise with your assertion that most of my methods are wrong and have retarded our growth. You give me way too much credit. That's a new one for me. Maybe that could be taken as a compliment, but when you start agreeing with me, then I might just be headed toward a death spiral in this Fellowship. But as they say, opinions are like excuses, everyone has one. Maybe you should re-read my last posting.

The message is that I am tired of people who complain about how the program was negatively impacted by the decisions of the Board of Trustees 10 to 20+ years ago. I don't like a lot of things that happen in GA, but if I feel that way, I try to make a change that is hopefully better for the Fellowship. If the Trustees agree, the items get passed and the Fellowship flourishes from having exercised Group Conscience, irrespective of what the item is. If the items fail, then I need to 'move on', one of your famous philosophies. See, that's now 2 things we agree on. By the way, this process goes for anyone who doesn't care for how things happen in the Fellowship.

The people that whine about what happened in the past without so much as an attempt to change what is perceived to be wrong, are also damaging the Fellowship as a whole. True, you align yourself with George and his thinking,

but I disagree with his modus operandi the same as I do with you. There are lots of people like that in the Fellowship. However, they don't complain about it and do nothing. If it bothers them, they have the stones to try and affect a change.

I threw down the gauntlet with George. Either stand up and try to make the changes, living with whatever the outcome is, or stop whining.

David M. - Area 12, New Jersey

Do You Have a Desire to Stop Gambling? I Don't Know.

2/18/11 - 12:57 AM

Hello Trustees,

My name is Ara and I am a past trustee. I had a situation happen in one of our rooms earlier this week and would like some input on how you would handle this...I would like to preface this by saying most meetings in Los Angeles are open and non-GA members are not allowed to talk. If they have any questions, they may listen then ask their questions after the meeting. That said, we had a young new member at our meeting earlier this week and he was asked to share, he spoke about his recent wins and losses with much detail on dollar amounts...One member (almost 30 years, past trustee and Board of Regent) interrupted the young speaker and asked "Do you have a desire to stop gambling". The response was "I am unsure, don't know". So that member said "I object to your speaking unless you say you have a desire to stop gambling".

A few of us were upset and said let the new member speak, maybe he will realize that he is a compulsive gambler and wants to stop gambling...The young man spoke for another two minutes then finished. My question is how your area handles such situations or as a trustee, what would you do if this happened in your room, or meeting.

Thanks,

Ara H. - Area 1, Los Angeles

2/18/11 - 4:56 PM

Dear Ara,

I want to respond to your experience with the new member who indicated he was not sure about his desire to stop gambling. The fact that he was at your meeting and even spoke in therapy is a starting point that could be seen as a positive step in the direction of this young man finding the desire to stop gambling. My experience over 45 years of being a member of GA is that the vast majority of new members come for help in a state of mental, emotional, physical, spiritual, and financial bankruptcy. Many come to GA because of pressure from a spouse, a parent, an employer, or judicial authority. I believe that most new members have little or no desire to stop gambling at their first GA meeting. They come confused, panicky, frightened, and unsure of what to do or what they will find at their first GA meeting.

The development of a true desire to stop gambling comes with our program suggestion to new members to give GA 90 days of commitment, to regularly attend meetings, to work the program in their daily affairs, to use the telephone list calling other members between meetings, to not gamble on anything, to encourage the new member after a period of time attending meetings to have a pressure group meeting, etc.

We, as involved members in recovery, having ourselves gone through years of pain, misery, suffering, and debt, are more aware that we are dealing with a destructive illness and a baffling, insidious compulsive addiction. We, as older members (successful members in fellowship and recovery) should have the tolerance and compassion to understand that this was a confused young man speaking of his wins and losses with dollar amounts thrown in for good measure. My sponsor told me, "George, if you won a million you would have to lose a million plus." That statement of reality got my attention. The true desire to stop gambling is born and nurtured at our recovery meetings (For some it takes more time than others.) as we share our experience, strength, and hope with new members and with all members.

Many of the most dedicated and involved members of our fellowship today arrived at their first meeting without a clue of what a desire to stop gambling meant---but with time and diligent effort discovered their principled, unyielding desire to stop gambling. I can not sit in judgment of another member's desire to stop gambling, but I will always support and encourage any member to surrender to the GA way of life. The choice they make will determine the question of desire or no desire to stop gambling. To stop a new member from speaking (while they are speaking) because he or she was not sure of having a desire to stop gambling would eliminate most new members from our GA recovery meetings. That would be a death knell for fellow sufferers who could develop into great members and contributors to our Fellowship.

Yours in Recovery, Unity, Faith, Hope, Compassion, and Tolerance,
George W. - Past Trustee Area 12, residing now in Area 16.

2/19/11 - 2:37 PM

Dear Ara,

It sounds to me as if the person attending the meeting as a potential member was being very honest. Personally I think it was rude of the member who interrupted him. It could have been just the moment he realized he did have a desire to stop gambling. Personally, if I was chairing I would let him speak and when he was done I would invite him back stating, please give the program 90 days, speak with other members after the meeting, and hopefully you will soon have the desire to stop gambling.

Sometimes people interpret the "desire" to stop gambling with the "ability" to stop gambling. Many new members I have spoken with over the years have done just that when they answered that they weren't sure they had the desire to stop gambling. The desire was there but they were afraid they didn't have the ability.

If I was really honest at my first meeting I am not so sure the correct answer would have been that I had a desire to stop gambling. I did have a desire to stop the pain and suffering from gambling but I still wanted to escape. I still wanted to enjoy being that big shot from time to time on the good days. Thankfully with time in the program and in recovery, today I have a desire to stop gambling.

Carol K. - Area 9, Michigan

2/20/11 - 2:00 PM

Dear Ara,

Interestingly enough I find that regardless of the amount of time or service work one puts into our program, we all earned our seats the same way. Every once in a while that shows in myself (and others) by the words or actions that we use. I find it most helpful to resort to ways in which our program has taught us to behave in response to this. Simply by living the statement, "say what you mean, mean what you say and don't say it mean" - my prayers are that this new member felt enough sense of relief and a slight bit of hope to return to his second meeting. For me, the new member is ALWAYS the most important person in the room. they give me a chance to look back at the person I was, and how by living my program, i can choose new ways of thinking and living each day.

Much prayers and peace to you in sunny california!
Jo-Jo B. - Area 3, Las Vegas

2/20/11 - 6:19 PM

Ara,

Atypical for me, I think I can keep my response short. Yes, I know, that's a shocker to everyone.

I will have to assume that the rooms in your area don't have written formats that lay out EXACTLY how things run in each of the individual rooms. Where was the Secretary of the room during this outburst? Who gives the complaining member the right to stop anyone's therapy? This was a new member and again, I have to assume that it was he first meeting. Did the 20 questions get read and answered? Where does it say that the member

must unconditionally declare that he/she has a desire to stop gambling when first coming to a meeting? What happened to H-O-W? If the member who objected didn't like the answer, then that member should have had the right to ask the new member to step outside when giving therapy.

It sounds to me like the almost 30 year member needs a good old-fashioned East Coast Sitdown with some other members to work out this behavior. Again, all this becomes moot if it is covered in the room's written format.

In my area, anyone who has a problem with a member, directs the issue to the Chair or the Secretary. Too many people take on those roles with a care free attitude and this is the result of that. Members get to dominate the room by doing and saying whatever they want. In my room, we say not to mention amounts of money during one's therapy, as we are here to relate to one another and not compare. When someone does say something like 'I made a \$500 bet on...' the Secretary or the Chair for the night, taps the desk and gently reminds the speaker that we don't mention amounts of money. There is no major disruption, such as you outlined by that one member, but that is because we have a written room format.

My suggestion is that if your room doesn't have a written format, to then have a group conscience meeting and put one together. Amend it every quarter, if necessary. If you do have a written format, then have a group conscience meeting and add something in to cover this subject.

David M. - Area 12, New Jersey

2/21/11 - 8:47 PM

First I would like to thank George W, Carol K ,Jo Jo B and David M for posting their thoughts on my question. It is much appreciated. In response to David's questions, Yes most meetings in our area do have a format explaining how to run a meeting including the meeting in question, and we follow these as close as possible. The new member was asked the 20 questions like all new members are. Then they are asked to share what brought them to the meeting...As for our secretary, well he was out of town on a business trip and had asked a dependable member to open up for him. We had a strong chair person run the meeting that night and I would like to say he did a good job of preventing the situation getting out of hand and we got back on point and the meeting resumed and concluded as it had for the past twenty years. A few members spoke to the new member after the meeting and urged him to come back and not be discouraged from what happened.

The situation is being addressed and we have a group conscience scheduled for next week to discuss this situation, put something in our format to avoid such situations again.

I also wanted to say that we do not speak about dollar amounts of bets in our rooms. However, once a new member comes in, we do not stop him in the middle of his therapy to tell him not to talk about dollars. However if he or she returns to meetings, the member usually figures out and stops talking about the size of his bets.

I would like to thank everyone again for your help.

Taking a day at a time,
Ara H. - Area 1, Los Angeles, California

Video Conferencing - Yes, No, Maybe?

2/21/11 - 4:31 PM

I am a member of the Video Conferencing committee. Prior to sending this, I talked with the other members; they were okay with me posting. I am looking forward to opening our BOT meetings to viewing by our International Brother and Sister Trustees (if approved). What an awesome opportunity to reach out and give those who can't travel to North America, the opportunity to see what we do. Maybe it will give them the extra push to try and make the next conference.

Without going into a lot of details, as they will be listed in our committee report, I was wanting to getting the pulse of the group. Are you favorable to video conferencing? Are there any concerns you may have about this topic? I

would like to hear from you.

Thanks,
Cathy K. - Area 8D, St. Louis, Missouri

2/23/11 - 9:52 PM
Good evening, Cathy:

When I first saw the presentation in Louisville that Andy R initiated, I must admit I was impressed, although I'm not 'up' on all this new technology that's readily available these days. What a wonderful opportunity it would be for those overseas who are unable to attend to be a part of the overall Fellowship. I would assume that all provisions for privacy will be in place by the time we have it up and running.

Yes, there is that downside that some will not travel because of the video conferencing capability, but who are we to judge? They may not be in a position to afford the expense of travel, etc. I think that those who want to come - to be a part of the process and to renew friendships - will be here regardless of the circumstances. I also agree with you that perhaps just a brief glimpse of the procedure and camaraderie might be enough to spur someone to making a greater effort to attend the next conference; at least one would hope so. Cathy - I think there are more pluses than minuses - so I say, carry on with your good work and proposal. Let's think on the positive side of the opportunity instead of the negative. In my opinion, we should take advantage of every and any opportunity to include more members in the operations of Gamblers Anonymous - as a whole.

With love, faith, hope and trust in our Fellowship,
Linda S. - Area 3A Trustee, San Diego

2/24/11 - 7:17 PM
Dear Cathy,

You pose an interesting question in your recent posting about the method used (other than telephoning every member) to communicate with GA groups who make up area Intergroups and their area membership. A method is outlined in Trustee guideline #17. I believe it states (this is not verbatim) that the Trustees discuss prior to the actual Trustee Meeting important upcoming agenda issues, particularly issues that affect Gamblers Anonymous groups and GA membership as a whole. The reasoning for this conversation is to give Trustees who represent a given area a clearer vision of the group conscience and to consider the input or suggestions made by the groups who elect the Trustees to represent their rights within the Fellowship. Board of Trustee members are elected to represent the rights of the membership who elect them. Am I mistaken in that analysis?

In Article VIII Section 7 of the Guidance Code Board of Trustees it states: "The Board of Trustees primary function shall be to insure the most effective exchange of thoughts and ideas between all Gamblers Anonymous Groups and to act for our Fellowship in an official and executive capacity on all matters affecting Gamblers Anonymous as a whole.

The second method for honoring the Trustees primary function of exchanging thoughts and ideas with membership is by considering the ideas and thoughts of their area membership. How many current Trustees will meet with their Intergroups to discuss the serious issues to be decided at the upcoming Cherry Hill Trustee Meeting? I would welcome answers to this Trustee responsibility to communicate with the members they represent? Is it a reasonable responsibility to request?

In addition, Guidance Code, Article XIX. Voting, Section 2, states: "On any issue affecting Gamblers Anonymous as a whole which necessitates a vote by the Board of Trustees and/or groups the ballots will be returned in a sealed envelope to the International Executive Secretary of the ISO who will tally votes and notify each Trustee and group of the result of voting." I am not talking about word changes made in the combo book but proposed changes that would be made to the Recovery Program and Unity Program principles where the voice of the Fellowship has to be heard for their approval or their disapproval. For the Trustees to do less or not consider the voice of the membership would be a violation of the Guidance Code.

My questions are: 1- When many serious decisions have been made over the

history of the BOT that affected Gamblers Anonymous as a whole, were GA groups ever polled before those decisions were made for their thoughts, ideas, and were they given the opportunity to vote on any decision that affected the membership as a whole? 2- Do you know of any issues decided over recent years of BOT activity (including current BOT activity) where the membership had a voice or vote on how the decision being made directly affected Fellowship Principles of freedom and equality?

Those freedoms and equalities are clearly expressed in the Guidance Code, Article VI, Members, Section 1, as follows: "No one is more important in this Fellowship than the individual member. HE OR SHE HAS NO RULER OR SUPERIOR, but he or she may select a person or group of persons to represent him or her and his or her rights in the Fellowship." Is there anything unclear or ambiguous about that statement? I believe the BOT members should read the Guidance Code at all Trustee bi-annual meetings to acquaint themselves (new and old) with the reality that Gamblers Anonymous is a Fellowship based in Democratic and Spiritual Principles. To those Trustees who are suspect of the value Spiritual Principles have to achieving and maintaining recovery for all GA members then those Trustees have every right to believe as they wish but should not have the authority to mandate those personal opinions on the Fellowship of Gamblers Anonymous as a whole. The Board of Trustees will always be accountable and responsible to the membership who elects them (even if this accountability has been neglected in times past) to be "Trusted Servants."

Some Trustees have falsely accused me as I defend the Spiritual Principles of our Fellowship of promoting anarchy or being an anarchist. That accusation is a flat out lie. Anarchy is defined as "disorder, political or social, lack of government in society, a doctrine that all laws and government be abolished. Gamblers Anonymous is not associated with government in any way. Gamblers Anonymous proclaims itself as a Spiritual Fellowship and is not governed by laws, rules, or rulers. I am fighting for those Spiritual Principles to be respected and if that is my "soap box" so be it. We surrender to Fellowship Principles or we die!

I hope to hear your thoughts about these thoughts pro or con.

Yours in Recovery and Unity,
George W. - Area 16, Upstate New York, Past Trustee, Area 12

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