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## Trustee Line for March 2012

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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 3/31/12.

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### 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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**Unity Step 3**

3/3/12 - 10:21 AM

Unity Step 3 - The only requirement for Gamblers Anonymous membership is a desire to stop gambling.

Picture in your mind a pyramid, a triangle with a broad base. Now take that pyramid and turn it upside down so it is balancing on its point. Now divide the pyramid into six layers from bottom to top. Starting from the bottom and going to the top: the first layer is the International Service Office, the second layer is the Board of Regents and the Board of Trustees (BOT) Executive Committee, the third layer is the Board of Trustees, the fourth layer is Area Intergroups and Regional Service Offices, the fifth layer is all the GA groups, and at the top layer is all the individual GA members.

This was the vision of the people who originally wrote the Unity Steps, that the most authority was given to the individual members and each group below the top layer was responsible to those layers above it as stated in Unity Step 2, "Our leaders are but trusted servants, they do not govern." In my opinion, if GA were to follow this interpretation of the Unity Step, most of the Guidance Code would go away. Let me give my favorite example.

Article 7, section 4 of the Guidance Code requires a member to attend at least 39 meetings for pinning. If the only requirement for membership is a desire to stop gambling, why is the BOT dictating how many meeting a member has to attend for pinning? My home group meets on the same night as our Intergroup and I do attend another fellowship, there have been years I have not attended 39 GA meetings in a year, but I have not gambled and I have performed service for my group and GA. My group should decide if I deserve a pin or not, not the BOT. This is not something that affects GA as a whole. At the Boston conference we have four agenda items trying to wordsmith (change) the words of Article 7, section 4 to capture every exception that seems to make sense to them. I feel we are getting lost in details that should be left to the groups and we need to get our focus back to carrying our message to those who haven't found the rooms of GA yet.

Last year the BOT had to vote on removal of a Trustee because Article 8, section 4 requires a 2/3 vote at the BOT meeting. In my opinion, should be a function of Intergroup to elect and remove their trusted servants, not the BOT. But all of this may be moot for me. Last week I checked my group's attendance sheets for last year and it appears that I did not meet the requirements of Article 8, section 1. I only attended my home group 24 times and with my trips to other meetings as Trustee, I did not meet the requirement for 39 "regular" meetings last year. I did attend two international conferences and workshops,

Intergroup 11 times, one mini conference where I attended 3 workshops and presented at another, I worked on a BOT committee, served as Intergroup Recording Secretary and Trustee for Area 17. And what about open meetings, or new meetings that are not recognized by Intergroup yet? Do they count? They are not mentioned in Article 8, section 1. Is someone at Boston going to make a motion that I be removed as Trustee? I think my Intergroup would like me to stand for another term, whose vote is more important to my Area, the BOT or my Intergroup?

My point is that the BOT can get bogged down in issues that belong further up on that inverted pyramid; we cannot capture every detail and exception for issues that should be taken care of at the group or Intergroup level. A compulsive gambler is a member when they admit they have a desire to stop gambling, not because they answer 7 out of 20 questions with "yes", or attend 39 meetings in a year, or follow the Guidance Code; they are a member because they say so. Intergroup and individual meetings should determine who holds office and who gets pins, not the BOT. The BOT focus should be on giving groups the tools to carry the message to other compulsive gamblers; we should ask more of our committees on public relations, prisons, international relations and literature to reach the still suffering compulsive gambler and get them to a meeting. But that assumes that everyone agrees with the structure of the inverted pyramid envisioned by the people who wrote the Unity Steps that GA adopted. Is there some fundamental difference between compulsive gamblers and people with other additions that require turning the pyramid back over on its base? What are your thoughts?

Paul S. - Area 17, Connecticut

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3/12/12 - 9:26 AM

What a great example. I agree that we should use the inverted pyramid for 'governing' GA. Here is another example from Area 8A about why it SHOULD be this way. Our area has been wanting to find some solution to the expense of sending 2 trustees to 2 international conferences per year. We feel here that it is an unneeded and unwarranted expense, although as long as there are 2 international conferences per year, we will continue to support 2 trustees at each of these conferences. In Cherry Hill, our area requested that we send out a survey to the groups of GA to see if we were the only ones who felt this way, or if, perhaps, there were many more that felt the way we do. Keep in mind, we only requested a survey, not anything binding to the BOT if by some chance the survey came back favoring only one international conference per year. This was shot down by the BOT. Some of the excuses were that the individuals and individual groups had no idea of the work that we do or how important this work was to GA as a whole. We could never complete everything with one meeting. This isn't up to the groups...etc. etc. What I heard that day sounded more like egos talking. I do agree that what we do IS important. However, there are more economical ways to accomplish the same thing without 2 international conferences per year.

Your Sister in Recovery,  
Karen E. - Area 8A, Minnesota

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<b>GA/Gam-Anon Joint Committee</b>
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3/4/12 - 12:25 PM

I concur with those who oppose the adoption of the GA/Gam-Anon Joint International Conference Guidelines, and I feel it is important that we maintain a healthy boundary between our two organizations.

Unity Step 5 is unambiguous as to GA's mission: "Gamblers Anonymous has but one primary purpose -- to carry its message to the compulsive gambler who still suffers."

Gam-Anon is similarly clear about its reason for being: "Gam-Anon's purposes are 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 and, upon our own recovery, to give assistance to those who suffer."

Obviously, our goals are complementary. However, our work is not identical, and this is the key. This is the reason for Unity Step 6: "Gamblers Anonymous ought never endorse, finance or lend the Gamblers Anonymous name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and

prestige divert us from our primary purpose.”

When we entertain notions such as holding joint conferences, it takes little imagination to see that complications (and, very likely, problems) will naturally arise regarding money, property and prestige; and these complications will inevitably divert us from our primary purpose.

For example, Gam-Anon is not mentioned in point 17 of Appendix D of the proposed Guidelines. Appendix D pertains to hotel contracts. Point 17 concerns “Force Majeure,” a situation in which a formal Agreement between a host hotel and sponsors of a conference must be voided due to unforeseen circumstances. Point 17 states that an Agreement “may be terminated by the Hotel or Gamblers Anonymous,” but says nothing about Gam-Anon. Shouldn’t Gam-Anon have coequal rights with GA to terminate an Agreement, presuming Gam-Anon has a comparable investment and interest in a scheduled conference? Or, conversely, if negative financial ramifications result from a voided Agreement, does the wording suggest that GA alone might be required to cover any losses?

Just this semantic ambiguity, by itself, creates a hazard for misunderstandings and conflicts pertaining to money, property and prestige. And in fact, as many of us will readily recall, in the wake of the ’94 conference in Tampa, when a GA Conference Chair had misappropriated a large sum of money, it was left entirely to the GA International Service Office to make the hotel whole because only GA’s signature was on the hotel contract -- even though trusted servants for the event, who were responsible for financial controls, included members of both GA and Gam-Anon.

Ambiguity is not desirable for our purposes. Here is another example from the General Overview section of the proposed guidelines: “Workshops and activities should reflect the diversity of the members of GA and Gam-Anon and embrace all members who attend - gamblers, spouses, significant others of, parents of, children of, etc.”

The spirit of this statement is generous and well-intentioned, but clearly the foci and needs of GA members will differ from those of friends and family (particularly children!). To require that a conference’s activities should “reflect the diversity” of all these parties is to cast too wide a net and mandate a near-impossible task. The intro goes on to say: “The primary focus of a Conference is the enhancement of the fellowships as Programs of Recovery; as a vehicle for bringing experience, strength and hope to the members affected by this illness and enhancing their journey to serenity.” Certainly, members of GA and Gam-Anon are affected by the same illness, but we are affected in fundamentally different ways by the illness, and thus our respective journeys to serenity assume a differing tone and character.

Other 12 Step fellowships and their complementary “anon” fellowships, such as AA and Al-Anon, explicitly recognize, in their literature, the critical distinction between cooperation and affiliation. The A.A. Guidelines state “The Fellowships of Alcoholics Anonymous and the Al-Anon Family Groups have a unique relationship. They are naturally drawn together by their close ties. And yet the Twelve Traditions, the General Service Boards, and the General Service Conferences of both Fellowships suggest that each functions more effectively if it remains ‘separate,’ cooperating but not affiliating with the other. . . . In accordance with the Twelve Traditions, a convention would be either A.A. or Al-Anon -- not both.”

Our own Unity Step 6 states, “If we were to apply our energies toward any ‘related facilities’ would we then set aside time and attention required to share with the suffering compulsive gambler? And would we then suffer from internal strife as we argue over money, rules, requirements? Yes.”

Cooperating with Gam-Anon means to respect, appreciate and be grateful for their fellowship, and possibly to assist them occasionally in logistical, practical ways. To affiliate with Gam-Anon is to seek to blend our missions and blur distinctions between us. Ultimately, this does not serve either fellowship.

We have already blurred the boundary line between our fellowships by our frequent mentions of Gam-Anon in GA literature. Perhaps a proposal such as the Joint Conference Guidelines is an inevitable outgrowth of our laxness to date about preserving our separate identities. It is understandable, given that so many of our loved ones are members of Gam-Anon, and given that the very existence of Gam-Anon is a blessing and an enormous support to GA, that we might think of Gam-Anon as “our family.” Quite literally, in many cases, as

individuals, they are! And yet, as fellowships, it is best that we remain clearly distinct from each other, so that we can stay focused on our respective missions.

Changing Unity Step 6 is not the solution. Instead, I believe it is time to review all references to Gam-Anon in GA literature and effectively cull out passages that blur the boundary line between Gamblers Anonymous and Gam-Anon. This will avert confusion in the future and keep us in firm accordance with Unity Step 6. I say this as someone who personally cares for and loves a number of Gam-Anon members. I think the very fact that the Board of Trustees will even be considering the Joint Conference Guidelines indicates that we have been walking a dangerous line for a long time, with potential for negative impacts on both fellowships.

Ed E. - Area 2, Past Trustee, Northern California

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<b>Closing Down A GA Group</b>
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3/9/12 - 2:44 PM

Last fall, I had the unpleasant experience of driving a couple of hours to a GA meeting that wasn't there. It had been closed down due to lack of attendance, and I had not known this. As it turned out, neither the GA telephone hotline and Area meeting list nor the GA website had been updated to reflect that this meeting no longer existed.

I was unhappy to have made a pointless long drive. However, more importantly, it occurred to me that such an event might have had far more significance and been much more disheartening for a new or relatively new GA member, possibly even endangering his or her recovery.

Unity Step 5 states that "Gamblers Anonymous has but one primary purpose -- to carry its message to the compulsive gambler who still suffers." It seems to me that providing updated meeting information in a timely manner is one requisite of fulfilling this primary purpose. If we are not scrupulous about "little things" such as providing notice about discontinued meetings, how can we ensure that we will be of help to others when they need it?

Therefore, I have proposed to the Board of Trustees that we add a brief subsection to the group procedures section of the GA Group Handbook, detailing simple, straightforward steps that should be taken in the event of a meeting closure. The proposed protocols (Agenda Item #83) are uncomplicated and, I believe, commonsensical. For example, after a group conscience vote to close down a meeting, the group secretary or an appointee should notify Area Trustees within 24 hours.

These protocols will not place an onerous burden on anyone and, made explicit, they will be eminently easy to follow. I trust there will be unanimous or near-unanimous support for their adoption at the Boston BOT meeting next month.

Ed E. - Area 2, Past Trustee, Northern California

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3/9/12 - 11:52 PM

Ed,

I wish I had something nice to say about this situation, but unfortunately, there are just too many frayed ends in what you write. I know you to be a very involved person in the program and can only extend that thought into your complete and total awareness of all situations that come up in your area. On that basis, it is hard for me to imagine that if your Intergroup was notified about this room closure in advance, you would not have made the trip up to that meeting to find the doors closed. It is distressing to hear that this event evidently went unnoticed or unmentioned, but it is long overdue that an item, such as this, is now an agenda item for Boston.

In NJ Intergroup, we have a segment in the beginning of our monthly meeting where we ask reps from rooms that are struggling to openly let all the intergroup attendees talk about such rooms and offer helpful suggestions. This is the first actionable event for many people to mobilize and possibly support the room by bringing some members to those rooms with attendance problems.

Currently, NJ Intergroup has 43 rooms in northern and central NJ, and 6 rooms from northeastern PA. The 43 rooms in NJ are no more than 75 miles away from where our Intergroup meetings are held. Going out to PA, that extends to 125 miles. We have 6 Trustees to cover that area for 49 meetings. We used to have 50, but 1 room just closed at the end of February and Intergroup was aware of it, a new area meeting list was published, reflecting the change, and most important, our Trustees were aware of this development of this upcoming closure before it happened. Our Trustees are supposed to split up the area and make sure that they periodically attend all meetings on a rotating basis. We are proactive in that regard.

The situation you outlined begs many questions. 1) Was the room that shut down give any indication to your Intergroup of its growing difficulties? 2) Was the room active with your Intergroup or was it just part of your area? 3) Where were your 4 Trustees are in this situation? 4) Does your Intergroup hold them accountable for visiting all the rooms in your area? If so, then this problem with the room shutdown should have been telegraphed way in advance to your Intergroup.

Having said all that, there are those who bitch and moan about all the rules we put together in this Fellowship. Well, here is another example of people doing what they want without any regard for order or structure. The recent question I got from a GA member whom I challenged about an issue regarding a violation of a Unity Step was: "Well, tell me...where is the pain? Who is this really hurting?" This is great stuff, don't you think? A prime example of don't confuse me with the facts, or the rules and any regard to what affects GA as a whole.

In Boston, I will do my best to speak in favor for a structured procedure for shutting down a room. It will come in the face of those Pollyanna types who always have to look at the positives, and will protest this action in lieu of trying to help the rooms get better. Well guess what guys... some times unpleasant things have to happen. This includes closing a GA room, because it just isn't getting any traction. Let's use our heads about this, and in the case of this room, obviously the Trusted Servants of that room had their heads somewhere else, which decorum prohibits me from elaborating on.

When all else fails – follow the rules. Bravo Ed.

David M. – Area 12, New Jersey

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3/12/12 - 9:26 AM

I also wanted to touch on the post regarding closed meetings. Area 8A has 2 trustees and approx. 79 meetings. Some of these meetings are 3+ hours away from the trustees. Although we would like to be able to get to them all, sometimes that is just not feasible. I think it would be a good idea to send with new meeting packets how new groups can get in touch with the areas intergroup and the area trustees. We have had occasions that a meeting is closed and we don't find out until somebody tries to attend that meeting and finds it closed. Although we try to make sure our meeting list is always up to date, sometimes we are unaware that a meeting is closed. Another issue is that there are times when an outdated meeting list is being circulated. The responsibility, in my opinion, is that it is also up to the individual rooms to make sure that the meeting list they are handing out is current and up to date. Our area Webmistress is always updating our website and especially the meeting list. There is always a current version available online. It is also the responsibility of that room to inform intergroup that the meeting is closing. Trustees are just that, trustees. We are not the GA police at the BOT or for our intergroup/areas. We are here to help guide our area and offer suggestions and help when and if needed. We need always keep in mind that although we don't always act like it, we are all adults in this program and need to act as such.

Looking forward to Boston!

Your Sister in Recovery,  
Karen E. - Area 8A, Minnesota

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3/22/12 - 4:33 PM

Ed,

Thanks for your hard work on the proposal of the item 83 from the Boston Agenda, which I am much in favor, but I would like to comment that as

International Fellowship all literature should be useful to all worldwide G.A. room meetings, what I would like to suggest is that on number 5 instead of referring only to US Meeting it should refer to Meeting list page of the G.A. website...

5. Intergroup Trusted Servants should update the telephone hotline and the Area meeting list, and notify the International Service Office to update the U.S. Meetings page of the G.A. website within 24 hours of being notified of the group conscience vote.

5. Intergroup Trusted Servants should update the telephone hotline and the Area meeting list, and notify the International Service Office to update the Meeting list page of the G.A. website within 24 hours of being notified of the group conscience vote.

See you all in Boston YSIR,  
Martha G. - Area 28, México

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