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**Trustee Line for April 2014**

A PDF version of this issue to distribute to your rooms, or to print out for easier reading, will be available after 4/30/14.

**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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**Requesting Your Input on Open vs. Closed Meetings**

4/12/14 - 9:18 PM

About six months ago, my home group voted to become an "open" meeting, meaning that anyone can attend our meeting. This was done primarily because there is a half-way house that has compulsive gamblers and people recovering from other addictions that the group wanted to allow in the meeting. Other than the people from the half-way house, no one else who is not a compulsive gambler has attended our meeting.

In the months since our conversion to an open meeting, people have stopped coming to our meeting or refuse to attend special events because we are an open meeting. The usual reason is that they are afraid that "a police officer or loan shark" could be sitting next to them, or that they don't want people who are not compulsive gamblers hearing their "therapy". Since I started my journey of recovery in another fellowship that is primarily made up of open meetings, I have a much more tolerant attitude.

So I am looking for feedback from those of you who are strictly compulsive gamblers on the risks or benefits of open meetings. My opinion is that we need to be more inclusive and welcome anyone who wants to learn more about recovery from compulsive gambling. And how many people have decided not to go to a GA meeting because our meeting schedules says "compulsive gamblers only" or "problem gamblers only" and they are not ready to accept that label?

Stop by and let me know what you think at the Trustees Meeting. I'll be the guy filling in for Jim P. with all the munchies.

Paul S. - Area 17 Trustee, Connecticut

4/13/14 - 11:28 AM

Paul,

You bring up an interesting topic, but let me start with the labeling of the meetings you cited. Nobody has to admit to being a compulsive gambler or

being a problem gambler in order to come into any GA closed room. Too many people will actually interrupt a member in their therapy if they don't make an admission of that kind, and ask if they are a compulsive gambler. Some 'long time' members who feel they are exempt from reading and following the Guidance Code or the Unity Steps, will actually force people out of the room, just for not admitting they are a compulsive gambler. We make this admission of being compulsive gamblers, to give others a sense of unity, but the only requirement is a desire to stop gambling, as you know. So to have your meetings listed as 'compulsive gamblers' or 'problem gamblers only', is problematic, in an of itself.

I am amazed that your group would vote to change to an open meeting and then have those same members not attend because it is an open meeting. In the words of Abbott and Costello... 'Who's on first?' You've got a real dilemma on your hands. I understand that the members might feel uncomfortable for all the reasons you cited, but it appears that this should be nothing new, after what was probably a detailed discussion of what changes would take place in the conversion.

I guard my anonymity very carefully, unlike many who blurt their last names out in meetings and use their emails with their full or last names in their email addresses. Nobody is telling them to give up those email addresses, but what I am saying is that those people should open another email account that doesn't give away the anonymity of the member. We might as well change the name of our Fellowship to 'Gamblers Anonymous – When It Suits Me'.

Telephone lists are also dangerous in any meeting, as they are a real threat to anonymity, especially with all the free technology available on the Internet. And yes, that includes cell phones on an increasing basis. It's an enormous threat to anonymity in this hyper-active information age. There are clear methods of completely locking down the identity of who we are with our telephone numbers. Let me know if you are interested in how to do this with a publicly available platform with no cost.

For the most part, I personally do not go to other functions unless they are for GA members only. The highly promoted open meetings that some rooms hold on an annual basis, are also the ones I generally try to avoid, for the same reason. People who are highly visible in the outside world through their jobs and professions, have other reasons for worry about breaches of anonymity.

8 years ago when I was in Moscow, sharing their 5th anniversary of being part of GA, they had an open meeting attended by about 250 people, 25 of which were first-time members. I was completely overwhelmed by witnessing such a situation, which we don't see in our meetings in the States. In New Jersey, annual open meetings are very well attended, but that is because other room members attend. The general public is only a negligible part of that attendance increase. Try though the rooms do, we just haven't uncovered the formula that really brings in a lot of outsiders to these meetings.

I think the issue you brought up is about acceptance and hopefully should not be considered a means of criticizing others who are worried about their anonymity or are uncomfortable giving therapy in front of non-GA members. It just would have been nice not to have the original members abandon the room, in the manner you describe, after they voted to make the room an open meeting. Area 12 (New Jersey) has less than 10% of its rooms listed as open meetings, but I understand the further West you travel those percentages each move in the other directions. It sounds to me like the group conscience has spoken, unfortunately after the fact. My take on it is that you keep the open meeting, to accomplish Unity Step 5. I would say to the members who used to go to this meeting that they voted on it and they either vote to change it or go to other meetings.

What I would find inappropriate would be for a handful of members to start a new meeting in close proximity to the one that exists. That will create controversy and force other members to make a decision as to which meeting to go to. It's bad enough that we have to rely on members to make a decision to go to a GA meeting in the first place. We should not burden them with yet another decision, which will quickly revert to a question of which meeting is the better of the 2.

In closing, I hope Jim P. is in good health and that his absence is for another reason. He is coming up on 41 years in May. Paul, you are now the proxy for our beloved 'Candy Man. You've got some big shoes to fill, because it's not

about having enough candy, it's about the choices you make of which ones to bring. Hmm...choices...sounds just like recovery. What wait a minute...I thought we got rid of proxies?

David M. – Area 12, New Jersey

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4/14/14 - 12:50 AM

Hi Paul,

What's that saying.. "new meetings are started with a resentment and a coffee pot." It looks like the meeting took a group conscience and a few members didn't like the outcome and decided to vote with their two feet. I think it is difficult to accommodate everyone. I look at my Area 2 meeting list and see a variety of meeting formats. I think we are all adults and can make our own decisions. I think it would be very arrogant of me to know what's best for other people. I think most of us have meetings we like and some maybe not as much and it's up to each individual to decide what best suits them. For the newcomer I don't know how much of an informed decision they can make when choosing a meeting they feel comfortable with attending regularly unless maybe they have experience in other 12 step programs. I personally have never felt like my anonymity was compromised in an open meeting. The only time I felt my anonymity was compromised was when I had my full name and address on the CTL. Anyways, I don't think open meetings are a new concept and I don't know all the circumstances of this particular room, but it sounds like a few individuals exercised their right to no stop attending a meeting they no longer feel comfortable in. Hopefully your area has enough options that they were able to find a meeting to better suit their needs.

Joe T. - Area 2, Northern California

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### **Unity Step 3 - For All Of Us, Not Just The New Members**

4/13/14 - 12:21 PM

If anyone cares to jump into this discussion, maybe we can figure out a way to have this Step not be so unclear.

Unity Step 3 (from the Red Book)

THE ONLY REQUIREMENT FOR GAMBLERS ANONYMOUS MEMBERSHIP IS A DESIRE TO STOP GAMBLING.

Regardless of who a person is, or how grave their emotional, legal or financial complications may be, Gamblers Anonymous welcomes anyone who demonstrates a desire to stop gambling.

For membership, it is not necessary that one pay dues or sign a pledge. Those who have returned to gambling are especially encouraged to attend meetings and get help because it is the desire to stop gambling - not the abstinence - that is required for membership.

Expressing a desire to stop gambling doesn't always mean that the member can overcome the strong urge to gamble, but nevertheless, it is the desire that is the requirement.

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So let's start, and by the way, I am serious about this, it's not meant to be just something to play with everyone's head.

What is membership? Is this a one-time event? We hopefully admit we have a desire to stop gambling. Does that mean we are lifetime members? I came into GA and answered the 20 questions, then gave my admission and said I was a compulsive gambler. I was not asked if I had a desire to stop gambling. So what's that about? Should we not be stressing more about having the person admit to having a desire to stop gambling rather than to be so focused on the '...and tell us whether or not you think you are a compulsive gambler.' that we all ask of the new members? I know that some areas say to the member that only they can determine if they are a compulsive gambler, without the need for them to admit to it. In that case, no admission to being a compulsive gambler and no questions about having the desire to stop gambling. **Possible Solution – Bottom of Page 16 on the Combo Book - Most people who have a desire to stop gambling, will answer YES to at least 7 of these questions.**

What about the person who says they don't know if they are a compulsive

gambler, or better yet, when asked if they think they are and the person says no, why do we immediately do the right thing in this case and ask the important question... 'Do you have a desire to stop gambling?'

What about the person who goes back to the bet? We don't ask that person when they come back to the room if they have a desire to stop gambling. We just accept them, as they most probably will admit to being a compulsive gambler. Are they still members? If we have this lifetime guarantee that once they admit to having a desire to stop gambling, then they are always a member. Right?

So the person goes out and gambles and comes back for whatever reason, and someone has the sense to ask if they have the desire to stop gambling, and the person says no. What do we do then? Is the person no longer a member of GA? If it's a closed meeting, do we tell the person they can't give therapy or maybe even more severe, they are asked to leave the room until they can come back and admit to having a desire to stop gambling? Don't think this is ridiculous – it happens more than you might imagine.

If that is a criteria for staying in the room, why doesn't everyone have to reaffirm their position of having a desire to stop gambling? Sounds like a double standard.

Here's the tricky part. Anyone can ask me if I have a desire to stop gambling and I will look them square in the eye and say NO. Hey, this is great opportunity for those who don't like me to bring me before the Trustee Removal Panel. A Clint Eastwood line just jumped into my head... 'Do you feel lucky? Well do ya, punk?'

Here's why I would answer no. The question is... Do I (David M.) have a desire to stop gambling? I say no because I'm not gambling. So why would I admit to having a desire to stop something I'm not doing? Now comes all the backlash from everyone who will throw their personal spin on why this Unity Step is right and still applies. Every one of them will fail at having my statement about not wanting to stop something I'm not doing, invalidated. But give it a try, I'd love to hear (see) what seems to make sense to others about this. **Possible Solution – The only requirement for membership is a desire not to gamble again.**

Okay everyone, see if that isn't the right way to reframe Unity Step 3. For me, my answer would always be yes. That allows me to remind myself that I am committed not to gamble again, a reinforcement tool everyone should be repeating in every therapy. For anyone who is not willing to admit to being a compulsive gambler, they can still be a member because it is somewhat certain that people who come to the meetings, at least have the desire to not gamble again. That is separate from those who might be court-mandated attendees.

So let's change the 1st solution to **Most people who have a desire not to gamble again, will answer YES to at least 7 of these questions.** And while we are at it, let's change Unity Step 3.

Any other thoughts on this?

David M. – Area 12, New Jersey

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12/14/14 - 1:09 AM

David,

The way I see unity step 3 is very simple. GA can't decide who's a member or not. Unity step 3 protects the individuals right to decide for him or herself. How many people would stick around if we had rules for membership? I have to confess that I've sat in GA meetings and judged others many times. They didn't lose everything, they didn't experience the despair I did, I can't relate to these high bottom gamblers who couldn't work a step if their lives depended on it. Unity step 3 protects members from people like me who aren't able to identify and not compare sometimes. GA should never require anything of its members and if GA ever does... I am certain it would lead to GA's demise.

Joe T. - Area 2, Northern California

4/16/14 - 11:17 PM

With one week to go before Houston, let's have one last Trustee outreach to replace some of the lifeliners that have fallen off over the last 2 years of our respective Trustee terms.

I have to believe nearly every Trustee attending the conference would be able to get at least 1 GA Member from their area to sign on to be a lifeliner. If 100 Trustees attend and each enrolled one new lifeliner with even a \$2 per month commitment, that would bring an additional \$2400 annually to the ISO. That wouldn't even take into account those lifeliners increasing their donations in future years or bringing others to the table.

The proliferation of gambling is rampant and these funds are needed to run the fellowship and bring meetings to other areas throughout the world.

I look forward to hearing how everyone did in Houston. See you next week.

Your Brother in Recovery,  
Steve T. - Area 14, Long Island

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### Intergroup Voting Procedures

4/18/14 - 10:10 PM

My area's Intergroup by-laws only allows meeting reps to vote and/or make a motion at our meetings. I was asked to bring this to the Trustee Line to ask who votes at your Intergroup meetings? Do your officers vote whether they are a meeting rep or not? Your input is greatly appreciated.

Jo K. - Area 8D Trustee, St. Louis, Missouri

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4/19/14 - 10:15 AM

Hi Jo,

In our area, which is Area 1, Los Angeles, in order to vote, you must be a secretary or acting secretary representing a meeting. However, with regards to making a motion, anyone can make a motion or speak on an item.

Also, our chairman only votes to break a tie. Our officers do not vote, unless they are representing a meeting.

Will miss you all in Houston. Thanks in advance for all your hard work! It is appreciated!

Steve F. - Area 1, Los Angeles  
Past Trustee

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4/19/14 - 12:27 PM

In response to Jo's question, in Delaware Valley Intergroup (Area 13) eligible voters are defined as: Current Intergroup officers, current and past trustees, the current secretary of each of our groups, and the current duly elected intergroup representatives from each room. Each of our rooms is entitled to two (2) duly elected reps.

Although a single member may serve in several capacities, (room secretary, Intergroup officer, current or past trustee, or room rep, even for more than one room) our guidelines state that each eligible voter is entitled to only one (1) vote.

The major problem with our system, as I see it, is that by an intergroup officer, say the secretary, also volunteering at the room level to serve as an intergroup rep for that room, he enables the room to not elect a room rep, thinking they have that job covered by the intergroup secretary. Unfortunately, if he/she is the only member elected as a rep by that room, the room is missing out on votes to which they would be entitled at the intergroup meeting. To wit: our guidelines say that room is entitled to 3 votes at intergroup (Secretary and 2 room reps).

Until recently, I served a secretary for one of our Friday night groups. I also regularly attend at least 3-4 other meetings each week. In addition to being a trustee, I also serve as an intergroup officer (Communications Coordinator). If one does the math, it sounds like I would be entitled to cast at least 6 votes on

any matters at intergroup. I, like everyone else, am entitled to 1. One motion; one vote. (One riot; one ranger.) Frankly, when the roll is called at our intergroup meetings, the only title to which I will respond is 'Trustee', since as such I represent all rooms. Hope this helps, Jo. See you in Houston.

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

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4/19/14 – 4:30 PM

Jo,

New Jersey Intergroup, Area 12, has this part of our procedures down really well.

Our Intergroup meetings are open to ALL GA members, whether you are a room representative or not. Anyone can speak and anyone can make a motion. If we are truly to represent the entirety of groups in our area, then it should be unrestricted as to who may speak or make a motion.

Upon making a motion, that person gets to initially decide if it is to be a general vote or a formal group vote. The difference is as follows. A general vote is for issues that do not affect the rooms as a whole. In such a vote, ANYONE who is in attendance may vote.

An item may be deemed important enough for all rooms to chime in with their thoughts. This is called a Formal Group Vote. Items that fall under that category are changes to our local area Guidance Code, expenditures of over \$500, anything that the Intergroup Chair believes is important enough or if the author of an agenda item seeks such a determination. We also have a provision that anyone making a motion may also request a formal group vote. In reality, it might not merit such a vote. As a result, the members of the meeting that night will vote on the validity of such an item going back to the rooms as a formal group vote or whether it should be a general vote. Such a process doesn't take into consideration people's opinion of the item, only whether or not it warrants a formal group vote.

Formal group votes also allow for discussion over 2 meetings before a vote is taken. This is done so that the author doesn't stack the room with information and handouts that can't be refuted at that time. It allows members with opposing opinions to bring material to support their position. This allows for a balanced presentation for the Intergroup reps to bring back to the room for their opinion.

When a vote is taken for a formal group vote, only the designated Room Representatives are allowed to vote. Each room is permitted 2 such people and they cannot represent but one room. In the beginning of the meeting when we know that a formal group vote will take place, attendance is taken and the individual room reps must opening declare themselves and the rooms to which they are attached.

The individual rooms set the requirements for being a room rep. Officers of Intergroup may be room reps. The Chair of Intergroup votes, just like everyone else for a general vote. Ties constituted a failure of the motion to pass, as it is not a majority. When the formal vote is taken, it is a roll call vote, unless it involves an election of some kind, then it is done via closed ballot. General votes are done by a show of hands.

David M. – Area 12, New Jersey

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