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Trustee Line for August 2012

A PDF version of this issue to distribute to your rooms, or to print out for easier reading, will be available after 8/31/12.

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 8

8/2/12 - 6:20 AM

Unity Step 8

Gamblers Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers.

How many GA members do you know that are counselors in the field of compulsive gambling? I know of at least four in my Area. Three of which I found out by statements they or other people made about them in a GA meeting. Each time it happens, I cringe because it associates GA with their

organization. In some cases they have started and 'run' GA meetings in their centers. The worst case was hearing someone state in a GA meeting that their sponsor was also their counselor (who was sitting in the meeting with them).

This unity step means to me that we cannot monetize our twelfth step work; work in the field has to be separate from talking about GA and the steps from our own personal experience. But it is a common desire of people who come into GA and turn their life around to want to help others and they want to become a counselor or therapist. This step asks that they do not disclose their GA membership in their professional work; if they need to do that, take the plaque down and take them to a meeting as a member of GA only.

I have had a counselor who was a member of a 12 step fellowship, but that was not the basis or purpose of our relationship. He encouraged me to go to meetings to deal with my illness and recover from it. Our work focused on family history and finding new tools and responses to situations that I could no longer gamble to avoid. It was a complement to my recovery not a substitution.

The other part of this step says that we can hire people, including members of GA, to perform jobs that are not twelfth step work but make twelfth step work possible. Ordering literature and shipping it out to groups all over the world is a full time job, probably for several people. We cannot reasonably ask people in GA to do it on a volunteer basis and expect prompt, professional response. There are jobs we need to hire people to perform and pay them a respectable wage.

I feel this step and Unity Step 7 tell each GA group that they need to support the International Service Office and the people who run it. Each GA group and Area Intergroup should make regular donations to ISO, to help pay for those special workers, if they use GA literature and expect the ISO to refer callers from their Area to meetings in that Area. What are your experiences with this step?

Paul S. - Area 17 Trustee, CT and Western MA

New Article XXI Overview

8/2/12 - 7:37 AM

Last month, Debbie M. from Area 8 brought up an issue about Internet access to the GA rooms. What started out as a situation that she was looking for some thoughts from other Trustees, actually turning into the beginning of something that we, as a Fellowship, seem to dance around rather than deal with directly.

Basically, it's time GA deals with the subject of the Internet, digital media, and public relations, in a direct manner so that we don't just do things individually because they feel good without consideration of their impact on GA as a whole.

I decided to approach this issue from a Guidance Code standpoint and came up with the beginning idea of creating a new Article XXI for the Guidance Code that articulates these issues. If the BOT were to approve this, we would no longer just do things without the thought of their consequences. We wouldn't have to waste our time arguing about situations and looking for everyone's interpretation of those situations. That just creates controversy instead of allowing us to carry out our primary purpose.

So here is how I approached the issue. I tried to initially identify the areas of concentration and laid out an outline. That was sent to a number of Trustees for their opinions and suggestions. The group was Trustees who generally agree and disagree with my items on the agenda. What I got were some great ideas to modify and expand upon what I initially wrote. It ended up turning into 3 of us collaborating and really trying to consider numerous situations. The result is a very comprehensive listing that is listed below.

The point of all this is to gather opinions from all the Trustees about the individual sections of this proposed Article XXI. This is a very high profile article and it would be great to show opinions on each of the articles, whether you agree or not, the purpose of posting all of the articles in the Trustee Line is to make it better through suggestions. All thoughts, both pro and con, will be considered for modifying the sections. In theory, every Trustee should be writing their thoughts, whatever they may be. The reality is something else.

This may end up being a shock to many Trustees, because of things that are being done currently that few if any members are considering as to their impact on Gamblers Anonymous.

The 9 sections have been broken down into 9 items on the Trustee Line, just to keep everyone's thoughts together on the same items. I will keep my fingers crossed about Trustee participation, both current and past. If someone has said what you wanted to say, it's okay to put in your quick message of support. General comments will go in this part and individual section comments will go to with their specific sections.

David M. – Area 12, New Jersey

8/9/12 - 10:41 PM

I have read and re-read and re-read the New Article XXI Overview David has presented here, as I wanted to be sure I had a firm grasp on exactly what each section was trying to say and what that meant. I have waited to see if anyone else would respond to these articles before I wrote in, because I was curious to see the comments. No one else has responded, so I guess I will be the first. If you have issue with my views, please express them. As David noted, these are very important issues and the Articles should be discussed here, in this forum, instead of waiting until they get put in the BOT agenda. It will give the author's the chance to flesh them out and refine them if they feel the need.

Before I start, let me say that I might violate some of the very ideas in these articles, because I reference a book that is non-GA approved literature. If so, then I will accept whatever course of action the webmaster and editors take.

So, here are my thoughts. I will attempt to be brief, and will respond to each individual section.

The individual section responses have been posted to the segment just below

I know a lot of hard work went into this document, and I also know that the authors have nothing but the best intentions. But after going back and reading what I wrote, I believe that this is a totally and completely misdirected attempt to monitor our anonymity and that of the fellowship of GA.

I want to make one point very clear. When I ask how a particular issue affects GA as a whole, and when I say I just don't get it, I am not being facetious or a smart####. I am asking a legitimate question. I'm sure David and perhaps others will tell me how, and I welcome the answers. And if you agree, even better. I will put on my big boy underwear, so give it to me straight.

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

8/11/12 - 6:40 PM

Levi,

The reason I posted all this is for responses similar to what you posted. What I have proposed here is some very hard-hitting material that takes the gray areas and hopefully clears them up without ambiguity. These 9 items are going to probably rub some people the wrong way, because they have been doing things they shouldn't be doing. These items make those people confront those issues.

The sections in this article are not my interpretation of what should be done. This is all related to the precepts of our Fellowship. If those who are against any of them take a deep breath and approach them from a purely objective and non-emotional basis, not only do they make sense, but they provide the structure and guidance we all need collectively for the betterment of the Fellowship of Gamblers Anonymous.

I will explain further on an item-by-item basis about the things that seem to be unclear. My goal would be to have you understand what is being proposed and have you get on board with these additions, along with every other Trustee and have them passed for inclusion in the Guidance Code.

David M. – Area 12, New Jersey

8/2/12 - 7:37 AM

Section 1:

Personal publicity is always shunned, and anonymity is carefully preserved because the Fellowship of Gamblers Anonymous is more important than any one member. By maintaining this policy, any problems that accrue to an individual member cannot harm the Fellowship.

Anonymity is not an option of any member of Gamblers Anonymous, including when dealing with the Internet or electronic media. In the meaning of Unity Step 11, it is not breaking anonymity if we choose to relate to family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, that we are members of Gamblers Anonymous.

8/9/12 - 10:41 PM

Section 1. I agree that no member is more important than the fellowship. We are all the same, all equal, with equal votes and an equal voice. I agree that no one should speak for GA unless given that specific duty by the Fellowship of GA. My problem lies with the second paragraph. It seems to be saying that I'm not allowed to tell anyone I please that I belong to GA. I have a real problem with the wording "Anonymity is not an option of any member of GA". In what context? In the broad context that I don't speak or represent GA, then yes, anonymity is paramount. In the context of my personal life, I tell anyone I choose that I am a compulsive gambler and belong to GA. It seems to me that the two paragraphs are not really cohesive. Does it mean that I can't post on my facebook page that I belong to GA? That is how I read it. If I misinterpret, please correct me.

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

8/11/12 - 6:56 PM

Levi,

I submit that your objection regarding your personal life and your right to give up your anonymity is answered in that 2nd paragraph. By the way, that last part is directly from the Red Book. Other than those examples, Step 11 states that we need always maintain anonymity as the level of press, radio, films, television and internet. This is not a suggestion. This is also not an option they we can choose to ignore. We are directed to follow it – period the end. And by the way, everyone could benefit from reading the Red Book about ALL the Steps.

David M. – Area 12, New Jersey

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| New Article XXI Overview - Section 2 |
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8/2/12 - 7:37 AM

Section 2:

Broadcasting audio, pictures, videos of any Gamblers Anonymous members are not allowed during any Gamblers Anonymous meetings, workshops or business meetings, whether local, regional or international. Members who meet outside of the aforementioned GA functions, may take pictures and/or videos for their private use, providing they do not identify anyone in the pictures and/or videos as members of Gamblers Anonymous.

8/9/12 - 10:41 PM

Section 2. Not sure how I feel about this one. I pretty much agree, but I'm not sure about the last sentence. If the videos or pictures are for my private use, why am I not able to identify my friends as GA members? Seems a bit restrictive.

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

8/11/12 - 9:00 PM

Levi,

This section is about protecting the anonymity of others. Nobody has the authority to give away someone else's anonymity. That is someone's personal choice in their own affairs. Sure, take your pictures for your private use, but don't identify the people in the picture as your GA friends. You have to ask yourself why you need to identify others as GA members, don't you know who they are with a caption saying that they are members of GA? Why can't it just be as simple as Mike, Sally, Debbie, Joe, etc?

David M. – Area 12, New Jersey

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| New Article XXI Overview - Section 3 |
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8/2/12 - 7:37 AM

Section 3:

With the exception of Gamblers Anonymous Board of Trustee meetings, no recording devices of any type may be utilized at any time. In Board of Trustee meetings, only the International Executive Secretary, or other designated person, may use a voice recording device, and only for the purpose of historical archiving of the proceedings of the meetings. Such recordings contain matters that affect Gamblers Anonymous as a whole.

Local and regional area business meetings are not allowed to use recording devices. In such cases a Recording Secretary should be utilized to capture the minutes of any business meeting.

8/9/12 - 10:41 PM

Section 3. If we have a speaker, one that knows he is being recorded, no one else is identified, is speaking to GA members as a GA member, why is the recording forbidden? My recovery was greatly enhanced when I read the book "A new pair of glasses", by AA member Chuck C. (I am not a member of AA) The book changed my life, because it changed my way of seeing the world around me. The book is a transcript of a recording made at a men's retreat for AA. What a shame it would be if this book was never published because the recording was not made. I know many members of many 12 step programs who have read this book and found it to be a huge part of their recovery. I am not comparing this fellowship to any other, because that is not the point. The point is that his talks were recorded, and a wonderful book came of it.

I'm also in favor of on-line meetings, which have been a hot topic at the last two BOT meetings. With the proper rules and guidelines, I think this could be a wonderful tool. We live in a digital age. We will continue to evolve along digital lines. Someone smarter than me can surely come up ways to make such meetings secure. Anonymity can be broken at any meeting, whether a regular meeting or an electronic meeting.

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

8/11/12 - 9:52 PM

Levi,

I understand that AA might have many wonderful things that GA doesn't. If you receive benefits from these things, then you are free to pursue whatever you feel works for you. That is a choice you have to make. But because a recording worked for AA doesn't mean it can be duplicated in GA. That's not a reason to allow it. More to the point is that we are not AA and recordings of any type cannot be controlled as to what gets recorded. It doesn't matter if the speaker is aware of the recording, there can never be any assurance that other recording devices are not being used. After all, if you let one person record, why wouldn't you allow others? And once that is done, what's to stop others from recording during regular meetings? We always start our meetings with opening announcements that include a warning to not admit to any past or present crimes that you may be still be prosecuted for. So if someone accidentally admits to such a crime, now we have to worry about someone taking a recording to the authorities to maybe cut themselves a deal to get out of a legal problem or debt? I don't think so. That is why this section is so important.

As to the online meetings, you might be in favor of it, but until strict guidelines are put into place, no consideration for any of what might go on in such a

meeting is part of the core of this section.

David M. – Area 12, New Jersey

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| New Article XXI Overview - Section 4 |
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8/2/12 - 7:37 AM

Section 4:

When involved in any online venture, either business or personal, a member is not allowed to show any pictures and/or videos in which the member makes any statement of association with Gamblers Anonymous, past, present or future. This includes anything in print.

8/9/12 - 10:41 PM

Section 4. This one really got my hackles up. First of all, it begins with the wording "When involved in any online venture, either business or private..." Why is my private life being restricted? It is unclear exactly what is being said here. I understand that I cannot make any statement in which I state "I am speaking for GA". However, why would it be forbidden for me to say "I am a member of GA". I believe these are two very different statements. And the last sentence really eats at me. "This includes anything in print". I'm trying to understand what this is stating. Does this mean I can't write a letter to the editor of my local newspaper and state, if it is in context to the subject, that I attend GA meetings? If so, why? This seems to be a personal choice. It affects no one but myself. Certainly not GA as a whole.

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

8/12/12 - 10:45 AM

Levi,

It looks like we need to be mindful of those GA hackles, but anonymity is most often thought of protecting the members. In actuality, most don't understand that anonymity is also meant to protect the Fellowship from the members. If I want to identify myself in GA style, I would be David M. I cannot be David (my last name). We are GA members 24/7, not just during our meetings. Again, why is it so necessary to declare with a full name that a person is in Gamblers Anonymous? Writing a letter to a newspaper and putting the Gamblers Anonymous imprint to it, is now attaching Gamblers Anonymous to outside issues, where we are not supposed to have an opinion. If you feel compelled to voice your opinion on something, you are not being restricted with this if you add your full name, address, phone number, email, social security number, etc. Just don't identify yourself as a member of Gamblers Anonymous.

David M. – Area 12, New Jersey

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| New Article XXI Overview - Section 5 |
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8/2/12 - 7:37 AM

Section 5:

Social media applications may not always be private or secure. Gamblers Anonymous members should always be aware that anonymity issues also apply equally to these situations, as per Unity Step 11.

8/9/12 - 10:41 PM

Section 5. Again, my hackles are up. What? I can't twitter to a friend that I am a compulsive gambler and that I attend GA meetings? Who are we to tell another member he can't tell anyone he chooses? And facebook, does it apply there, too? Again a personal choice. We seem to be getting into some very hairy ground, here. I am not a civil libertarian, and I understand that even if I were, this fellowship is different and the same rules that apply to the general public do not apply to us. But come on, as long as I don't "out" another member, why is it anybody's business who I tell?

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

8/12/12 - 10:51 AM

Levi,

This section starts out that these applications may not always be private or secure. Anonymity issues, as per Unity Step 11 indicated above, specifically spell out about handling anonymity with friends. It looks like you are bringing up issues that don't really exist, or have been outlined in previous responses.

David M. – Area 12, New Jersey

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| New Article XXI Overview - Section 6 |
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8/2/12 - 7:37 AM

Section 6:

When using email or any platform that carries the identity of the sender for Gamblers Anonymous correspondence, the account name cannot disregard anonymity issues. Use of last names and domain names that breach anonymity are not allowed.

8/9/12 - 10:41 PM

Section 6. I don't quite understand this one. Is this only related to correspondence that relates to GA? If so, then I guess I agree, because the receiver of the e-mail could be "outed" as a GA member if someone else read my last name and made the connection. Need more info.

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

8/12/12 - 11:17 AM

Levi,

This one happens more than you might believe. In fact, 45 of the Trustees on the current Trustee listing use an email address that contains their full , last name or work address that makes it easy to find out who the person is. All it takes is awareness and opening up a new email address that maintains your anonymity by not giving away any contextual clues of who you are. I'll take you situation from a previous posting of yours about sending an email to a newspaper or response blog. Using a fictitious example. You can use john.smith@bankofamerica.com, as long as you don't identify that you are from Gamblers Anonymous. Anonymity issues are intact. If you mention your association, you have given up your anonymity on 2 fronts. What's wrong with setting up a new email address of johns@yahoo.com ? You are in favor of anonymity and wouldn't come into the room and say I'm John Smith, compulsive gambler, etc. So why would you communicate with others in the program using your last name or where you work in an email. Virtually everyone I speak to about this has never taken the time to think about it. Once they do, they open another account for use in GA matters.

David M. – Area 12, New Jersey

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| New Article XXI Overview - Section 7 |
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8/2/12 - 7:37 AM

Section 7:

Speaking engagements, involving any groups in which GA members will identify themselves as members of Gamblers Anonymous, are to be considered an extension of an open-meeting. All parties participating in such engagements must ensure that these events are not recorded via audio or video in any way.

8/9/12 - 10:41 PM

Section 7. Again, as long as the speaker knows he is being recorded, and the speaker does not speak for GA, how is this so bad? I really don't understand. If he mentions during his speech that he is a GA member, and not speaking for GA, who has the right to tell him he can't do it?

Your Brother in Recovery,

Levi B. - Area 2 Trustee, Northern California

8/12/12 - 11:24 AM

Levi,

What happens with the recording? Does it go on the Internet? Does a video file get emailed to a series of mailing lists? Nobody is saying that the GA member is speaking for GA as a whole, but there is no control as to where any recording will end up. Preventing the recordings is the beginning of how to prevent them from circulating in an environment that may very well result in a full facial shot with the identifier of that person being part of Gamblers Anonymous. The critical component is that when a member admits to being part of GA, he/she is bound by the structure of anonymity in the Fellowship. It once again does not become an option.

David M. – Area 12, New Jersey

New Article XXI Overview - Section 8

8/2/12 - 7:37 AM

Section 8:

Any type of radio or Internet voice interviews in which GA members will identify themselves as members of Gamblers Anonymous require the GA member(s) to use a different name than their own.

8/9/12 - 10:41 PM

Section 8. Why is it so important that the GA fellowship controls the use of my name? I really seem to be belaboring this point, but if I go on a radio program about compulsive gambling and share my experience, make it clear that I am speaking only for myself and not for GA in any way, how does my using my own name affect GA as a whole? I just don't see it.

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

8/12/12 - 9:39 PM

Levi,

This appears to be more of the same. You don't have to be officially designated as a person that is an ambassador of Gamblers Anonymous, where every word out of your mouth is scripted. When any GA member speaks, they should be aware that there are people listening to learn and are hanging on every word. Radio or Internet interviews are again, about anonymity. The retransmission of such interviews can be sent to affiliates anywhere in the world. You have absolutely no idea where that may be. This necessitates the use of a different name to help ensure anonymity when speaking as a member of Gamblers Anonymous. I'm not clear why you continually object to using a different name. Is this a statement about you or the message we are supposed to carry?

David M. – Area 12, New Jersey

8/16/12 - 8:53 PM

Some members could possibly have a problem using a fictitious name when dealing with the press because of the program's emphasis on honesty; I certainly can understand that. I have that same qualm myself. When I was in action there were numerous times I used aliases to disguise my behaviors and to do so now that I am in recovery feels like a continuation of that deceitful way of life.

The method I devised to make myself more comfortable with protecting my anonymity when dealing with the press was to use my middle name (which very few people outside my family know) and the initial of my first name. However, some people, in the pursuit of honesty might even be uncomfortable with this. My personal thought is that if someone is comfortable with using their first name and last initial and no more there should not be an issue or conflict about personal anonymity.

Yours in Unity,
Kent C. - Area 7C, Trustee - Oklahoma

New Article XXI Overview - Section 9

8/2/12 - 7:37 AM

Section 9:

Any type of video interviews in which GA members will identify themselves as members of Gamblers Anonymous are not allowed for display of any distinguishable facial features. The recording entity must find the means to hide or obscure the members' faces. The members cannot use their own names. An anonymity release form must be signed by the recording entity.

8/9/12 - 10:41 PM

Section 9. Ditto to all the above mentioned reasons. Not representing GA, just a regular member sharing my experience, if I choose to show my face, how does that affect GA as a whole?

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

8/12/12 - 11:20 PM

Levi,

Video interviews are the most dangerous because there is a voice and a face now attached to a member of Gamblers Anonymous. Once again, there can be no assurance that the video interview will be confined to its originally intended place. This is when maximum safeguards have to be put into place to ensure anonymity. As you said in your response...ditto. No one should be pushing so hard to make it a point to show one's face when anonymity is the operative phrase. Allowing that to happen affects GA as a whole because it strikes at the essence of our core fundamentals.

David M. – Area 12, New Jersey

Trustee Term Limits

8/2/12 - 7:01 PM

Greetings, Brothers and Sisters,

We have a situation in my area and I'd appreciate your feedback.

A member has brought to our intergroup a proposal to set term limits for our trustees. The proposal is as follows:

"In order to foster growth in the fellowship and new member participation...

The following term limit is suggested:

Trustees who have served 3 consecutive terms shall NOT be eligible for nomination for the next term unless no other non-serving trustee nominations are made. Non-serving nominees shall assume the open positions, with a vote taking place if there are more nominees than positions. In the event that there are fewer non-serving nominees than positions, existing trustees (with 3 or more consecutive terms already) may run for the remaining position(s).

Put another way, if there are more than 3+ term serving trustees than positions available, a vote will be taken to decide who of this group will be seated.

A trustee having served 3 (or more) consecutive terms shall be eligible after a 1 term absence Example: Trustees A, B and C have each been a trustee for at least 3 terms. Nominees D and E wish to be considered. Under the old rules, trustees A, B, C, D and E are on the ballot. Under the proposed rules, nominees D and E would become trustees and A, B and C could choose to be the subjects of a vote for the third position."

My primary argument against this proposal is that I consider it out of order: it violates the Guidance Code Article X, Section 15 ("An intergroup does not have the right to set stricter guidelines pertaining to the elections of trustees other than those that are contained in the Guidance Code.") and Article X, Section 12, which states that whenever possible, the intergroup should hold the election for the trustees, etc . . .

The proposal as written gives our intergroup the ability to appoint as trustees

any members, as long as they have not already served 3 consecutive terms. Everywhere in the Guidance Code that refers to how trustees achieve office, an election is called for, even if to fill a vacancy.

My response to the 'example': If nominees D and E wish to be considered, their names should be included on the ballot, along with anyone else who meets the requirements set forth in the Guidance Code. Just as members should have the opportunity to serve, even if they haven't served before, so also should those who have served. Previous or present service should never be an obstacle to future service.

Bottom line for me: We already have term limits; they are called elections.

The item generated quite a bit of discussion, and has been tabled until our next intergroup meeting, August 20, so I'd appreciate your input before then.

Thanks. See you in San Diego.
Your friend in recovery,
John B. - Trustee, Area 13, Philadelphia

The Guidance Code as Universal Document

8/6/12 - 6:25 PM

As a result of my attendance to the BOT meeting in Boston, I want to share some concerns we have about removing articles from the Guidance Code that already show up in the By-Laws I would like to share, as briefly as I can, the experience of Area 21 regarding the use of the Guidance Code and By-Laws:

Thanks to the Guidance Code in Spain we have been able to work for the unity beyond the dominant personalities and personal points of view. So every time our growth has caused a conflict, we have looked at the Guidance Code, not the solution but the spirit to address it.

Some years ago, Area 21 had to face a very tough moment because there were groups who would not follow the guidelines of the Guidance Code and the suggestions that came from the Board of Trustees. Then, we asked for help to ISO and BOT, which sent a custodian to mediate the conflict. At the end, unity was impossible and a breakup happened.

Today in Spain, there are several associations called Jugadores Anónimos (Spanish translation of Gamblers Anonymous). Someone is even legally recognized. But only one fellowship has expressed voluntarily a desire to be a part of Gamblers Anonymous. This fellowship is called legally "ORS de JUGADORES ANONIMOS EN ESPAÑA-AREA 21" and is governed by the Guidance Code and is a member of GA as a whole.

When the RSO Area 21 tried to legalize the fellowship in Spain, the first step was to seek help in Gamblers Anonymous approved literature and turned to the By-Laws. Translated it and, as a first option, tried to adapt it to Spanish laws. By-Laws were insufficient and the legal reality in Spain forced us to make several changes. At the end, with help from a lawyer and the Guidance Code we drafted a document that respects the spirit of Gamblers Anonymous and did not involve renouncing any principles of the Unity Program and Guidance Code and also could be accepted for the Spanish laws. So now, in Spain, we have two By-Laws:

The ISO By-Laws -approved GA literature, updated and translated into Spanish but without legal value in Spain - and the RSO Area 21 Legal Statutes -not approved GA literature but a legal document that Area 21 needs to operate legally in Spain-.

However, for any of our daily affairs, RSO-AREA 21 only use the reference of the Guidance Code, leaving our statutes just for the legal issues that the RSO, as non-profit corporation, is required to comply with Spain official's government.

We do it in this way, because we understand that membership of GA is essentially a spiritual issue and the Guidance Code give us that universal orientation we need to make the right choices to act in the same spiritual way in all Gamblers Anonymous around the world, beyond the borders and local laws but considering this too.

That is why for us it is so important not to cut out the Guidance Code. It is our reference and the nexus of union between us and the rest of the Gamblers

Anonymous world. It's nothing against the By-Laws, but all in favor of maintaining as complete as possible the Guidance Code, because this provides helpful guidance anywhere in the world and in all circumstances in the manner of Gamblers Anonymous.

In the same case of Spain, there must be other areas for which the guidelines of the Guidance Code certainly helps them understand what Gamblers Anonymous is and how it works and use it to try to develop GA in their countries in solidarity with the Brotherhood. Personally, I don't see anything wrong with that Guidance Code and By Laws sharing some items. Just will be a little bit more of job for the trustee servant has to update them. However, I see a great disservice to eliminate parts of the Guidance Code. It serves brothers and sisters from other areas to learn, understand and adopt the guidelines specified therein and are introduced gradually in the way of Gamblers Anonymous.

This book has provided guidance to all those who, anywhere in the world and affected by the problem of compulsive gambling, believe that this program could help us. In it, we have found a sensible way to organize our areas, schedule meetings and groups and carry the message to other compulsive gamblers. But most of all, we found a guide that helps us overcome the fear of being alone, the fear of mistakes in our GA life, and that has led us to keeping alive the feeling of belonging to something bigger than ourselves, Gamblers Anonymous as a whole.

I understand that the main purpose of Gamblers Anonymous is not a national, not even an international; it's a UNIVERSAL purpose. And that UNIVERSALITY, today, can only be offered by the Guidance Code!!

There are big changes in sight. So, for our service it is very important to prepare ourselves with an open mind, honesty and good will to confront the big challenge that is presented to us.

Hopefully, just for today, we will able to do our part and let our Higher Power do his.

Thank you very much.

One Day at a Time,
FELICES Y SERENAS 24 HORAS

Lluís R. - Trustee Area 21, Spain

8/8/12 - 12:12 PM

Maybe it's because I see all the postings as they happen on the Trustee Line, that I some times count the minutes hoping that others will respond to items posted on the site. Again, another disappointment, but not one of the scale of question 18 in the Combo Book.

With all due respect to Lluís, his posting, which mirrors the sentiment that he and Leo from Argentina voiced in Boston, is way off base. The Trustees got sucked into this thinking, without actually thinking things through. As of Boston, it's now crystal clear that the mere mention of something that 'might' negatively impact foreign countries in GA, gets all the Trustees to group together in a defensive circle like a mother protecting her child from harm. I don't agree with the presentation in Lluís' submission and I'll explain why.

I get the importance of the Guidance Code and it is refreshing that areas, such as Spain, have embraced it in the manner suggested by Lluís. However, in becoming a legal entity, GA in Spain, and no doubt other countries, could not utilize the By-Laws as they exist now as a platform for their country's legal corporate requirements.

Lluís states that the By-Laws are not valid in Spain. Yes, I understand, but it does not invalidate the By-Laws. That is the heart of the issue. Spain and apparently Argentina maintain that since the By-Laws are not valid in their respective countries because they are put together with California laws, that their contents are not to be used.

Sorry, but that is a choice that is being made by those countries. The By-Laws are about the Corporation of Gamblers Anonymous in California. The references within are devoted solely to that. Any country in the world who is part of our Gamblers Anonymous MUST recognize it as a valid document for the understanding of how the ISO and corporation of GA works, in addition to

the structure of the Fellowship of GA.

Cutting out the references to items in the Guidance Code that are contained in the By-Laws is getting rid of duplications, not making them disappear. The Guidance Code deals with the Fellowship of GA and the By-Laws deal with the corporation of GA, 2 entirely different bodies. Nothing is lost by removing duplications between the 2 publications. If someone is interested in items concerning either entity, they will know where to look.

Yes, the Guidance Code offers all the strengths listed in Lluís' submission, but there is no problem with the removal of items from the Guidance Code that deal with issues that belong in the By-Laws. Saying that removal of those items make them disappear, is misleading and outright dishonest. The By-Laws may not play a part in how GA is structured overseas, but it sure as hell is there for continuity and reference.

Instead of foreign countries walking away from the By-Laws, I submit that GA members all over the world pay closer attention to it, because it is how things can and cannot be done. This distills down to if the overseas areas want to reference it, when needed, or conveniently ignore to then complain that GA is doing an injustice to foreign countries by making provisions of the Guidance Code disappear.

If this comes up again in San Diego, there will be a much different tone to the discussions on the floor than what we witnessed in Boston, and not just from me.

David M. – Area 12, New Jersey

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| Guests and the Guidance Code |
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8/7/12 - 1:22 PM

To all my brothers and sisters around the world,

I recently attended a birthday meeting in the Los Angeles area, and there were two guests in attendance. This is an Open meeting, and therefore, they are welcome to attend. At the end of the therapy, the guests were invited to share, which apparently was voted on by the room at a previous meeting, and one of them proceeded to pull out a poem that they had written and started reading it.

Whether I am a current trustee or past trustee, I feel that it's my responsibility to let the secretary know my thought about this, as I feel it violates the Guidance Code and Gamblers Anonymous as a whole. Most of our members, unless they have been a trustee, are not that familiar with the Guidance Code. First and foremost, I am a member of that meeting and do have a voice just like anyone else. I believe that as guests, they are more than welcome to attend, but not participate, even at a birthday celebration. Plain and simple, I feel very uncomfortable being in a meeting where the guests share. Don't get me wrong, I truly enjoy hearing from the family member or friends, but after the meeting. I guess I don't feel comfortable making an exception to what is considered a rule. If that were the case, why not invite all spouses and guests to share at a regular meeting?

The other concern I had and probably most confusing was the reading of a poem, or really anything other than GA approved or appropriate literature. As I understand our Guidance Code, I think it's pretty clear that we can't bring any outside literature in the rooms. To me, that includes poems or journal readings or copies of articles, etc., etc. What is considered outside literature? Where do we draw the line? When I discussed this with other members in our area, I got conflicting opinions. Some say it's completely fine, and others say, it goes against our Guidance Code. One member asked if the poem was submitted by a GA member for inclusion into the ISO Bulletin, then that person could read from the ISO Bulletin, which is GA Appropriate literature. It's very confusing to me.

I would like to get some feedback from what your experiences have been, and what your point of view is on this subject, or if you know where in our literature it states that guests are not allowed to participate. I do know that the only requirement for membership is a desire to stop gambling. I definitely would like to hear from you, as this appears to be a "grey" area, with lots of different perspectives and opinions. I have been wrong before, so if I am

interpreting this the wrong way, please tell me.

Grateful to be a compulsive gambler.
Steve F. - Area I, Los Angeles, Past Trustee

8/7/12 - 2:35 PM

Steve,

I see a number of problems here and hopefully, I can bring some light to your grey areas. It's good that you wrote this because for as long as I have been in program, the west coast meetings seem to do things a bit different than what we do in the east coast meetings.

Your meeting is an open meeting and as you said, anyone can attend. Let's start with the Group Handbook definition of Open and Closed Meetings on page 11. It clearly states that, "At open meetings, the families are not permitted to participate in GA meetings."

That section also states, "The thinking, relative to the open meeting, is that the spouses and friends of a problem gambler can have a better chance to understand the real nature of the problem when they are permitted to attend GA meeting."

Anyone who speaks in a meeting, is participating, and that cannot be allowed because such action affects GA as a whole. That supersedes Unity Step 4 about each room being self-governing, so a group conscience vote to allow it is a violation of the Guidance Code.

Use, display or distribution of non-GA approved or GA appropriate material in a meeting is a violation of the Guidance Code, so is a poem or any other material of that nature. As you said, where do you draw the line?

A poem read in the room is not allowed, but if it were sent to the ISO and added to the Bulletin, then magically, it would be okay, because the BOT voted that the Bulletin was appropriate literature. I personally have a problem with the Bulletin being deemed as appropriate literature because it is just the free writings of GA members who don't follow any structure other than just writing their thoughts. Karen has full editorial rights with the Bulletin, but it shouldn't be permitted, the same as conference booklets not being classified as appropriate literature. But that's another topic for another day. In the meantime, I follow the decisions of the BOT.

I submit that the people who have said all of this is ok, do that out of thinking that all this is related to GA, so what harm would it cause. I would also question not just if those people know the provisions of the Guidance Code, but if they even know what color the cover is. Giving opinions is easy. Backing them up with specifics is where the truth comes out. I don't believe that Unity Step 3 comes into play with outsiders who attend our meetings to support the birthday people. They are not looking to join GA, and as such, they can't participate.

David M. – Area 12, New Jersey

8/9/12 - 8:03 PM

I have read David's response to Steve's question regarding non-member participation at open GA meetings, and I gotta say, I have some real issues with the response.

First off, how does a family member speaking at a birthday meeting affect GA as a whole? David quoted part of Unity Step 4. The entire step states "Each group should be self-governing except in matters affecting other groups or Gamblers Anonymous as a whole". Please explain how a member's wife, speaking at her husband's 20th GA birthday, affect other groups or GA a whole?

I just read the entire Guidance Code, as of Los Angeles, and nowhere in there does it mention anything about a non-member speaking at an open GA meeting. David quoted the Group Handbook. We are not governed by the Group Handbook. We are governed by our Guidance Code. So, I ask for an explanation of how a group conscience allowing a non-member to participate violates the Guidance Code? If we are to look to other GA approved literature, let's look at the Red Book (A New Beginning) under the heading "Open meeting". The last two lines are "Sometimes open meetings have invited guest speakers. These speakers can be Gamblers Anonymous or non-Gamblers

Anonymous members”.

The argument that non-members participating at a GA meeting violates the Guidance Code just doesn't hold water. I'm not saying I'm in favor or against non-members speaking. I do, however, believe it is a matter for each group to decide, based on a group conscience, as it is not a violation of the Guidance Code or Unity Step 4.

The part that really gets my undies in a wad is where it is implied that we (the group, GA as a whole, BOT) decide exactly what another member's "experience, strength and hope" constitutes. I have read the Guidance Code, and I believe I have a very clear understanding of what is GA approved literature and GA appropriate literature. A member reading a poem, written by them or someone else, as part of their sharing, in my mind does not violate the Guidance Code in any way, shape or form. Am I being told that if I write a poem, or a particular journal entry, or if a friend writes me a poem, I am not allowed to read it at a GA meeting? What if I memorize the poem and just recite it during my share, as opposed to reading it from a paper? Am I in violation of the Guidance Code then? Come on, people. We are not fascists. I know, I know, where do we draw the line? Some would make the argument that we (the individual groups or members) are not capable of drawing the line, so the all knowing BOT must tell them where to draw it. This reminds me of the hoopla around wearing sporting team apparel to a meeting. What gives us the right? Unity Step 4 gives groups the right to self-govern, as long as other groups or GA as a whole are not affected. How does my reading a poem violate this Unity Step. I just don't see it. By the way, I am a firm believer in both the 12 Steps of Recovery and the 12 Steps of Unity. I believe we need structure. I believe we need guidance. I do not believe we need to have our hands held by the BOT over every single aspect of every single meeting. Compulsive gamblers like me need structure, because in my pre-GA days my life was completely unstructured. However, it seems like the BOT sometimes does not give enough credit to our membership. We need to trust the membership to know the difference between what is right and what is wrong. I'm not advocating anarchy, just saying that we need to let Unity Step 4 do what is intended to do. Give the individual groups the right to govern their meetings in the way that works best for them, without violating the Guidance Code. If anyone believes the items I addressed here violate the Guidance Code, then by all means feel free to let me have it. And if anyone thinks that these issues should violate the Guidance Code, then use the ultimate power of the BOT, the democratic group conscience, and try to change it.

Your Brother in Recovery,

Levi B. - Area 2 Trustee, Northern California

8/10/12 - 9:29 AM

Hello All,

Looking at the threads to this post, it is clear that we are somewhat divided on the subject.

Our Guidance Code and all the literature that GA has put out is there for a reason. It is there to protect the fellowship that we so adore. ALL of our literature has been written by members of GA and has been deemed appropriate or approved literature by the Board Of Trustees.

RESPONSIBILITIES FOR INTERNATIONAL TRUSTEES OF GAMBLERS ANONYMOUS

3. Uphold the Guidance Code, and all decisions made by the Board of Trustees (not fulfilling this affects G.A. as a whole).

Past Trustee Decisions

Section 4 - Groups & Intergroups

5 - Non-members of Gamblers Anonymous are not allowed to speak at "Birthday Meetings." Sunnyside, 1989

It is very clear what the intentions of our Trustees were, when they voted on this. The answer is NO, family members are NOT permitted to speak at Birthday Meetings.

This vote was taken 23 years ago. Our fellowship has gone through a world of changes since then. How many changes to our Guidance Code have there been

since then? Our Group Handbook? Our Combo Book? How about our Rules and Procedures which didn't even exist then.

Perhaps it's time to revisit this "Rule". I have been to several "Birthday Meetings" in the accompaniment of other past Trustees and current Trustees where family members did get up to speak and nothing was said.

It may be that the current body feels differently than the body that voted 23 years ago.

Personally, I feel there is a great benefit in having family members share at a "Birthday Meeting". I'm not sure this makes any sense, but it makes it a little more "real" for me.

Yours in recovery,
Andy R. - Area 13B, PAST TRUSTEE, South Jersey

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| Sit Downs - A Bonus in GA |
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8/11/12 - 5:25 PM

My name is Artie R. and I have been in this Fellowship for 37+ years and recently became a Trustee for the NJ area. I plan on submitting an agenda item for San Diego that deals with Sit Downs.

This is a commonly used tool in New York and New Jersey and has helped my family and me more than any other tool in program on a continuous basis for all my years in GA, except for pressure relief.

For the last few years I have become aware that this tool is completely unknown through the rest GA. Because it has had such a dramatically positive affect on my life, I feel it is my duty and obligation to share anything that can benefit our members to restore them to a normal way of thinking and living.

My focus is to bring awareness of this valuable tool to everyone and the best way to do this is to incorporate it into our literature. I'm planning to make a very impassioned discussion about sit downs when I present this item at the Trustee meeting.

I ask every Trustee who reads this to consider how they might help to improve upon what I have put together. If you feel this entire concept is still foreign to you or makes you uncomfortable, please contact me and I will explain all the benefits of a sit down.

It would be a shame for something as great and effective as this tool to be voted down because Trustees don't understand how they work. I became a Trustee to do my part to help improve our Fellowship. This is my initial attempt to do so. Please support this item, or let me know why you can't.

Sit Downs – What they are and why they work. A sit down is one of the most powerful tools of recovery in Gamblers Anonymous, and also the most underutilized. Many times the compulsive gambler chooses not to deal with issues in the home, because they are thought to be too difficult to resolve. Working with a sponsor, the compulsive gambler must first come to realize that his/her life is unmanageable and want to seek the help of others, and the tools of the program to remove the strain between family members.

Recognizing that help is needed with home issues, is just the door opener to fixing these problems. The use of a sit down is the next step. The compulsive gambler has to trust those in the rooms to have his/her best interests in mind.

Sit downs revolve around problem solving and are for everyone, whether you are a new member or have been a member for many decades, and if approached with the honesty, openmindedness and willingness to change that which is, then recovery can be continued and improved, not just in program, but in the member's life in all its aspects.

Once that decision is made, the next steps are simple. The member with the spouse, significant other or family members, get together with other GA members and Gam-Anon members, if applicable. Many couples tend to retain hostility toward each other even after the compulsive gambler comes into GA. Such situations prevent the couple from adequately dealing with issues such as, attitudes, communication, accountability over money and time, issues with the

family at large, including children. The members of the sit down are there to help the couple solve these problems and much more, using their experience, strength and hope.

Success in a sit down comes from open sharing and honesty. No problems can be solved unless they are first honestly identified. In order to get things started, it is as simple as asking your sponsor or some trusted servants in your room, and just say that you need a sit down. Asking for a sit down is not a sign of weakness, but rather a growth step in your recovery and a sign of strength that you are willing to improve your life. But many times, someone in your room will tell you that they think you need a sit down. When you hear that, don't be offended, but be aware that someone cares enough about you and what you are going through, to offer help not just to you, but your family.

Remember, when you finally surrendered to Step 1, you came to realize that your way of handling things in your life was not working. Retaining the your old way of handling problems keeps you from moving forward with your recovery. Sit downs are a way of giving yourself the ability to say that you are willing to accept the help of your GA brothers and sisters for the good of yourself and your family.

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Don't forget to let me know how you feel about this as an addition to the Group Handbook.

Artie R. - Area 12, New Jersey

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| What Can Be Read At A Meeting? |
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8/13/12 - 11:38 AM

Hello Everyone,

I wanted to get some feedback on what is considered to be acceptable to be read during a members therapy at a meeting. I understand the Guidance Code's definition of Approved and Appropriate literature, however, there seems to be another thought process that reciting a poem that one has written or to read from one's journal, or even photo copy something that was printed is acceptable to bring into the meeting and be read.

I don't know if this is considered a fact or just a myth, but I was told that if I can remember what I wrote and recite whatever that is, that would be acceptable. However, once I take something out of my pocket which is not GA Approved or Appropriate literature, I can't read it during the meeting, but I could read it after or before the meeting.

Understanding what is in our Guidance Code is not always easy, as interpretation can sometimes get foggy. Though, when it comes to what Approved or Appropriate literature is, I don't believe there are any foggy areas. If it's not either one, than it belongs outside the meeting. It's so easy to let someone proceed, but why do we make exceptions.

Best wishes to everyone!

Steve F. - Area 1, Los Angeles, Past Trustee

8/16/12 - 8:28 PM

My understanding of what consists of outside literature is that it is materials that have been distributed by any organization or person besides what has been designated as official literature of Gamblers Anonymous by the Board of Trustees.

I don't see how a poem or words of a GA member that have been handwritten or printed out would fall into this description. From my point of view if a member has an inspiration or epiphany and chooses to write this down to be read at a meeting, how is that different from their spontaneous speaking as long as it doesn't include text from a printed book or webpage and only contains their writings? To use an extreme example, if a room has a member who is mute the only way they would have to share would be to transcribe their thoughts and have another member read them. Would this be banned as outside literature? Censoring the ability of members to freely express their personal thoughts on recovery in any way is certainly not the intention of the ban on outside literature from my way of looking at it.

Now if this matter has been discussed and resolved by the Trustees in a past

decision I apologize and would greatly appreciate being pointed to that decision so I confidently point this out to members in my area.

If it hasn't been codified by a Board decision, I'd like to hear how other areas deal with this, your traditions and decisions on the matter.

Yours in Unity,
Kent C. - Area 7C, Trustee - Oklahoma

8/18/12 - 2:49 PM
Hello to All my GA Brothers and Sisters,

Item 11 in Gamblers Anonymous' Group Handbook page 10 (Suggested Meeting Format) states, "...speakers confine their remarks to their own personal thoughts and experiences". I believe that when a member writes their own thoughts as in a poem, farewell letter to gambling, journal entry. etc. they are doing exactly that. When I gambled and in early recovery, I had great difficulty in expressing myself. Writing down my thoughts helped me focus and express myself in ways I never thought possible. I believe that some members who might have difficulty in sharing extemporaneously, feel by writing their own thoughts and experiences through devices such as poems take great joy in self expression. In many years of attending meetings I have been quite often moved by these personal writings and have seen the members reciting them grow in both fellowship and recovery. I see this as no violation in our rules pertaining to outside literature. I believe that sharing one's personal thoughts and experiences through writing is a pure expression of "inside literature".

With Serenity,
Marc L. - Trustee Area 1A
