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Trustee Line for September 2011

A PDF version of this issue to distribute to your rooms, or to print out for easier reading, will be available after 9/30/11.

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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Trustee Poll #19

9/1/11 - 12:01 AM

To all my GA Brothers and Sisters,

I heartily agree with Joe B. on the "no opinion" selection to items listed on the Trustee Poll. It seems to me that the Trustee poll is vital in two ways. First, it is a great tool too sort of feel out the other BOT members and see which way they might vote on an agenda item. This would help that Trustee decide to put the item on the agenda if there seems to be interest or is somewhat divided, or drop it if the agenda item if the overwhelming majority was against it. This would help keep the BOT meetings from going on for so long, and those of us who were there to the bitter end in Cherry Hill would agree would be welcome this.

I believe the trustee poll can also be very helpful when a member, group or intergroup needs some direction or opinion on items of importance to those entities. A "no opinion" vote would do them a disservice. I agree with Joe that if a Trustee has no opinion on a poll item, they should take the question to the membership to find out if there is a particular sentiment either way. If there is, then vote that way. If not, then It seems they should not vote at all.

All opinions expressed in this posting are of course just that. Opinion. Thanks for the opportunity to exercise my right to express my ideas.

Your Brother in Recovery,
Levi B. - Area 2

Don't Judge An Area By The Submissions

9/1/11 - 12:01 AM

To all my GA Brothers and Sisters,

I am a Trustee from Area 2, which serves the greater San Francisco Bay area and the Central Valley. Those that read this trustee line I'm sure are aware that two of the members of Area 2 have posted their thoughts on a couple of issues. This is of course their right to do so. Both of these men are long time members who have attended many meetings and given service to intergroup and the

BOT for many years, and I have great respect for both of them. However, I am not writing to comment on their postings or to take sides.

Those that have read the posts I am referring to might get the idea that Area 2 is in disarray, and that we are falling apart at the seams. Nothing could be further from the truth. Great things are happening out here in Northern California. We are united in our efforts to spread the message of hope and recovery to all of those in the area. We have several well attended social events every year. We have many members always willing to give their time and/or energy to anyone that asks. We have dedicated Trustees who go wherever they are asked to go to help individual members or groups. Several members of the Northern California Intergroup have helped the Central Valley form its own Intergroup, and that intergroup is now planning a mini-conference for next year. Our Intergroup meetings are always productive, and the members that attend are passionate about Gamblers Anonymous. Because of this passion, it sometimes leads to differences of opinion. But these differences are not shown by yelling or being obstinate. We respect each other's opinion, and believe in and have great respect for group conscience. We all know that this is how we grow, as both individuals and as a group. Show me a family (and I believe that Intergroup is a family) that doesn't have differences. I don't believe they exist. I have spoken to other trustees about their experiences with Intergroup, and it seems that all Intergroups at times have personality conflicts and differences of opinion. Yet by the Grace of our Higher Powers, we get through it, and the message of hope and recovery is spread throughout the world.

There will always be personality conflicts and differences of opinion. And because we are imperfect human beings, sometimes we will not act in the way we know we should. I am not saying that these two members have acted inappropriately. I am just saying that their opinions and issues do not reflect Area 2 as a whole. To Paul and Ed, I love and respect both of you, and this posting is not an indictment of either of you.

I look forward to seeing all of you in LA, and hope peace is with all of you.

Your Brother in Recovery,

Levi B. - Area 2, Northern California

East Coast Peril

9/2/11 - 10:07 AM

To all of my brothers and sisters in Gamblers Anonymous:

The recent news we have heard and seen on television news channels is both bothersome and alarming. It is my sincere prayer that all members, and their families/loved ones, who live, work and attend meetings along the eastern seaboard are safe, well and out of harm's way.

With love, faith, hope and trust in our Fellowship,
Linda S - Area 7B

Agenda Item #4 I

9/15/11 - 4:58 PM

To all the members of the Board of Trustees,

The notion of having to remove a GA Trustee from service is unpleasant for all concerned, yet it is an issue that has arisen in the recent past and may likely arise again (though hopefully seldom). Since January 2010, the six-member Trustee Removal Procedures Committee has been tasked with drawing up a formal set of procedures for situations in which a Trustee is alleged to have behaved in a manner (i.e., a return to gambling, or an act or acts deemed detrimental to GA as a whole) that would necessitate his or her removal from the Board.

To be clear, the Committee was not tasked with formulating a comprehensive description of acts detrimental to GA as a whole, or even a set of criteria for identifying such acts, as such a categorical definition would necessarily be extremely broad, unwieldy, and no doubt flawed in unforeseeable ways.

Currently, the GA Guidance Code stipulates that a Trustee may be removed from the Board by a 2/3 vote of the Board members. However, up until now, there have been no procedural steps delineated that would precede such a vote -- that is, no protocols for determining whether such a vote should take place, or specifically what types of testimony or discussion should occur prior to a vote.

At the May 2011 BOT meeting in Cherry Hill, a discussion of whether or not to possibly remove a particular Board member shed light on the need for explicitly defined protocols. In the absence of a structured procedure, the discussion assumed a quality that was not consistent with the value of orderliness, as prescribed in Section IV, Paragraph 3 of the Procedures ("Meeting Presentations and Proceedings"). The result was a process that was unclear, unfocused, and -- at moments -- simply confusing.

After much earnest labor, the Trustee Removal Procedures Committee has authored a step-by-step procedural protocol for the removal of a Trustee. We believe that the proposed procedures are fair, measured and precise. At the upcoming BOT meeting next month, the Trustees will vote on whether or not to accept these new procedures as GA-approved literature and agree to incorporate the necessary modification in our Guidance Code. The committee urgently hopes that the vote will be in favor of approval.

The procedures include mechanisms that can avert the necessity of a vote at the BOT level, including a mandatory 45-day period during which the member filing a complaint against a sitting Trustee must make a good-faith effort to have a hearing and resolve the issue at the level of his or her local Intergroup. Then, if the matter cannot be resolved locally, it will be referred to a special 5-member Trustee Removal Merit Panel, comprised of geographically disparate Trustees (to avoid bias). This Panel will evaluate the merit of the charge (based on information and testimony submitted by the concerned parties) and determine whether or not the matter should be considered by the full Board of Trustees. These preliminary procedural "layers" will ensure that only legitimate and serious complaints reach the BOT, underscoring the gravity of what it means to remove a Trustee from service.

Should the complaint reach the BOT, both the petitioner and the Trustee in question will have ample opportunity to submit testimony and have their perspectives heard. BOT members will have the opportunity to question the concerned parties, and the vote itself will be taken by secret ballot, with a 2/3 majority remaining as the standard for removal of a Trustee.

Despite the various safeguards and buffers built into the process, the procedures are constructed in such a way as to ensure expediency as well. The "Trustee Removal Guidelines and Procedures" have been carefully wrought by a committee of six GA members who very much hope that they will not be needed often. But when a crisis arises -- as crises do -- it is critical to have recourse to an efficient, practical, unambiguous process. We strongly believe the Procedures provide just that.

Before the Procedures come up on the agenda at the BOT meeting in Los Angeles next month, I trust that the Trustees will have read them carefully and given them due consideration.

Ed E. - Trustee Removal Procedures Committee Chair
Area 2 - Past Trustee, Northern California

9/15/11 - 5:57 PM
To all Trustees:

Thank you, Ed, for posting the information regarding the Trustee Removal Procedure which is an agenda item for the Trustee Meeting in Los Angeles. Your insightfulness in preparing this note for the Trustees was well written and sincere. I wish each member of the Board of Trustees could have been part of this procedure as its severity touches us all. I don't believe there was a member of the committee who 'enjoyed' the task we were asked to perform. We questioned each step of the potential procedure frequently to insure that each person involved was going to be treated fairly and with the utmost respect.

I am proud of the final document the committee voted to accept, and I was both honored and humbled by participation in this effort. Like you, I hope each member reads the procedure thoroughly before placing his or her vote. Each member of the committee spoke calmly and quietly during our collaboration;

one could tell it was being taken with the greatest of gravity and sincerity. The bottom line was that this was a measure which had to be taken. And like my fellow committee members, I hope and pray we never, ever have to use it. But it's there if we do.

This is a highly-charged and emotional issue for many. It was and is with the greatest of hope that we have diverted some of the emotion: the result being a fact-based procedure - not a "he said/she said" issue. Thank you for your direction; thank you for your guidance, and thanks to the committee members for their willingness to serve their brothers and sisters through a difficult challenge.

With love, faith, hope and trust in our Fellowship,
Linda S - Area 7B, Oklahoma
Former Trustee, Area 3A, San Diego

9/18/11 – 9:20 AM

When it comes to doing things impulsively, there is no better person to call upon than a compulsive gambler. Hurry up and make a decision. Hurry up and figure out something to take care of the problem before it gets worse without thinking it through. Hurry up and do something that you will regret later.

When there is no procedure in place to take care of a problem, there is only rushing, and a lot of 'hurry up and make a decision' actions for which you will later be sorry. As compulsive gamblers, we are really good at making up stories 'on the fly'. Anything to justify our actions, so we can believe our own lies. All this ties into how we make decisions.

Recovery hopefully has slowed down this process for all of us and allowed us all to be a bit more balanced when important decisions come before us. If you need proof of how difficult patience can be, play back in your own mind the events of the agenda item in Cherry Hill to remove a Trustee. It was an event filled with raw emotions and little if any credible process. Although the final decision was not to remove the Trustee, the actions taken were not well thought out and it was a classic example of 'lets try this so we can hurry up and make a decision'.

Well, my brothers and sisters, the time has come to change that, as it relates to a provision of the Guidance Code that specifically deals with removing a Trustee for acts considered to be detrimental to GA as a whole. My ultimate hope is that the Board of Trustees never has to endure the distasteful act of even considering the removal of a Trustee from the Board of Trustees. However, before Cherry Hill, it was likely that all the Trustees would have almost guaranteed that such an event would never happen. It did, and now the Board of Trustees has the opportunity to pass specific procedures on how to deal with this subject, should it come up again, only this next time with greater fairness and a better understanding of the circumstances.

Before you read any further, you should immediately go to the download page of the Trustee website and review, in complete detail the document submitted for the agenda item #41 – part 2. After reading that 7-page item, you will see that slow and steady is the operative phrase. Removing a Trustee is a very serious matter. This document takes all the personalities out of the equation and gives multiple 'pit stops' as I have grown to refer to them as, in order for everyone involved in the actual situation that either caused the action that may now be moving toward a decision by the Board of Trustees to remove a Trustee to come to a more solidly defined procedure. Slow it down, defuse the emotion, give all the parties and opportunity for enlightened response, ratchet down the intensity. Maybe it will give us all an opportunity to repair rather than destroy. However, things don't always work out according to efforts of goodwill. When that fails, other measures have to be taken to maintain the balance we all seek in recovery.

This is not about the GA police, which has come to be a pet phrase for many who continue to fight conforming with group conscience and take back their will. It is the arrogance of those who preach Unity, but continue to rebel against the actual group(s) they profess to be protecting. This agenda item is about patience, understanding, eliminating personalities, and in the final analysis, the ultimate authority...group conscience at the Board of Trustees level. We should not tolerate the behavior of those trusted servants who commit acts detrimental to GA as a whole. Unfortunately, a procedure to remove Trustees at the local area level was narrowly defeated on the 2nd vote in Tampa. This would have eliminated the need to now put into place actions that will no doubt be reviled by those who live by the Rodney King way of

thinking... 'Why can't we all just get along?' Detrimental acts of a Trustee have a far more reaching affect on the members in their area. If this happens, they need to be removed, and done so in a calm and clearly outlined protocol. These Trustee Removal Procedures do just that – with directed purpose and no personalities.

The question you have to ask yourself is if these procedures were approved and in place before Cherry Hill, would the item to remove the Trustee in question ever have been placed before the Board of Trustees? If so, that means that every possible resolution pathway would have been exhausted. This did not happen in actuality. If it did come in front of the Board of Trustees, would the process of how the agenda item would be heard have yielded a different outcome?

Approving the procedure strengthens us as a Fellowship. It gives more strength and direction to the local areas, the Intergroups, and the individual rooms. If the procedures at those levels fail, then the Board of Trustees is there as the backstop it should be. All the good that can happen as a result of the structure of this process can't happen unless the Trustees approve it.

If you have any doubts about any aspect of these procedures, please talk with any of the committee members before the Los Angeles Trustee meeting. The biggest enemy we face is a lack of knowledge about what these procedures are and how they can accomplish their objective. If you find out that any Trustee is looking at these procedures for the first time once the conference starts, know that the Trustee will not have time to understand all that is covered in the 7 pages of how the Trustee Removal Procedures Panel will operate. By the way, the current committee members that came up with these procedures will not be part of the Trustee Removal Panel, when it is approved. That is up to the Chair to appoint 5 members from 4 different compass points in the US and 1 from Canada.

Let's think ahead, rather than react to situations after the problems occur. If we don't use it ever again, then nothing was lost by passing the procedures. If we have to refer to it for a future action, then we can rest assured that all parties will get 100% fair treatment, in the true manner of the Fellowship of Gamblers Anonymous.

David M. – Trustee Removal Procedure committee member
Area 12, New Jersey

9/19/11 - 1:54 PM

First and foremost I would like to thank Ed. E for his guidance and patience as the Chair of the Trustee Removal Procedure Committee. I would also like to thank the other members who took part in this process.

When I first joined this committee, several Trustees approached me saying that this committee was a waste of time. That a Trustee would never be removed from their position. My reaction was that we have this provision in the Guidance Code, so we should have something in place if we do need it. My hope has always been that we never need this document.

Fast forward to Cherry Hill. A Trustee was being brought up on charges of acts being detrimental to GA as a whole. I agree with David in that this event was filled with raw emotion. We, on the committee, worked endlessly to try and take that emotion out of the process and keep everything focused on the facts at hand. There were items we disagreed on. However, we all, including myself, kept an open mind as we moved forward. This document is the end result. During our discussions on certain items in the procedure, everyone was given an opportunity to speak and we looked at the best way to keep personalities out of the equation, focusing more on principles.

Nothing in here was taken lightly. Our original goal was to have this document ready in time for Cherry Hill, however we believed we needed to get it right, as opposed to just getting something done. To make sure emotion was taken out of the equation. This committee worked diligently toward that goal. It is my hope, and that of many others, that this is never needed.

Pete K. – Trustee Removal Procedure committee member
Area 13B - South Jersey

9/21/11 - 3:31 PM

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I would like to thank Ed for the invitation to be part of this committee. I would also like to thank the other committee members for their dedication and thoughtfulness throughout the process of writing this procedure over the last several months.

For me, the reason for the formation of the committee was simple and straightforward: There is a provision in the Guidance Code that calls out for the removal of a Trustee for acts that are detrimental to GA as a whole, yet no further clarification as to what that process should look like.

What I am proud of about this document is that there is tremendous scope for action and reconciliation at the individual, group and Intergroup levels. At any time, the matter can be put to rest. The progression of action is logical and natural, with plenty of inbuilt safeguards for reflection and due diligence before moving forward.

As others on the committee have pointed out, this process strives to separate emotion from fact. While it is to be hoped that this procedure is never employed, it does serve as a guide for everyone in the program—including new members, Trusted Servants, Intergroup members and the Board of Trustees—as to how to proceed if there is a serious question about the actions of a sitting Trustee.

I also very much appreciate that the document provides a step-by-step outline for dealing with such charges should they reach the BOT level. Again, having a clearly-delineated process eliminates uncertainty and allows the BOT to focus on the charges, instead of being distracted by discussion of procedure and protocol.

Great care was taken throughout the committee's process to do our absolute best to ensure that the parties involved in such an action are treated fairly and with respect.

Please take the time to read the document attached to Agenda item #41 prior to our meeting in Los Angeles. I am open to any questions, and I'm sure the other committee members would be, too.

Thanks again to the other members of the committee and to Ed for his patience and clear-mindedness.

Your Sister in Recovery,
Jeannie B. - Trustee, Area 8A, Minnesota

Committee Reports

9/28/11 - 6:46 AM

It is never too late, until it is too late. (Yogi Berra and Herb B.)

This is a shout-out to all committee members and committee chairs:

Please attempt to send in your committee reports for the Los Angeles Trustee Meeting within the next 48 hours.

This will give all trustees the opportunity to see your committee's work in progress well in advance of the meeting, and thus, be able to ask questions and clarifications where necessary.

Thanks, Herb B. - 2nd. Co-Chair of the Board of Trustees
Trustee Area 5, Montreal
