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Trustee Line for September 2012

A PDF version of this issue to distribute to your rooms, or to print out for easier reading, will be available after 9/30/12.

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 9

9/1/12 - 12:00 AM

Unity Step 9

Gamblers Anonymous, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards directly responsible to those they serve.

This is the Unity Step I mutter under my breath at every Trustee meeting when we are our third point of order and headed towards a challenge to the chair. Well, at least the first part of this step. But seriously, I think this is the most misunderstood Unity Step in GA; or maybe I should say its original intent is ignored.

Going back to source documents from the time when this step was written, the writers stated that there was to be no central authority that could tell any group or member what to do. I am glad to see an item on the San Diego agenda to change the Board of Trustees from a "governing" board to a "guidance" board of the fellowship. The goal of service boards, including the BOT, should be to bring recovery within reach of anyone who wants it. It seems to me that several articles of the Guidance Code are in direct conflict with this Unity Step and the recent vote at the BOT on the removal of a Trustee conflicts with our own literature on Unity Step 9 which states "they have no power within themselves" and "have no formal veto power".

Some may feel that we need rules to protect the fellowship or to ensure conformance to the Recovery and Unity Steps; or that we need rules to clarify every acceptable and unacceptable behavior in the fellowship. I would ask that every Trustee to first ask why a member is doing something that appears to be at fault. Are they doing it from a place of ego? Or is there some knowledge or spiritual hole within GA they are trying to fill to help their recovery? If it is the later, we as Trustees should work to understand the hole and find the right solution to give our fellowship the best tools for their recovery. If is the former, experience has shown that our illness will eventually return to those who are not following the spiritual principles of the program. Do you agree with that statement? What is your experience?

My vision is that Intergroups and the BOT would focus on getting the message of recovery out to those who are looking for a solution; more and more casinos are opening around the country. The committees on Public Relations, Prison, Treatment and the Answering Service should get the most attention and

support since they are the first contact most compulsive gamblers will have with GA. We have a serious issue in Connecticut and other places where groups use "Gamblers Anonymous" in their name or literature to advertise their phone number; we should work hard to correct these kinds of problems. I would love to see someone who has been through the prison system form a committee and reach out to all prisons about starting a GA meeting at their facility.

In essence, I feel our committees should strive to look outward to help the still suffering compulsive gambler instead of looking inward at what rules we need for those already in our fellowship. What are your thoughts?

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

9/1/12 - 12:01 AM

It wouldn't be accurate to say that I have waited 9 months to respond to this Unity Step submission from Paul, but this one carries a lot of meat on the bone for me. There is a high degree of sensitivity with this step, especially in view of the BOT and its actions that appear to ready for some scrutiny in San Diego.

It's a witness to the perversion that occurs in this Fellowship of members who do what they want, in direct defiance of Unity Step 4 regarding things that affect GA as a whole, the Guidance Code, the decisions of the Board of Trustees and our literature. That all falls under the category of "Don't confuse me with the facts." Structure is a necessary component of recovery. Without it, we are commandeered by what every other person's version of how this Fellowship should proceed. A member should be able to go to any GA and see the basic tenants of GA without variation, of course with obvious exceptions as per Unity Step 4.

The Board of Trustees agenda item to change the By-Laws is an effort to remove the governing aspect of the item to one of assignment of responsibility. The Board of Regents is responsible for the corporation of GA and the Board of Trustees for the Fellowship. The proposed change is not to modify the functions of the Board of Trustees, just to uphold consistency with Unity Step 2, Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern. So in the infinite wisdom of those who first put together the corporate structure of GA, they used the word "governed". This item has been overlooked for too long, like much of what is written poorly in our By-Laws and Guidance Code, and I am hopeful that the efforts of the committee that is responsible for this item, will be recognized by an affirmative vote in San Diego.

Our Fellowship has evolved over the last 55 years to the point where there are numerous things that must be followed by members, groups, Intergroups and Trustees. This is for uniformity and conformance with the Guidance Code. What are we to do when someone, at any of these levels violates, let's say the Guidance Code? Evidently from this month's submission, we should just let it go thereby ensuring that such behavior propagates throughout the area or the Fellowship at large. That sets up the stage for a continuation of that behavior to be taught to the new members. Maybe we should just buy a spray bottle of weed killer for each room and let the Secretary spray it in each meeting to kill the roots of our Fellowship. That is the message I get from this overview of wondering why members act the way they do. If we have Trustees violating the Guidance Code, we can't just say they can be removed, we have to follow up with the removal of such Trustees. Let us not forget about accountability and transparency.

I understand that addiction is addiction, but when are we going to stop making comparisons to AA and realize that although AA may be on autopilot with its structure, GA evidently has other issue that mandate that we keep the structure we have, so that we can concentrate on our primary purpose. We can't help the compulsive gambler who still suffers if everyone is running in different directions as to how individuals feel the program should be followed. The argument of "common sense" dictating what should be done, essentially is about common sense not being so common. Expecting others to follow the spiritual principles foremost in their minds is a leap of faith that we can't afford.

Getting back to the question of why members carry out their behaviors that are against what we have in place. My answer is twofold. Ego clearly takes the majority of the credit for most of the problems we face within the Fellowship. The balance can clearly be laid directly in the lap of the Board of Trustees.

Because most of the Trustees choose to turn the other cheek and not uphold the Guidance Code and the decisions of the Board of Trustees, the problems persist, and going unchecked like that, our garden of weeds continues to grow and eat away at the very roots of our Fellowship. The fact remains that the spiritual principles of the program do not carry into the world of how many of the members of GA work their recovery program.

Let me also say this, the Board of Trustees is elected by the areas that they represent and act as representatives of those areas. Each Trustee should poll their area on the forthcoming agendas and use the opinions to guide them in voting. Additionally, it is incumbent upon the Trustees to channel the energies of the BOT into extending our primary purpose into the world of the compulsive gamblers who still suffer. Along the way, we need to plug the holes in the Guidance Code and the rest of our literature. Yes, the variances between AA and GA are very prominent at times, but GA can't constantly be held hostage to its perceived comparative shortfalls when matched up with AA.

I would also be in favor of GA emptying our collective treasuries and commit the money to blanket the advertising markets with a simple billboard that was almost proposed by Area 3 a few years ago. It was a big florescent yellow poster perfect for bus stops, but adaptable to any usage. It had a very big and bold question mark in the middle. Above it was the words "Gambling Problem" and underneath the question mark where the words "Call Gamblers Anonymous" with the local hotline number directly below. The simplicity of it was amazing. Hopefully, someone can submit it for approval in Vancouver as appropriate literature.

In the meantime, if I annoyed people who are reading this with my remark that the Trustees are partially to blame for the behavior of those who insist on doing things their own way in this Fellowship, look at the Local Area Help Flyer link on the Trustee website. Do you see your area listed with a flyer? This flyer format has been there for 4 years. If it's not, then it's time to get one put together. If there is one, get them printed and distributed to all rooms. Other than that, we will continue to do what we do at the Trustee meetings, until someone makes a change.

David M. "Area 12, New Jersey"

9/4/12 - 9:34 AM

David M. brings up a point that I have often reflected on about differences between GA and AA. When I hit my bottom from drinking, I was physically, spiritually and emotionally bankrupt. I wanted to kill myself at that moment. Most people did not want to be around me and I hurt the people closest to me. Coming in to GA, my bottom was much shallower than most, because I understood powerlessness and knew I could not stop gambling on my own, I turned to GA. I did not walk in as someone with 17 years of recovery; I came in as a newcomer, asked for help and took suggestions. I haven't gambled since, one day at a time.

Watching many new people come through the GA rooms in Connecticut, I sense there is a difference in newcomers between GA and AA. These are my limited observations and based on my opinion, if yours is different, please join this discussion. More newcomers to GA than AA are at their first meeting due to external pressures: lost job, angry spouse, legal problems, etc. Not as many GA members get to the program because they are sick and tired of being sick and tired: being so physically and mentally beat up that they are willing to surrender. Many GA members have been living a high life just before their bottom: comp'd rooms, meals, pit bosses calling them by name. The whole gaming industry is trying to build up their ego.

What happens when each of these newcomers to AA and GA walk into their first meeting? The AA newcomer is told to sit back and listen, get phone numbers and go to another meeting. If he is not sure he is an alcoholic, he is just told to keep coming. The GA newcomer walks into the room and (in Connecticut) he is asked the twenty questions at the first meeting from people he does not know or trust; and he has to answer those questions to the whole room. If the person is not willing to declare they are a compulsive gambler, they are asked to leave since it is a closed meeting. Also, there are few open meetings in GA, there are more open meetings than closed meetings in AA.

Before the Unity Steps were written in their original form in AA, their central office asked every group to send any rules that group had for their members. When they put all the rules in one document, they realized that no one could

be members in AA if all the rules were in effect in one place. There was a lot of fear that individual members could destroy meetings or the program as a whole and they made up the rules to protect what was so vitally important to them all. In the end they saw the program survive many "rule" violations and they came up with Rule 72: Don't take yourself too damn seriously.

One thing that I still don't understand: what is the consequence if someone violates the guidance code or Unity Steps? In AA, when someone breaks their anonymity at a public level they approach the person and stress Unity Step 11; most were uninformed and apologetic, some are ego driven and ignore any suggestions. AA also approaches the media outlet that published the story and explains the principle of anonymity and most will actively support that principle once it is explained. But nothing can be done to the person or reporter who does not comply.

Although there is some important points made about social media, this new Article for the Guidance Code is over the top expansion of Unity Step 11. What is the point of using a different first name when doing a radio show? Anyone who is going to connect my voice and first name will probably recognize me by my voice anyway. And that is not the intent of maintaining public anonymity. The intent is to prevent the general public from associating any one individual with Gamblers Anonymous, not to keep people who know me from discovering I am in GA when I speak in a public forum. With the addition of the internet to Unity Step 11, I would much rather an explanation of anonymity and the internet, especially related to social media, in a pamphlet on anonymity rather than more unenforceable rules in the Guidance Code that will create more disharmony than unity. Do compulsive gamblers really need more rules than alcoholics?

Respectfully,
Paul S. - Area 17, Trustee, Connecticut

New Article XXI Overview - Section 8 - Continued

9/1/12 - 12:01 AM
David,

You ask the question "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?"

This is absolutely about the message we are supposed to carry. Whether I use my own name or not makes no difference in the message. By the way, I write in the first person only for convenience. When I write or say I, I am representing any GA member who might be in this situation, not only myself.

But to respond to your entire answer to my post on this section and on anonymity as a whole, I have the right to break my anonymity if I so choose. I DO NOT have the right to break yours or any other member of GA. You state in Section 1 that Unity step 11 does not apply to family, friends, etc. Does our literature not tell us to speak to Doctors, Judges, Attorneys, Counselors, etc. about the illness of compulsive gambling and that there is help available at GA? (We even have a pamphlet specifically for this purpose). If I stand up in a court room or Doctors convention and state the I am a compulsive gambler and that I have been able to stop gambling with the help of GA, is that not spreading the message? And if I do that, does it really matter if I use my own name or not? Or if I am on a call in Radio program and choose to use my real name? Again, nowhere in this program does it say that I cannot break my own anonymity. Just for the record, I am using the very basic definition of anonymity, which to me and I would venture to say most members take to mean revealing my name not for glory or attention, just because that is my name. I am not ashamed of the fact that I am a compulsive gambler.

I will state this one last time, and this applies to every section you have written: No one has the right to tell me that I (or any other member of GA) can or cannot use my real name and/or reveal that I attend GA meetings, as long as I am speaking for myself and not representing GA. This is my decision and mine alone. Obviously some of our literature is contradictory on some of the ideas you have presented, but these articles and not the answer to unifying our definition of anonymity. It is preposterous to believe otherwise.

Your Brother in Recovery,

9/4/12 - 9:25 AM

If Levi is saying he thinks it is okay to go on the radio and use his first and last name or go on television and show his full face and state that he is a member of Gamblers Anonymous, this is in direct conflict with Unity Step 11. It is not an issue of shame, fear or ego; it is an issue of risk. Levi may be a model GA member who never gambles again and represents the program in a positive way. But if Levi has the option to do this, then ANY member could do the same. Some of those people could do much harm to the program, far more damage than the goodwill that people like Levi could generate. "Bad news sells better. Speaking at a conference, using only your first name, is much different than putting your full name or picture in a mass media product. So those members whose life can be a testimony of the great things that GA can do for a compulsive gambler can still share their story; but to protect the program from other misguided individuals, it is strongly suggested they comply with Unity Step 11.

Respectfully,
Paul S. - Area 17, Trustee, Connecticut

Photography At GA Events

9/11/12 - 1:27 PM

Greetings, Fellow Trustees,

I'm hoping someone can point me in the right direction concerning a recent development here in our area. We had our annual Intergroup Picnic last Saturday, attended by about 125 of our members, families, and friends. Throughout the day I took pictures (75) of the activities. I then uploaded the pictures to a web site and sent a link to the site only to those I remembered seeing at the picnic.

At no time in any of the pictures is there an indication that it is a GA event, or identifying anyone as a member of GA.

One of our members I sent the link to forwarded it to another member who did not attend. That member then contacted me to say he felt it was wrong to take pictures at our functions, citing concern for members' anonymity.

I have taken pictures at our picnics and banquets for years, and only shared them with people who were present. However, if I'm wrong I'll stop.

I have been searching the Trustee Web Site for references to photography at GA events, to no avail. Can anyone point me towards some material (Past Decisions, etc) for guidance? See you in San Diego. (Can I bring my camera?)

Your Friend in Recovery,
John B. - Trustee, Area 13, Philadelphia

9/14/12 - 10:24 PM

This is in response to taking Photography at GA events. I asked that people not take pictures at a GA event. You never know who is in the background of those pictures. Members in our area expressed concern about having their pictures taken, or worse yet not knowing that their picture had been taken. We would not post pictures on our website either, as that would associate those members immediately with Gamblers Anonymous. Please no cameras.

Kathy H. - Past Trustee, Area 8 - Chicago

Stand For Something Or Fall For Anything

9/11/12 - 8:36 PM

I am going to make a bold statement which may be attacked by some who do not believe this statement to be true. "The heart and soul of our fellowship are the individual groups and individual members who practice the principles of Recovery and Unity on a daily basis to the best of their abilities." These individual members carry the message of hope to those that still suffer on a daily basis, who give of themselves without concern for the time day or night,

who contribute to the I.S.O. enabling the I.S.O. to fulfill their mission; and without their dedication, commitment, and love for their recovery and freedom, there would not be a Fellowship of Gamblers Anonymous.

There are some Trustees who have stated that the Board of Trustee members are elite, or in ways superior to the average G.A. member. Nothing could be further from the truth. If humility is one of the highest and finest qualities of the human mind, not to mention kindness and generosity, then the statement that members of the Board of Trustees are elite is wrong. Our Trustees are but Trusted Servants. They do not govern. The Trustees are not elected to be elite. They are elected to be the guardians of the Twelve Steps of Recovery and Twelve Steps of Unity and are be guided by those precepts in making all their decisions. The Trustees are also asked to be living examples of Recovery and Unity as they comport themselves in carrying out their duties.

In the spring Trustee meeting in Boston there was an item to change the name of the GA Guidance Code to The GA Rule Book. By a vote of 3 for the change and 108 against the change, it was defeated. Since the GA Guidance Code clearly states there is no one more important than the individual member and that he or she has no ruler or superior, then the truth is that the proposed change to change the name of the Guidance Code to "Rule Book" was a violation of the Guidance Code itself. The group conscience prevailed!

There are proposed changes to the Recovery Program and Unity Program to be decided at the fall Trustee meeting that I believe will be defeated also. The time has come to stand for the principles the Program was founded upon, which are time-tested; and changing their meaning and purpose does nothing to improve the Twelve Steps of Recovery and Twelve Steps of Unity which are infallible. A Trustee in a previous posting stated that to change a Recovery Step or Unity Step would take an "Act of God." I totally agree with that statement.

These Steps that guide all our recoveries and unity need to be honored and respected. The changes most important to recovery and unity are the changes we build within ourselves for continued recovery, personal growth, and sooner or later "A Spiritual Awakening."

In closing I want to address two issues: 1- The animosity and antagonism directed towards the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. There is no justification for this attack. We are not A.A. That is true, but in no way does A.A. hold us hostage. In all humility, we owe respect and gratitude for their willingness to lend to us their program for our use; and all should know that Jim W., founder of Gamblers Anonymous, was a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. Do we know with certainty that Gamblers Anonymous would exist if Jim W. were not a member of Alcoholics Anonymous? 2- The idea that GA is a corporation that supersedes the Spiritual Principles of Fellowship. We are NOT a corporation in the sense that that Gamblers Anonymous is a company. The incorporation of our service offices (Board of Regents) was done for the obvious reasons of Internal Revenue Service requirements and good business practice. It was never intended to supersede or replace the Spiritual Principles of our Fellowship. Anyone who violates the Spiritual Principles of the fellowship or believes those principles need not be honored is not carrying the right message.

The Gamblers Anonymous Guidance Code tells us that our Fellowship is based upon democratic and spiritual principles, and dismissing that profound statement is a violation of the Guidance Code itself and affects Gamblers Anonymous as a whole. The Spiritual Principles Gamblers Anonymous describes as the highest and finest qualities of the human mind are listed as; Kindness, Generosity, Honesty, and Humility. That list would be well-served by the addition of Compassion, Love, and Tolerance.

Love for all our continued recoveries,
George W. Area 16, Past Trustee, Upstate New York

9/12/12 - 1:42 PM

Interesting, although obviously sensitive stuff going on here it seems. Red rag to a bull without horns, so to speak. I refer only to myself of course.

I haven't seen anything that resembles an attack, antagonism or animosity towards any other fellowship and I can't see any reference to Trustees being considered elite.

I have previously seen a reference or two to suggest that Trustees may have undertaken or been given a higher level of responsibility than non trustees but, regardless of the varying opinions on that matter I don't see it in any way as suggestive that even one Trustee considers themselves Elite. In fact I believe that the two year minimum qualifying period is sufficient to ensure that, by the time anyone becomes a trustee they are fully aware that to try and pull such a stunt, well, aint gonna work.

To suggest that any trustee would have such pretentiousness would be to undermine some of the very people who are likely to be among the doers who stick their necks out for the greater good of us all, treason if you would.

Warning, End of Rant but start of ramble which may well lead to another rant, if you are thin skinned please exercise your right to not read further.

On the matter of Gamblers Anonymous being held hostage by any other fellowship, no chance, simply because no other fellowship has an opinion on the matter, period or as we say, FULL STOP.

Attempts by individuals to hold us hostage on behalf of something or someone they don't represent, that's another story.

I totally agree with the sentiment expressed in an earlier post by David, that we will be less effective bringing the message of the program of gamblers anonymous to those who suffer if everyone is running in different directions and I believe this is a problem whereby individual members, inadvertently or otherwise, attempt to commandeer the fellowship and program of Gamblers Anonymous for a purpose other than that which exists. The need for structure, consistency, uniformity and a democratically and spiritually guided conformity (conscience if you would) is beyond necessary, it is vital. Again, plagiarism of words from an earlier post mixed in with my own view.

I'm not convinced that rules are the answer but I believe the real issue may be that, whether it is palatable or not, there is an inference by some members that they represent or are representative of the views of outside organizations.

Ask these members who appointed them to represent these organizations, the answer is nobody. I expect nobody from any other fellowship asked us to allow a representative in to fix our program for us with their superior offering. No, the source of these opinions is just the passion from members who feel they have something extra to give. There's a time and a place for everything and the wrong time and the wrong place leads to disruption.

If anyone has anything they want the fellowship to consider maybe the best thing to do is work it out and bring it to the table in a spiritual and democratic way.

(Perhaps we should elect some representatives and meet once or twice a year to continually reflect on such matters, I suggest San Diego this fall, Lol.)

On the matter of any other fellowship having lent us the steps I do not believe that is the view of any other fellowship. My understanding is that these steps were given to us freely for which we are grateful.

On the matter previously put forward in an earlier post about source documents and intentions, there are many ways of looking at source documents and intentions and many ways of fitting perceptions to fit any particular mood at any particular time, again, what's behind the view and what is the benefit for this fellowship.

Apologies David but I must again quote your words..QUOTE|Our Fellowship has evolved over the last 55 years to the point where there are numerous things that must be followed by members, groups, Intergroups and Trustees. This is for uniformity and conformance with the Guidance Code UNQUOTE

Perhaps the statement " These are the steps which are a program of recovery " (Not suggested anymore, they are, because they work) illustrates that well, we're not guessing any more, for the most part, collectively, we know what works and what doesn't.

To all trustees and past trustees who have given freely of their time and effort in service, thank you.

new version