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**Trustee Line for December 2013**

A PDF version of this issue to distribute to your rooms, or to print out for easier reading, will be available after 12/31/13.

**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

Item	Subject	Last Entry	Entries
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**Telephone Conference Calls – A Class Of Meetings Unto Themselves?**

12/1/13 - 11:15 PM

As of the Orlando Trustee meeting, item #77 passed, allowing telephone conference call meetings to be listed on the ISO website, providing they meet the guidelines set forth by the Telephone Conference Committee, which were also approved in Orlando by the Board of Trustees.

As of that item being passed, there were no telephone meetings that were in place that met those guidelines. Of the telephone conference call meetings that are already in place, they have been difficult to find and each seems to run with a different set of rules.

The focus of this posting is to discuss the condition of these meetings and what real connections are being made with members under the umbrella of other people's version of how things should be done in Gamblers Anonymous. Whatever the situations are, I'm sure all of us agree that the Unity Steps and the Guidance Code must prevail in all that we do.

I know that there are many people who are guided only by Unity Step 5 – about carrying our message to the compulsive gambler who still suffers. All other Unity Steps only become important when the rationalizations and justifications for actions taken become important. But for the most part, the other steps are conveniently overlooked.

So let me bring up some particulars. Ask yourself on each one if you believe this is the way a GA meeting should be run. First, remember that telephone conference call meetings are by definition open meetings. The objectives of these meetings are to reach people who might not physically be able to attend a meeting or for those who need a 'GA tune up' between their regular meetings. They are not meant to replace a physical meeting and do not constitute a group in the eyes of the ISO. It is a GA meeting, nothing more.

Since each meeting is open to anyone who has the phone number and access ID, there can be no assurance as to who is actually in the meeting. We are Gamblers Anonymous and if someone dials in and wishes to remain

anonymous, we may never know who that person is, but the people who dial in cannot be restricted in any way. It is possible that attendees could be a bookie, a loan shark, an officer of the court or anyone else, including the news media. Announcements have to be made periodically that we cannot be assured that only GA members are in attendance. This is a non-negotiable condition.

Here some of the points about various telephone conference call GA meetings which are problematic:

- attendees give out their email addresses looking to contact other attendees of the meeting.
- attendees give out their phone numbers looking to contact other attendees of the meeting.
- no open attendance – you must be invited to be part of the meetings.
- you are required to give your email address and phone number to the organizer in order to get into the meeting with an invitation.
- all attendees MUST be announced, so if you wanted to remain anonymous, you wouldn't be allowed to attend the meeting.
- only a pre-qualified group of people can speak at the meetings. That is decided by one person or a limited few.
- meetings are purposely recorded by the meeting organizers.
- recorded audio files of the GA meetings are posted to a website with public access.
- organizers can access personal information on attendees that is part of Linked-In, Google, Twitter and FaceBook.
- attendees can access personal information on other attendees that is part of Linked-In, Google, Twitter and FaceBook.

These are a few of the problems with some of the existing telephone conference call GA meetings. They are violating the Unity Steps, even though the intentions of the organizers are commendable. I would assume that many of the meetings were put together and began their operation without the approval of the local area Intergroups. Maybe they were approved after the fact, but evidently, they are still in violation of the Unity Steps.

What's worse is when members decide on their own to start these meetings and don't check with anyone and when it is pointed out that there are violations, the organizers continue to proceed without making the necessary changes to conform to the Unity Steps. Unfortunately, members who defy the Unity Steps seldom get called to task, as many people in the area just turn their heads not looking to create any controversy.

Sad though it may be, the Trustees in the affected areas are left with the responsibility to make sure the Unity Steps are followed. Amazing though it may be, the Trustees in those areas are many times completely unaware of the Unity Step violations, and once made aware, they are reluctant to be instrumental in the effort to correct the problems.

When all else fails, the Board of Regents should be called into the mix. To the best of my knowledge, that hasn't been done in a very long time, certainly not to any telephone conference call GA meeting. The question that has to be asked is if the organizers for these rogue meetings openly defy the Unity Steps, even after the violations are pointed out, why should they be allowed to organize any such meetings? Maybe those who complain about these explicit telephone conference call meeting guidelines, should stop and connect the dots that the guidelines are there to prevent meetings from going off the beaten path, just for the sake of someone's ego.

The telephone conference call meetings that will be listed on the ISO website will be in full compliance with the guidelines. And I put to everyone else, why would it be acceptable to have it any other way?

David M. – Area 12, New Jersey

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**Isn't There Something After - Talk The Talk?**

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12/10/13 - 10:32 PM

Recently, I started a Google Group for the regularly attending members of my home room, Westfield Thursday in NJ. I, like most of us, feel a palpable drop in connection with my Westfield brothers and sisters in between meetings. I find I am the person who is reaching out to everyone, without an even a small effort on the part of most of the other members. This Google Group allows for

anyone in the room to go to the site and type up a question, feeling or anything that person wants to share with the others in the room. Getting people to sign up for it is an insurmountable task, and yet it's free. Maybe one-third of the room has signed up. The message posts so far are very good and it gives the members an opportunity to respond so that everyone else in the group sees it and has the chance to do the same. But participation is like the telephone in between meetings. It just seems to be too much of an effort. This is a room level situation that everyone was in favor of and that seems to be the extent of it. Talk the talk.

We have a situation in NJ where a GA member is violating numerous Unity Steps in the pursuit of hosting a GA meeting that covers the Recovery Steps. The subject was brought up in Intergroup at the end of last month, where it received a heavy "No, you can't do that." But the member is still doing what is in clear violation of the Unity Steps. The issue is now in the hands of the Trustees, but not because Intergroup said that the Trustees should deal with it as a unified vote. This was an Intergroup level situation that everyone was clearly against and that seemed to be the extent of it. Talk the talk.

Our Intergroup Special Events Coordinator now holds a monthly conference call with any member of NJ Intergroup who wishes to attend. The purpose is how to improve Intergroup and create some sort of spark to reinvigorate attendance and participation in Intergroup sponsored events. 300 email invitations were sent out by the Special Events Coordinator and another 264 were sent out by the Website Admin. Obviously, there was an overlap of invitations. The result was that 4 people showed up. Talk the talk.

We have also had periodic "A night with the Trustees" to allow all the members of our Area that voted us into the position of Trustee, the opportunity to review agendas with us for their input. This was received as a great idea, and our best participation was 7 members a few years ago. Talk the talk.

Going back to the Special Events conference call, a brisk exchange of ideas happened between the 4 attendees and an idea was brought up about having a North American conference call to discuss all that is good and unfortunately bad with our Intergroups. I took the idea and sent an email requesting everyone's assistance for identifying the Intergroups, when they meet, contact information, etc. My hope was to have all that information and personalize emails to those people inviting them to this potentially groundbreaking event. The original emails went out on Wednesday, 12/04, to 109 Trustees. As of this posting, only 6 Trustees have responded. A total of 6 other Trustees have been CC'd on 2 of the 4 responses, so I wouldn't expect them to respond.

After all that, I now want to make my point for this posting. As Trustees, we are expected to hold ourselves to a higher standard of how we exist within the Fellowship. Of all the problems we have with the Board of Trustees, talking the talk and not walking the walk seems to be most prevalent. We get Trustees to volunteer for committees who seldom if ever attend the committee conference calls. This is such a problem that more than just a few committees are currently at risk for being dissolved in Houston, because of this very problem.

So, should I be surprised that a potentially positive event of getting all the Intergroups together for something like an Intergroup Summit has met with the same apathy as just about every other event I cited? I understand that if I have no expectations then I won't ever be disappointed. But my expectations are for Trustees to be that step above what the rest of the Fellowship appears to be. Remember, we didn't attain the level of being a Trustee. We accepted a nomination for the position. It was our choice. Is it our choice to select apathy once we get the confidence of the very members we were elected to represent? Tell me I'm wrong. Give me some other reason why all this happens. Let's kick it around and see if we can make something happen – for a change.

Look in your email for an item marked as 'Request for assistance regarding your Intergroup(s). Read it and respond. This could be the start of something very special, but we can't just talk the talk, we must walk the walk.

David M. – Area 12, New Jersey

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**Rotation Principle? Maybe For You, But Not For Me.**

12/15/13 - 12:34 AM

Much time and effort has been devoted to this topic of rotation. Since first hearing about this when I became a Trustee, I couldn't believe all the drama and commitment that seemed to come out of some of the Trustees. Some said you 'have to' rotate out as a Trustee similar to what was in the By-Laws for the Board of Regents. A maximum of 2 1-year terms. That seemed to work for the BOR, but that part of GA was basically a west coast grouping. Bringing that thinking to the Board of Trustees was a different matter. Every time it has surfaced, the room divides very clearly.

Many times the point of rotation for terms of the Trustees comes to the floor for a vote and those who do that always seem to put a 2-term provision on either how long Trustees or member of the Executive Board of the BOT can serve. Who says that 2 years is an adequate time that requires rotation? But that's not at the heart of this thread. My question is, where does it say that rooms elect meeting chairman who chair every meeting for as long as their term exists? Who came up with this bizarre situation? What happened to the rotation principle for people who chair the meetings rotating that person EVERY week?

More and more, I hear about such meetings happening throughout the country. We talk about how week our retention is only 3%. What about us looking at how absurd it is for one person to chair every meeting for 3, 4, 6 or 12 months. How about the rooms where only 1 person has chaired every meeting for multiple years or since the room opened? Allowing ALL members to chair on a weekly rotating basis is to ensure that each member feels a sense of ownership in the room, a sense of contributing to the complexion of the room. If we instill that concept of unity with the members, more good comes from the effort. Members stay better connected and committed to the room and its regularly attending members, just to name a few

The Information Packet has a section on the meeting chairman. It says the following: "You are now, or soon will be, eligible to Chair a Gamblers Anonymous meeting. If you wish to Chair a meeting and have not yet been called to do so, mention this to your Group Secretary." That says 'A meeting', not ALL the meetings. Strangely enough this come after the paragraph above that says, "Gamblers Anonymous needs your participation. The steps in making a successful group are many and we in Gamblers Anonymous need your involvement. The following is a list of ways in which you may involve yourself in Gamblers Anonymous, thereby helping yourself, your group and other compulsive gamblers." Having someone chair every meeting, for whatever term, completely contravenes this part of GA.

I'd like to hear from those who believe Unity Step 4 applies here and the justifications behind why anyone would defend that the same person chairing a meeting every week is a healthy decision for the growth of the room.

David M. – Area 12, New Jersey

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12/19/13 - 2:05 PM

I go to three meetings in my area on a regular basis. At these three meeting we rotate a chair person every week. I always remind the secretary to ask someone different to chair the following week so that person will already be committed to be at the meeting early. The secretary usually chairs his first and last meeting as secretary and his or her term is three months.

Then I go to a different meeting once in a while that is just as close to my house, twenty minutes or so, and there the secretary chairs every meeting!!!! I inform the group that they should rotate, the secretary thinks its is a great idea. I come back a month or two later and nothing has changed. I try to go to many different meeting and encourage different members to chair a meeting. Sometimes people listen, sometimes they do not.

As far as putting a time limit on a trustee term, I always thought two terms (four years) was a great limit and put it on the agenda at least twice, one time it even went to a second vote. However I was given a very good argument how this could be detrimental to some areas...

Just my humble opinion, Ara H. - Area 1 trustee, Los Angeles

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<b>Open Meeting, Do You Allow Guests To Speak ???</b>
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12/19/13 - 2:27 PM

I would like to ask other trustees how their rooms address guests speaking. Ever since I have been in the program (1995), guests have never been allowed to speak, record, take notes, or participate in any way except by listening. This includes birthday celebrations...However some meetings in my area have allowed family member to say something. I was not there, but was notified by other members to address the situation as a trustee. Then I am told that every meeting is self governing...I say except when it affects GA as a whole. I think it does, what if a guest says " u don't know my husband like I do" then talks very negatively...

Our literature is kind of contradicting, on page 11 of our Group handbook it says "At open meetings, guest are not permitted to participate in GA meetings"...Then in our red book A new Beginning, page 11 under "open meetings" last two sentences say..."Sometime open meetings have guest speakers. These speakers can be GA or non-GA members." So which is it???

I would like to hear how other areas handle this topic.

Thanks,  
Ara H. - Area I Trustee, Los Angeles

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12/19/13 - 3:30 PM

Open meetings are a sore subject for me. That was heightened by my experience in going to Moscow to help them celebrate their 5th anniversary of Gamblers Anonymous in Moscow in 2006. Although my memory is a bit fuzzy on the details, they had an open meeting where I was one of the guest speakers. I believe they had 250 people attend the meeting and 10% of them were attending their first meeting. That was one of the most emotional parts of my trip to Moscow.

Open meeting in my area (NJ) are heavily disappointing as a generalization, because a lot of time is expended to promote the meeting in our rooms, but we don't do an effective job of carrying the message to the compulsive gamblers who still suffer. We usually get higher attendance levels, but that comes from members of other rooms who come to support the open meeting. Clearly, we are not doing an effective job of getting the word out to the general public. But that's a different topic.

Guests who attend our meetings do not get a chance to speak at all – during the meeting. On anniversaries, the meetings are closed out with the 2 prayers from the Combo Book. Only after that is done, do we allow non-GA people to speak on a presentation of medallions on anniversaries, or upon receiving a Red Book signed by all the members who attended that meeting on a 90 day celebration.

When we have an open meeting, guests who are attending as non-GA people do not get to speak – period, the end. They also are not allowed to contribute when the can is passed around, in observance of Unity Step 7. What Ara says is correct about our literature, but the Red Book does not contradict the Group Handbook. It is not clear, because it is referencing a person or persons who are invited to be a guest speaker. Someone who is a specialist in the field of addictions, for example, would be such a guest speaker, which is different from a guest speaking.

Regarding your example of a spouse ripping into a member, that sounds more like a combined meeting, which I have even more problems with than what I cited at the beginning about open meetings. Combined meetings should be eliminated, but again, that's a different topic.

David M. – Area 12, New Jersey

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