

12 Traditions Workshop –12 Weeks 2026
Facilitated by Francine W. and Billy N.
AA Traditions Workshop – Selected Resources

1. **Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions** (published June 1953): **(Read/Watch/Listen)**
<https://www.aa.org/lit-twelve-steps-and-twelve-traditions>
2. **AA Comes of Age** - <https://www.aa.org/alcoholics-anonymous-comes-age>
3. **AA Pamphlets available at AA.org:**
 - a. **The A.A. Group...Where It All Begins:** <https://www.aa.org/aa-groupwhere-it-all-begins>
 - b. **A.A. Tradition--How it Developed:** <https://www.aa.org/aa-tradition-how-it-developed>
 - c. **The Twelve Traditions Illustrated:** <https://www.aa.org/twelve-traditions-illustrated>
 - d. **A.A.'s Legacy of Service:** <https://www.aa.org/aas-legacy-service>
 - e. **Traditions Illustrated:** https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/P-43_0625.pdf
4. **AA Grapevine:**
 - a. **(Archive) Subscription Detail:** <https://www.aagrapevine.org/store/grapevine-subscriptions?srsId=AfmBOorS227zySllqJ7a4Dy5aRNQt4klg7G8cfhaA99RaedwjsW0zblg>
 - b. **Traditions Checklist:** https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/smf-131_en.pdf
 - c. ***Our Twelve Traditions*** (AA Grapevine book)
5. **What are AA Guidelines:** <https://www.aa.org/faq/what-are-aa-guidelines>

The A.A. Guidelines represent the shared experience of A.A. members and groups throughout the United States and Canada. They also reflect guidance given through the Twelve Traditions and the General Service Conference (U.S. and Canada). In keeping with our tradition of autonomy except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole, most decisions are made by the group conscience of the members involved. The purpose of the A.A. Guidelines is to assist members in reaching an 'informed group conscience.'

6. **Traditions Illustrated:** https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/P-43_0625.pdf
7. **Traditions Checklist :** https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/smf-131_en.pdf

[Literature Library](#)

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Tradition 1 on May 15, 2026:

1. **AA Grapevine (Archive)** Subscription Detail: <https://www.aagrapevine.org/store/grapevine-subscriptions?srsId=AfmBOorS227zySllqJ7a4Dy5aRNQt4klg7G8cfhaA99RaedwjsW0zbLg>
 - a. Articles include those written by Bill W. (94)
 - b. Audios (22)
2. **Language of the Heart:** <https://www.aagrapevine.org/store/language-heart-softcover>
 - a. "Twelve Suggested Points for AA Tradition" (April 1946) p. 20-24 (21)
 - b. "Tradition One" p. 76-77
 - c. "Tradition Twelve" p. 92-94
3. Bill W. letter dated June 23, 1964, to Bob (not Dr. Bob) – attached

Tradition 2 on May 22, 2026:

1. **AA Grapevine (Archive)** Subscription Detail: <https://www.aagrapevine.org/store/grapevine-subscriptions?srsId=AfmBOorS227zySllqJ7a4Dy5aRNQt4klg7G8cfhaA99RaedwjsW0zbLg>
 - a. *AA Grapevine* (Archive)
 - a. Articles incl those written by Bill W (85)
 - b. Audio (14)
2. **Language of the Heart:** <https://www.aagrapevine.org/store/language-heart-softcover>
 - a. "Twelve Suggested Points for AA Tradition" (April 1946) p. 20-24 (21)
 - b. "Tradition Two" p. 77-78 (January 1948)
 - c. "Tradition Twelve" p. 92-94 (November 1948)
3. **AA Comes of Age** - <https://www.aa.org/alcoholics-anonymous-comes-age>
 - a. "Unity: The Second Legacy" p. 79 – 137 (97, 132; p. 136)
 - b. Sacrifice, p. 132
 - c. Issues that threatened to tear us a part: p. 97-98

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Tradition 3 on May 29, 2026:

1. **AA Grapevine (Archive)** Subscription Detail: <https://www.aagrapevine.org/store/grapevine-subscriptions?srsId=AfmBOorS227zySllqJ7a4Dy5aRNQt4klg7G8cfhaA99RaedwjsW0zbLg>
 - a. *AA Grapevine* (Archive)
 - a. Articles incl those written by Bill W (44)
 - b. Audio (6)
2. **Language of the Heart:** <https://www.aagrapevine.org/store/language-heart-softcover>
 - a. "Twelve Suggested Points for AA Tradition" (April 1946) p. 20-24 (21)
 - b. "Tradition Three" p. 79-80
 - c. "Who is a Member of Alcoholics Anonymous?" (p. 37-39)
3. **AA Comes of Age** - <https://www.aa.org/alcoholics-anonymous-comes-age>
 - a. Pages 102-103, 199-200, 203
4. **Our Great Responsibility:** (p. 56, 95)
5. **Traditions Illustrated:** https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/P-43_0625.pdf (p.7/8)
6. **Traditions Checklist:** https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/smf-131_en.pdf (p.2)

Tradition 4 on June 5, 2026:

1. **AA Grapevine (Archive)** Subscription Detail: <https://www.aagrapevine.org/store/grapevine-subscriptions?srsId=AfmBOorS227zySllqJ7a4Dy5aRNQt4klg7G8cfhaA99RaedwjsW0zbLg>
 - a. *AA Grapevine* (Archive)
 - a. Articles incl those written by Bill W (60)
 - b. Audio (14)
2. **Language of the Heart:** <https://www.aagrapevine.org/store/language-heart-softcover>
 - a. "Twelve Suggested Points for AA Tradition" (April 1946) p. 20-24 (21)
 - b. "Tradition Four" p. 80-82
 - c. "Who is a Member of Alcoholics Anonymous?" (p. 37-39)
3. **AA Comes of Age** - <https://www.aa.org/alcoholics-anonymous-comes-age>
 - a. Pages 103-104
4. **Our Great Responsibility:** (p. 56, 95)
5. **Traditions Illustrated:** https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/P-43_0625.pdf (p.9/10)
6. **Traditions Checklist:** https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/smf-131_en.pdf (p.2)

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Tradition 5 on June 12, 2026:

1. **AA Grapevine (Archive)** Subscription Detail: <https://www.aagrapevine.org/store/grapevine-subscriptions?srsId=AfmBOorS227zySllqJ7a4Dy5aRNQt4klg7G8cfhaA99RaedwjsW0zblg>
 - a. *AA Grapevine* (Archive)
 - a. Articles incl those written by Bill W (120)
 - b. Audio (8)
2. **Language of the Heart:** <https://www.aagrapevine.org/store/language-heart-softcover>
 - a. "Twelve Suggested Points for AA Tradition" (April 194) p. 20-24 (22)
 - b. "Tradition Five" p. 82-83, page 93; page 115-116
3. **AA Comes of Age** - <https://www.aa.org/alcoholics-anonymous-comes-age>
 - a. Pages 106, 109, 198, 203-104
4. **Our Great Responsibility:** (p. 56, 95)
5. **Traditions Illustrated:** https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/P-43_0625.pdf (p. 11/12)
6. **Traditions Checklist:** https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/smf-131_en.pdf (p. 3)
7. **AA at a Glance:** (what we do and don't do) - <https://www.aa.org/aa-glance>

Tradition 6 on June 19, 2026:

1. **AA Grapevine (Archive)** Subscription Detail: <https://www.aagrapevine.org/store/grapevine-subscriptions?srsId=AfmBOorS227zySllqJ7a4Dy5aRNQt4klg7G8cfhaA99RaedwjsW0zblg>
 - a. *AA Grapevine* (Archive)
 - a. Articles incl those written by Bill W (61)
 - b. Audio (11)
2. **Language of the Heart:** <https://www.aagrapevine.org/store/language-heart-softcover>
 - a. Page 83-84 [Tradition 6]
 - b. Page 43-46 [Dangers in Linking AA to Other Projects]
 - c. Page 20-24 [Twelve Suggested Points for AA Tradition]
 - d. Page 46-50 [Clubs in AA]
3. **AA Comes of Age** - <https://www.aa.org/alcoholics-anonymous-comes-age>
 - a. Pages 107, 109, 198, 203-104
4. **Traditions Illustrated:** https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/P-43_0625.pdf
5. **Traditions Checklist:** https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/smf-131_en.pdf
6. **AA at a Glance:** (what we do and don't do) - <https://www.aa.org/aa-glance>

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7. **AA Guidelines:**
 - a. CPC - <https://www.aa.org/aa-guidelines-cooperation-professional-community>
 - b. Relationship Between AA and Alanon - <https://www.aa.org/aa-guidelines-relationship-between-aa-and-al-anon>
 - c. Relationship Between AA and Clubs - <https://www.aa.org/aa-guidelines-relationship-between-aa-and-clubs>
 - d. Public Information - <https://www.aa.org/aa-guidelines-public-information>
8. **Advisory Actions:** <https://www.aa.org/m-39-advisory-actions>
 - a. PI: 1962, 1963, 1964, 1965, 1967, 1971
 - b. CPC: (2 primary themes: anonymity and Tradition 6): 1963, 1964, 1965, 1974 (Gray pages were accepted then)
 - c. Clubs: 1961, 1967, 1971, 1972, 1981, 1989
 - d. Grapevine: 1974 (continue to publish); but then in 1991 (discontinue Gray pages)

Tradition 7 on June 26, 2026:

1. **AA Grapevine (Archive)** Subscription Detail: <https://www.aagrapevine.org/store/grapevine-subscriptions?srsId=AfmBOorS227zySllqJ7a4Dy5aRNQt4klg7G8cfhaA99RaedwjsW0zbLg>
 - a. *AA Grapevine* (Archive)
 - a. Articles incl those written by Bill W (61)
 - b. Audio (11)
2. **Language of the Heart:** <https://www.aagrapevine.org/store/language-heart-softcover>
 - a. Page 24 [Safe Use of Money]
 - b. Page 28 [Policy on Gift Funds]
 - c. Page 57 [Lack of Money Proved AA Boon]
 - d. Page 62 [Last Seven Years Have Made AA Self Supporting]
 - e. Page 85 [Tradition 7]
3. **AA Comes of Age** - <https://www.aa.org/alcoholics-anonymous-comes-age>
 - a. Pages 107, 109, 198, 203-104
4. **Traditions Illustrated:** https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/P-43_0625.pdf
5. **Traditions Checklist:** https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/smf-131_en.pdf
6. **AA at a Glance:** (what we do and don't do) - <https://www.aa.org/aa-glance>
7. **AA Guidelines on Finance:**
 - a. https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/MG-15_0525.pdf
8. **Advisory Actions:** <https://www.aa.org/m-39-advisory-actions>
 - a. Finance Committee – p. 81-106

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9. **Services Provided by GSO / AAWS**
(https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/Services_Provided_by_GSO-SMF-176_EN_1124.pdf)
10. **Your AA Contributions:** (https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/F-203_1025.pdf)
11. **Final Report (2025):** (<https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/2025-general-service-conference-final-report-en-updated-1025.pdf>)
12. **Where Money and Spirituality Mix:** https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/F-3_Self_Support_ONLINE.pdf
13. **Quarterly Report:**
https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/newsletters/F-14_Quarterly_Report_2026_First_Quarter.pdf
14. **AAWS Highlights:**
https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/newsletters/AAWS_Highlights_Jan_March_2026.pdf
15. **Jack Alexander Article:** <https://www.aa.org/jack-alexander-article-about-aa>
16. **Jack Alexander Follow-up Article (The Drunkard's Best Friend):**
<https://www.aa.org/the-story-behind-Jack-Alexanders-article>
17. **Corporate Poverty - Gary A. Glynn from October 29, 1994:** pdf attached

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Tradition 8 on July 3, 2026:

1. **AA Grapevine (Archive)** Subscription Detail: <https://www.aagrapevine.org/store/grapevine-subscriptions?srsId=AfmBOorS227zySllqJ7a4Dy5aRNQt4klg7G8cfhaA99RaedwjsW0zbLg>
 - a. AA Grapevine (Archive)
 - a. Articles incl those written by Bill W (47)
 - b. Audio (11)
2. **Language of the Heart:** <https://www.aagrapevine.org/store/language-heart-softcover>
 - a. "Tradition 8," p. 86-87
 - b. "Respecting Money," p. 220 (GV - July 1948)
3. **AA Comes of Age** - <https://www.aa.org/alcoholics-anonymous-comes-age>
 - a. Pages: 114-117
4. **Our Twelve Traditions** (AA Grapevine book), p. 108, 110, 114, 115, 117, 118, 119, 121
5. **Concepts:**
 - a. Listen to the full **audio version:** <https://www.aa.org/twelve-concepts-concept-xi>
 - b. **Concepts Checklist**, https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/SMF-91_0525.pdf (p. 4)
 - c. **Concepts Illustrated**, https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/P-8_1124.pdf (p. 22)
 - d. **Service Manual** (Concept 11), p. C37 - C47, <https://www.aa.org/aa-service-manualtwelve-concepts-world-services>

"While the Trustees hold final responsibility for A.A.'s world service administration, they should always have the assistance of the best possible standing committees, corporate service directors, executives, staffs and consultants. Therefore the composition of these underlying committees and service boards, the personal qualifications of their members, the manner of their induction into service, the systems of their rotation, the way in which they are related to each other, the special rights and duties of our executives, staffs and consultants, together with a proper basis for the financial compensation of these special workers, will always be matters for serious care and concern.

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Tradition 9 on July 10, 2026:

1. **AA Grapevine (Archive)** Subscription Detail: <https://www.aagrapevine.org/store/grapevine-subscriptions?srsId=AfmBOorS227zySllqJ7a4Dy5aRNQt4klg7G8cfhaA99RaedwjsW0zblg>
 - a. *AA Grapevine* (Archive)
 - a. Articles incl those written by Bill W (41)
 - b. Audio (10)
2. **Language of the Heart:** <https://www.aagrapevine.org/store/language-heart-softcover>
 - a. "Tradition 9," p. 88-89
 - b. "Rules" Dangerous but Unity Vital" p. 6-9 (GV – September 1945)
 - c. "Will AA Ever Have a Personal Government?" p. 40-42 (GV – January 1947)
 - d. "Let's Keep It Simple—But How?" p. 303-306 (GV – July 1960)
3. **AA Comes of Age** - <https://www.aa.org/alcoholics-anonymous-comes-age>
118-119 ("...you can't keep us out.")
4. ***Our Twelve Traditions*** (AA Grapevine book), p. 126, 127, 132, 133, 134, 136, 138
5. **Concepts:**
 1. *Service Manual* (Concepts 6-11, p. C19-C-47); (Appendices O, P, Q)
<https://www.aa.org/aa-service-manualtwelve-concepts-world-services>
 - Listen to the full audio version
 - Concept 6 (<https://www.aa.org/twelve-concepts-concept-vi>)
 - Concept 7 (<https://www.aa.org/twelve-concepts-concept-vii>)
 - Concept 8 (<https://www.aa.org/twelve-concepts-concept-viii>)
 - Concept 9 (<https://www.aa.org/twelve-concepts-concept-ix>)
 - Concept 10 (<https://www.aa.org/twelve-concepts-concept-x>)
 - Concept 11 (<https://www.aa.org/twelve-concepts-concept-xi>)
 - *Concepts Checklist*, https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/SMF-91_0525.pdf
 - *Concepts Illustrated*, https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/P-8_1124.pdf

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Tradition 10 on July 17, 2026:

1. **AA Grapevine (Archive)** Subscription Detail: <https://www.aagrapevine.org/store/grapevine-subscriptions?srsId=AfmBOorS227zySIqJ7a4Dy5aRNQt4klg7G8cfhaA99RaedwjsW0zblg>
 - a. *AA Grapevine* (Archive)
 - a. Articles incl those written by Bill W (41)
 - b. Audio (10)
2. **Language of the Heart:** <https://www.aagrapevine.org/store/language-heart-softcover>
 - a. p. 89-90; p. 23; p. 318-319, p. 93 (Sacrifice and Tradition 10)
AA Comes of Age
 - a.
3. **AA Comes of Age** - <https://www.aa.org/alcoholics-anonymous-comes-age>
 - a. Page 123-28 the essay in the 12x12 was lifted from here.
 - b. Page 124 – para. #1. “Let us re-emphasize...”
 - c. Page 125 “Considering how most of us...”
 - d. Page 127-28
4. **As Bill Sees It:** Citizens Again p. 21
5. **Our Twelve Traditions** (AA Grapevine book), p. 141, 142, 143, 147, 148, 150, 151, 154
6. **AA Guidelines on Safety** - <https://www.aa.org/aa-guidelines-safety-and-aa-groups>
7. **Concepts:**
 2. *Service Manual* (Concepts 6-11, p. C19-C-47); (Appendices O, P, Q)
<https://www.aa.org/aa-service-manualtwelve-concepts-world-services>
 - Listen to the full audio version
 - Concept 6 (<https://www.aa.org/twelve-concepts-concept-vi>)
 - Concept 7 (<https://www.aa.org/twelve-concepts-concept-vii>)
 - Concept 8 (<https://www.aa.org/twelve-concepts-concept-viii>)
 - Concept 9 (<https://www.aa.org/twelve-concepts-concept-ix>)
 - Concept 10 (<https://www.aa.org/twelve-concepts-concept-x>)
 - Concept 11 (<https://www.aa.org/twelve-concepts-concept-xi>)
 - Service Manual - App N, p. 132
 - *Concepts Checklist*, https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/SMF-91_0525.pdf
 - *Concepts Illustrated*, https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/P-8_1124.pdf

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Tradition 11 on July 24, 2026:

1. **AA Grapevine (Archive)** Subscription Detail: <https://www.aagrapevine.org/store/grapevine-subscriptions?srsId=AfmBOorS227zySllqJ7a4Dy5aRNQt4klg7G8cfhaA99RaedwjsW0zbLg>
 - a. *AA Grapevine* (Archive)
 - a. Articles incl those written by Bill W (41)
 - b. Audio (10)
2. **Language of the Heart:** <https://www.aagrapevine.org/store/language-heart-softcover>
 - a. Page 13 [A Tradition Born of Our Anonymity]
 - b. Page 16 [Our Anonymity is Both Inspiration and Safety]
 - c. Page 20 [Twelve Suggested Points for AA Tradition]
 - d. Page 91 [Tradition 11]
 - e. Page 207 [The Bill W. Yale Correspondence]
 - f. Page 209-218 [Why Alcoholics Anonymous is Anonymous]
3. **AA Comes of Age** - <https://www.aa.org/alcoholics-anonymous-comes-age>
 - a. Page 286-94 Appendix B (Why Alcoholics Anonymous is Anonymous)
4. **As Bill Sees It:** Citizens Again p. 21
5. ***Our Twelve Traditions*** (AA Grapevine book), p. 141, 142, 143, 147, 148, 150, 151, 154
6. **AA Guidelines on Safety** - <https://www.aa.org/aa-guidelines-safety-and-aa-groups>
7. **Advisory Actions (PI Committee):** 2013 incorporating Internet
8. **AA Website AA.org:**
 - a. **Jack Alexander Article:** (https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/P-12_1225.pdf)
 - b. **Story Behind Jack Alexander Article:** (<https://www.aa.org/the-story-behind-Jack-Alexanders-article>)
 - c. **Digital Press Kit:** (https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/PressKit_en_0723_0.pdf)
 - d. **AA & Anonymity:** (<https://www.aa.org/aa-and-anonymity>)
 - e. **AA Guidelines on Internet:** https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/MG-18_1025.pdf
 - f. **AA in the Digital Age:**
https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/en_anonymityplacard.pdf
 - g. **Understanding Anonymity:** https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/P-47_0924.pdf

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Tradition 12 on July 31, 2026:

1. **AA Grapevine (Archive)** Subscription Detail: <https://www.aagrapevine.org/store/grapevine-subscriptions?srsId=AfmBOorS227zySllqJ7a4Dy5aRNQt4klg7G8cfhaA99RaedwjsW0zblg>
 - a. *AA Grapevine* (Archive)
 - i. Articles incl those written by Bill W (166)
 - ii. Audio (14)
2. **Language of the Heart:** <https://www.aagrapevine.org/store/language-heart-softcover>
 - a. Page 13 [A Tradition Born of Our Anonymity]
 - b. Page 16 [Our Anonymity is Both Inspiration and Safety]
 - c. Page 20 [Twelve Suggested Points for AA Tradition]
 - d. Page 93 [Tradition 12]
 - e. Page 67
3. **AA Comes of Age** - <https://www.aa.org/alcoholics-anonymous-comes-age>
 - a. Page 286-94 Appendix B (Why Alcoholics Anonymous is Anonymous)
 - b. Sacrifice (286-288) (Unity: Second Legacy 79-137).
4. **Our Great Responsibility** –
 - a. Principles before Personalities p. 17-18; p. 55
 - b. Anonymity p. 220
5. **Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers**, p. 264-265
6. ***Our Twelve Traditions*** (AA Grapevine book), pages 174, 176, 178, 179, 181, 182, 184, 185, 188
7. **AA Guidelines on Safety** - <https://www.aa.org/aa-guidelines-safety-and-aa-groups>
8. **Advisory Actions (PI Committee):** 2013 incorporating Internet
9. **AA Website AA.org:**
 - a. **Digital Press Kit:** (https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/PressKit_en_0723_0.pdf)
 - b. **AA & Anonymity:** (<https://www.aa.org/aa-and-anonymity>)
 - c. **AA Guidelines on Internet:** https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/MG-18_1025.pdf
 - d. **AA in the Digital Age:**
https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/en_anonymityplacard.pdf
 - e. **Understanding Anonymity:** https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/P-47_0924.pdf

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June 23, 1984

Dear Bob,

Our way, both as members and as Groups, of practicing the Steps appears to vary from time to time.

Many of us lack thoroughness, which most evidently you do not. And I'm very glad that you have had such good results with the approach you made.

I have only one suggestion. This would be to avoid trying to force anyone into your particular approach. Your example of good results is apt to be much more effective with others than your insistence that they conform to your particular interpretation.

Most of us alcoholics are apt to be "all or nothing" people. We go to extremes. Either we want "perfection by Thursday next" or else we want only the barest bit of A.A. that will keep us sober. Experience seems to show that we can go broke on spiritual pride or on unreasonable rebellion, or just plain apathy. A plain, every day desire to make some progress is usually the best and safest bet.

However, don't take what I say as the gospel. You--and everybody--have the right to practice A.A. as you wish. This is spiritual freedom.

May God bless you.

Ever,

Bill

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Bill Wilson wisdom on dealing with “The You’re Not Doing A.A. Right” club. Spiritual freedom for sure:

June 28, 1964

Dear Bob (not Dr.Bob),

Our way, both as Members and as Groups, of practicing The Steps appears to vary from time to time.

Many of us lack thoroughness, which most evidently you do not. And I’m very glad that you have had such good results with the approach you made.

I have only one suggestion. This would be to avoid trying to force anyone into your particular approach. Your example of good results is apt to be much more effective with others than your insistence they conform to your particular interpretation.

Most of us alcoholics are apt to be “all or nothing” people. We go to extremes. Either we want “perfection by Thursday next” or else we want the barest bit of A.A. that will keep us sober. Experience seems to show we can go broke on spiritual pride, or on unreasonable rebellion, or just plain apathy. A plain, everyday desire to make some progress is usually the best and safest bet.

However, don’t take what I say as gospel. You—and everybody—have the right to practice A.A. as you wish. This is spiritual freedom.

May God Bless You. Ever...Bill

Tradition 7 letter shared. Corporate Poverty - Gary A. Glynn from October 29, 1994

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Corporate Poverty-Gary A. Glynn

October 29, 1994

Larry's subtitle for this sharing session is spiritual and practical principles that assure A.A.'s future. I thank him for that because it got me thinking. I think in A.A. spiritual and practical are the same thing. Imagine someone coming into service who wanted to have some influence in A.A. and promoted some practical sounding idea that had no spiritual merit. The Fellowship would quickly put a stop to that. Such a person would have to act as if he were spiritual and would have to find some idea with a spiritual basis even if he didn't believe it. So anything that is going to be of any practical use to us has to be spiritual as well.

At the same time, it looks to me as if A.A., beginning with Bill W., has quickly dropped any spiritual sounding ideas that don't pass the practical tests of keeping alcoholics sober or keeping A.A. together.

So is corporate poverty a spiritual and practical principle that would assure AA's future? Of course it is.

In the Seventh Tradition, when talking about how A.A. acted when it found out about the bequests that were coming our way, Bill wrote, "The pressure of that fat treasury would surely tempt the board to invent all kinds of schemes to do good with such funds, and so divert A.A. from its primary purpose. The moment that happened, our Fellowship's confidence would be shaken. The board would be isolated, and would fall under heavy attack of criticism from both A.A. and the public. Then our trustees wrote a bright page in A.A. history. They declared for the principle

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that A.A. must always stay poor. Bare running expenses plus a prudent reserve would henceforth be the Foundation's financial policy." He went on to say, "At that moment, we believe, the principle of corporate poverty was firmly and finally embedded in A.A. tradition."

That's sounds pretty simple: avoid schemes that divert us from our primary purpose and only have enough money around to meet bare running expenses and maintain a prudent reserve. I don't think anyone in this room would object to those statements, so why are we sharing about them? The reason is it's pretty clear they mean different things to different people.

The concepts try to help us a little more in making these principles concrete. Actually the concepts are confusing, especially about the power of the purse and our prudent reserve, which usually are at the center of debates about corporate poverty. In the first warranty, Bill tells us why a dictator wouldn't last a year. "And in the brief time he did last, what would he use for money? Our delegates, directly representing the groups control the ultimate supply of our service funds." Sounds here like the power of the purse is supposed to be immediate, doesn't it? That's on page 63. On page 65, in the second warranty, writing about what hard times might do to A.A., Bill says, "Our present reserve and its book income could see us through several years of hard times without the slightest diminution in the strength and quality of our world effort." Sounds there as if immediate was not what he had in mind after all.

Throughout Bill's writings, I get this sense of his recog-

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nizing the balancing act he was asking us to take on. Too much, and we argue over perilous wealth and power and lose sight of our primary purpose of carrying the message. Too little, and we risk losing the ability to carry the message at all. So he spoke for both sides in different places.

What are the issues here? A.A. groups are formed and dissolved all the time, and a one or two month's reserve for a group seems adequate to a lot of people. I have been asked if one or two month's reserve is okay for a group, why do we need ten or twelve at G.S.O. For one thing, it is probably easier to form a new group than it is to form a new G.S.O. There is no alternative to G.S.O. to turn to if ours goes under. The services we provide have been built up out of many year's collective experience and would be hard to recreate. Also, despite the eagerness of others to publish some of our literature, G.S.O. needs to continue to publish regularly without the threat of interruption so the message of sobriety will continuously be available, both through the written message itself and the services supported in part by literature profits. Many of our projects extend over a considerable period of time, like financing new translations or planning a convention. I think the Fellowship takes the financial stability of G.S.O. for granted and assumes it will always stay that way.

Bill wrote about how Alcoholics Anonymous got the outside world's attention when it realized A.A. was going to be self-supporting. He pointed out that most people viewed alcoholics as financially irresponsible. When I tell people who don't know

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much about A.A. that we accept no outside contributions, and are self-supporting and solvent, the reaction is amazing and laudatory. A.A. has such a solid reputation with the public. When we discuss the idea that it might be sound to lower our Reserve Fund to come closer to some supposedly more spiritual level of corporate poverty, we should recognize that we would also be coming closer to the point of running out of money if we run into hard times or if some of those "possible demands on the Reserve Fund" occur at inconvenient intervals. The lower our Reserve Fund, the higher the risk of some financial accident where we run out of money. What would we do if we ran out of money? A financial failure of A.A. would do incalculable harm to our reputation with the public, the Fellowship, and with some poor drunk who's looking for a reason to believe A.A. doesn't work.

If we ran out of money, we might have to borrow from a bank temporarily to keep the doors open. If we did that, we would lose some measure of financial independence. A strong Reserve Fund is one of the prices we have to pay to assure that no one but the Fellowship sets our financial policies. And continually debating whether the Reserve Fund is perilously large is part of that price.

One counter to that argument is that if there ever was a real emergency, A.A. groups would increase their contributions and rescue G.S.O. In effect, we should rely on our higher power operating through the groups to save us from our own imprudence. Maybe that would work. If we rely on that, we wouldn't have to worry about the accuracy of our budgets, our accounting, or much

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of anything really. This is probably the time to invoke Bill's comment in the ninth concept about casting the whole idea of planning for tomorrow onto a fatuous idea of Providence. I don't believe that because God looks after A.A., it doesn't matter what we do in the practical realm. It's risky to ask our higher power to bail us out of trouble when we can avoid it ourselves by budgeting solidly, running G.S.O. in a businesslike manner, and keeping at least 10 month's expenses in our Reserve Fund.

I also think that if we ever had to go to the groups and say for example, "If you don't send us \$500,000 of contributions within the next three months we will have to lay off half of our staff and cancel the Conference" the reaction probably would not be, "Oh, aren't they spiritual at G.S.O. practicing corporate poverty. Well anyone can make a mistake. Let's send them more money." I think the actual and proper response from the groups would be that G.S.O. didn't know what it was doing and shouldn't be trusted with any money at all.

But I have to admit that there is something to the idea that some groups are reluctant to contribute to G.S.O. when they see a \$9 million Reserve Fund. The problem with focussing on this amount is that the dollar amount low enough to counter that reluctance is so low that we would be running severe risks if we were to get to that level. That is the main reason we have been displaying our financial numbers on a per group basis as well as in total, like \$156 per group for the amount in the Reserve Fund. This is not a trick; it's a way to point out to the Fellowship how large we are. A large Fellowship will show large absolute

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dollar numbers.

Bill W. solved the question of whether a prudent reserve inhibited contributions simply. He wrote, "It is said that the impression is created that A.A. Headquarters is already well off and that hence there is no need for more money. This is not at all the general attitude, however, and its effect on contributions is probably small." I wish I could get away with simply asserting that conclusion the way Bill did, but I don't think I can.

I think the keys here are first being true stewards with A.A.'s money, that is acting as if we were we were poor even if we have a prudent Reserve Fund. No one is going to send us contributions if we are perceived as wasting money or spending it in marginally effective ways. I tried to summarize this in my Conference Finance report. I said there were two ways to avoid going over the 12- month limit on the Reserve Fund: spend more money or reduce literature income. I said, "We will not increase spending above ordinary amounts unless the Fellowship clearly indicates a desire for new services. We must control spending, despite the presence of a large Reserve Fund, with the same sense of stewardship that we would exercise if the Reserve Fund were small." I believe that truly and think it's a reasonable description of corporate poverty in practice. And in fact that's what we just did, reducing pamphlet and other literature prices in a way that makes it easier to carry the message and helps groups' finances.

The other two keys to more contributions, and what I think

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is much more important- the number of groups contributing, are explaining what the money is spent on, which we are now able to do with our new reports, and emphasizing the spiritual benefits of making contributions. Contributions are as important to the contributor as they are to the recipient. Contributions are so important for A.A. unity. Making contributions gives the groups an opportunity to know that they are part of carrying the message of A.A. around the world.

Group contributions are important to us and they must always be at a high enough level so we hear the Fellowship directly, but I have never understood the equation group contributions equals self-support. I agree completely with Bill W. that book profits are "actually the sum of a great many contributions which book buyers make to the general welfare of Alcoholics Anonymous. The certain and continuous solvency of our world services rests squarely upon these contributions. Looked at in this way, our Reserve Fund is actually the aggregate of many small sacrifices made by the book buyers."

What I'm trying to say is that corporate poverty is more a state of mind than the size of our bank account. We all know people and organizations that extravagantly spend money they don't have, living beyond their means either by ignoring the facts of their finances or by assuming a rosy tomorrow. So you can in fact be poor and not practice corporate poverty. It happens to museums and opera companies all the time. The opposite is also possible, that we can maintain a prudent reserve without falling into the temptation of spending it just because

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it's there. One fear I hear expressed is that G.S.O. might ignore the will of the Fellowship because we have a prudent reserve. My experience at board weekends, the Conference, and A.A.W.S. and Grapevine corporate board meetings is that there is no danger of that. First of all, group contributions pay for three-quarters of services spending. But even more important, we listen because we know we should and must.

I think a prudent reserve under most circumstances is around 10 month's expenses. I know that might be a little right-of-center and that some responsible people in service think 9 or even 8 might be okay. The treasurer probably should be a bit more conservative than most of you.

One advantage of having a prudent reserve is that it makes it easier for us to sign a lease for office space on good terms. A reserve fund is one of the few ways a nonprofit has to show a landlord that it is creditworthy.

Another big advantage of having a sound prudent reserve is that it lets us plan with better budgets. 1994 is a good example. We used best estimates throughout the budget. If we had had only 5 or 6 month's expenses in reserve, we would have had to use more conservative budget estimates, which would have meant either cutting expenses or raising literature prices to balance our budget, which we never had to contemplate. I would not have been able to support reducing literature prices at mid-year, even though it was the right thing to do from a service point of view, if we had only had a 6 month's Reserve Fund.

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I started out by saying that if it wasn't spiritual it wouldn't work in A.A. and if it wasn't practical, it wasn't spiritual. A solid, prudent Reserve Fund and good business management skills are both spiritual and practical. It is neither practical nor spiritual to accumulate more or spend more than we need to. It is also neither practical nor spiritual to run out of money. As usual Bill has a good phrase for what we need. He called it fiscal common sense.