

~Tradition Eight~

Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.

*We have gained some understanding of the ancient words "Freely ye have received, freely give."
(Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions pg. 166)*

You remember how I was told by A.A.'s group conscience that I could not go to work for Charlie Towns as a professional therapist, and that was right. Early in the game we discovered that under no conditions should an A.A. be paid for taking or carrying this message to somebody else, person to person and face to face. That was out. If professionalism ever invaded us at that level, we were doomed.

But the issue of professionalism had other aspects. For years in A.A. we were trying to figure out what in A.A. was professionalism and what was not. This problem arose out of the need for paid workers in our service centers, the need for people who would do the jobs that volunteers could not or would not do. Were service workers professionals, or were they not? That was the issue.

The first situation of this kind that I can remember came up in the old club house on Twenty-Fourth Street in New York. Volunteers had painted the old place and shined it up and were answering the telephone, and that was fine. When they went home they would hand out numerous keys for the benefit of the night owls. But some of the night owls had the habit of getting stoned and lying around the place in all conditions and at all hours. That was not good. The volunteers also got very tired of sweeping out the place, so it stayed dirty most of the time. Plainly enough we needed a caretaker.

Well, we approached old Tom, a fireman we had recently sprung out of Rockland asylum. We were shrewd. We already knew that Tom had a pension as a fireman. So we said to him, "How would you like to come over, Tom, and live at the club? Nice room for you there." Tom said, "what's the angle?" "Well, Tom, we'll give you a nice room and you can kind of look after the place." Tom said, "Seven days a week?" "Yeah." "What am I supposed to do?" "Well, Tom, you ought to make the coffee and, you know, lead the drunks out if they're too bad, and sweep the place up." "Do that seven days a week?" said Tom. "What you guys want, is a janitor." "All right," we said, "sure, we want a janitor." "Well," said Tom, "ain't you going to pay me nothing?" "Oh, no," we said, "that would make you a professional. This is Alcoholics Anonymous. We must not mix money with spirituality." "Okay," said Tom, "no money, no work. I'm doing my Twelfth Step work free, but if you're going to have me here as a janitor, you're going to pay me, see?" Lots of us were working at that time and earning money. But believe it or not, we actually

haggled with that old man to get him down to the last cent we could for doing that
grubby job!

But old Tom was right. In order for A.A. to function, we had to hire some help. In all the length and breadth of A.A., among the whole 200,000 or more of us, we have today only two or three hundred hired help all around. That includes cooks frying hamburgers in clubs, janitors sweeping out the places, and women answering telephones in our central offices. It also includes me. I once wrote some literature for you, so I am paid royalty for being a writer. **That is where the line finally fell: For face-to-face treatment of a drunk, no money, ever. But A.A. does have to hire people so that it can function where there are legitimate jobs to be done.**

(“Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age” pg 115-116)

A similar development has taken place at the Fellowship’s “headquarters.” Once a tiny office for one co-founder (Bill) and one secretary, it has now grown into the present General Service Office, fully staffed, with a big mailroom keeping the lines of communication open throughout A.A. worldwide. The employees, both A.A. and nonalcoholic, are paid on a scale comparable to that in profit-making enterprises, so that the office force can function dependably. And the A.A. staff members are in exactly the same position as the A.A. intergroup employees. Suppose you drop in at G.S.O. one day when you’re in New York. Staff members who pause to chat with you may have been working on next year’s Conference or corresponding with a group in your home area, helping it to carry the message more effectively. For that, they are paid biweekly checks.

But you may also hear them mention to other staff members plans for taking a newcomer to a meeting in the evening or for giving an A.A. talk to a neighborhood group the next week. For that, they are paid only with their own continuing sobriety.

In these office jobs and in other assignments, members are actually paid for their business and professional skills. Working at a G.S.O. desk, on Conference-approved books and pamphlets, or on the Grapevine, these A.A.’s use their abilities as correspondents, managers, writers, editors, artists, proofreaders – as well as their understanding of A.A. from the inside. On occasion, volunteers have given their time and talent to all these services, and their contributions are deeply appreciated. But what if the Fellowship decided that all such assignments should be handled *only* by unpaid volunteers? In present day A.A., there’s too great a volume of work to be done in spare hours here and there, and only the rich or the retired could afford to work full-time. If we tried to find in this limited group people qualified for particular tasks, obviously the field would be narrowed down – too often, down to nobody at all.

There would be another problem in using volunteers alone: **It seems ungrateful – or, at least, it’s socially awkward – to criticize or reject a job done for free. But paid jobs for A.A. get quite a going-over!**

(“The Twelve Traditions Illustrated”)

Tradition Eight Long Form

Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional. We define professionalism as the occupation of counseling alcoholics for fees or hire. But we may employ alcoholics where they are going to perform those services for which we might otherwise have to engage nonalcoholics. Such services may be well recompensed. But our usual A.A. "12 Step" work is never to be paid for.

(Alcoholics Anonymous pg. 564 fourth edition, pg. 566 third edition)

Even after A.A.'s Tradition Eight was thus established in principle, it took still more years to work out the applications. There were all sorts of borderline cases, always in hot debate.

For example, no A.A.'s have been more buffeted by such emotional gusts as those bold enough to accept employment with outside agencies dealing with the alcohol problem. A university wanted an A.A. member to educate the public on alcoholism. A corporation wanted a personnel man familiar with the subject. A state drunk farm wanted a manager who could really handle inebriates. A city wanted an experienced social worker who understood what alcohol could do to a family. A state alcohol commission wanted a paid researcher. These are only a few of the jobs which A.A. members as individuals are filling today. Now and then A.A. members have bought farms or rest homes where badly beat-up toppers could find needed care. **The question was, are such activities to be branded as professionalism under A.A. tradition?**

Our years of experience tell us that the answer is "No." Members who select such full-time careers do not professionalize A.A.'s Twelfth Step. The road to this conclusion was long and rocky. At first, we could not see the real issue involved. In former days, the moment an A.A. hired out to such enterprises he was immediately tempted to use the name Alcoholics Anonymous for publicity or money-raising purposes. **Drunk farms, educational ventures, state legislatures and commissions advertised the fact that A.A. members served them.**

Unthinkingly, A.A.'s who were so employed recklessly broke their anonymity to thump the tub for their pet enterprises. For this reason, some very good causes and everything connected with them suffered unjust criticism from A.A. groups. There were cries of, "Professionalism! That guy is making money out of A.A.!" Yet not a single one of them had been hired to do A.A.'s Twelfth Step work.

The violation in these instances was not professionalism at all; it was breaking anonymity. A.A.'s sole purpose was being compromised and the name of Alcoholics Anonymous was being misused.

It is significant now that almost no A.A. in our fellowship breaks anonymity at the general public level, and so nearly all these fears have subsided. We see that we have no right or need to discourage A.A.'s who wish to work as individuals in these fields. **It would be actually antisocial were we to discourage them. We cannot declare A.A. such a closed corporation that we keep our knowledge and experience top secret.** ("Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age" pg 116-117)

This is the exciting welter of events which has finally cast up A.A.'s Tradition of nonprofessionalism. Our Twelfth Step is never to be paid for, but those who labor in service for us are worthy of their hire. (Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions pg. 171)

"To sum up: For thousands of alcoholics yet to come, A.A. does have an answer. But there is one condition. We must, at all costs, preserve our essential unity; it must be made unbreakably secure. Without permanent unity there can be little lasting recovery for anyone. Hence our future absolutely depends upon the creation and observance of a sound group tradition. First things will always need to be first: *humility* before success, and *unity* before fame." (Bill W., speaking before the third annual Southeastern Regional Convention in Memphis, Tenn., on September 19th 1947)

Eighth Tradition Checklist

- Do I sometimes try to get *some* reward--even if not money--for my personal AA efforts?

- Do I try to sound in AA like an expert on alcoholism? On recovery? On medicine? On sociology? On AA itself? On psychology? On spiritual matters? Or, heaven help me, even on *humility*?

- Do I make an effort to understand what AA employees do? What workers in other alcoholism agencies do? Can I distinguish clearly among them? B. L. Manhattan, New York (www.grapevine.org)