

Tradition 9

SHORT FORM

9.) *A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.*

LONG FORM

9.) *Each A.A. group needs the least possible organization. Rotating leadership is the best. The small group may elect its Secretary, the large group its Rotating Committee, and the groups of a large Metropolitan area their Central or Intergroup Committee, which often employs a full-time Secretary. The trustees of the General Service Board are, in effect, our A.A. General Service Committee. They are the custodians of our A.A. Tradition and the receivers of voluntary A.A. contributions by which we maintain our A.A. General Service Office at New York. They are authorized by the groups to handle our over-all public relations and they guarantee the integrity of our principle newspaper, "The A.A. Grapevine." All such representatives are to be guided in the spirit of service, for true leaders in A.A. are but trusted and experienced servants of the whole. They derive no real authority from their titles; they do not govern. Universal respect is the key to their usefulness.*

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The least possible organization, that's our universal ideal. No fees, no dues, no rules imposed on anybody, one alcoholic bringing recovery to the next; that's the substance of what we most desire, isn't it?

But how shall this simple ideal best be realized? Often a question, that.

We have, for example, the kind of A.A. who is for simplicity. Terrified of anything organized, he tells us that A.A. is getting too complicated. He thinks money only makes trouble, committees only make dissension, elections only make politics, paid workers only make professionals and that clubs only coddle slipees. Says he, let's get back to coffee and cakes by cozy firesides. If any alcoholics stray our way, let's look after them. But that's enough. Simplicity is our answer.

Quite opposed to such halcyon simplicity is the A.A. promoter. Left to himself he would "bang the cannon and twang the lyre" at every crossroad of the world. Millions for drunks, great A.A. hospitals, batteries of paid organizers and publicity experts wielding all the latest paraphernalia of sound and script; such would be our promoters dream. "Yes sir," he would bark "My two year plan calls for one million A.A. members by 1950!"

For one, I'm glad we have both conservatives and enthusiasts. They teach us much. The conservative will surely see to it that the A.A. movement never gets over organized. But the promoter will continue to remind us of our terrific obligation to the newcomer and to those hundreds of thousands of alcoholics still waiting all over the world to hear of A.A.

We shall, naturally, take the firm and safe middle course. A.A. has always violently resisted the idea of any general organization. Yet, paradoxically, we have ever stoutly insisted upon organizing certain *special services*; mostly those absolutely necessary to effective and plentiful 12th Step work.

If, for instance, an A.A. group elects a secretary or rotating committee, if an area forms an intergroup committee, if we set up a Foundation, a General Office or a *Grapevine*, then we are

organized for service. The A.A. book and pamphlets, our meeting places and clubs, our dinners and regional assemblies--these are services too. Nor can we secure good hospital connections, properly sponsor new prospects and obtain good public relations just by chance. People have to be appointed to look after these things, sometimes paid people. Special services are performed.

But by none of these special services, has our spiritual or social activity, the great current of A.A. ever been really organized or professionalized. Yet our recovery program has been enormously aided. While important, these service activities, are very small by contrast with our main effort.

As such facts and distinctions become clear, we shall easily lay aside our fears of blighting organization or hazardous wealth. As a movement, we shall remain comfortably poor; for our service expenses are trifling.

With such assurances, we shall without doubt, continue to improve and extend our vital lifelines of special service; to better carry out our A.A. message to others; to make for ourselves a finer greater society, and, God willing, to assure Alcoholics Anonymous a long life and perfect unity.

Bill W.

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Our Ninth Tradition talks a great deal about A.A. at the Trustee level, which can be intimidating to some A.A.'s. But I'd like to highlight just four words from the long form of this Tradition: "authorized by the groups."

Our operational service structure, as handed over to us A.A.'s by Bill and Dr. Bob, took place with the dawn of our Third Legacy. This Legacy, laid out in our Service Manual, turns over the entire down-the-line authorities of A.A. to the collective conscience of all the A.A. groups, which, of course, are comprised of individual members.

Individual members, by becoming active in a group and attending the group's business meetings, exercise their right to be heard in the group conscience. Even a newcomer, joining the group and attending his or her very first business meeting, has a powerful voice in the worldwide affairs of A.A.

Regrettably, the group conscience can become lodged in the throat of a group, never getting any further than the church basement. I have witnessed groups becoming just as self-involved and self-centered as any individual A.A. member who never lifted a chair or made a pot of coffee.

Unless a group is organized enough to have business meetings, a way to reckon its own group conscience, and an active, elected GSR (general service representative) to carry that group's conscience to the district level, such a group could be compared to a member who just doesn't drink, and goes to meetings, but does not work the Steps or become an otherwise active member.

Just as we individuals have the Twelve Steps to maintain our own spiritual fitness, our groups have the Traditions to maintain their primary purpose.

Our groups play an important part in worldwide A.A. and in carrying its message far and wide. Each member helps shape the group conscience. The group's elected GSR makes sure it's understood at the district and area levels, and that it's part of the delegate's thinking, which he or she takes to the annual General Service Conference of A.A. Delegated with the full authority of the groups, the Conference is responsible for developing and maintaining all the services needed to carry A.A.'s message of hope and recovery. At the bottom of our upside-side down organizational structure, the trustees, taking their authority from the Conference, take actions that allow the GSO staff to carry out the day-to-day operations of those services.

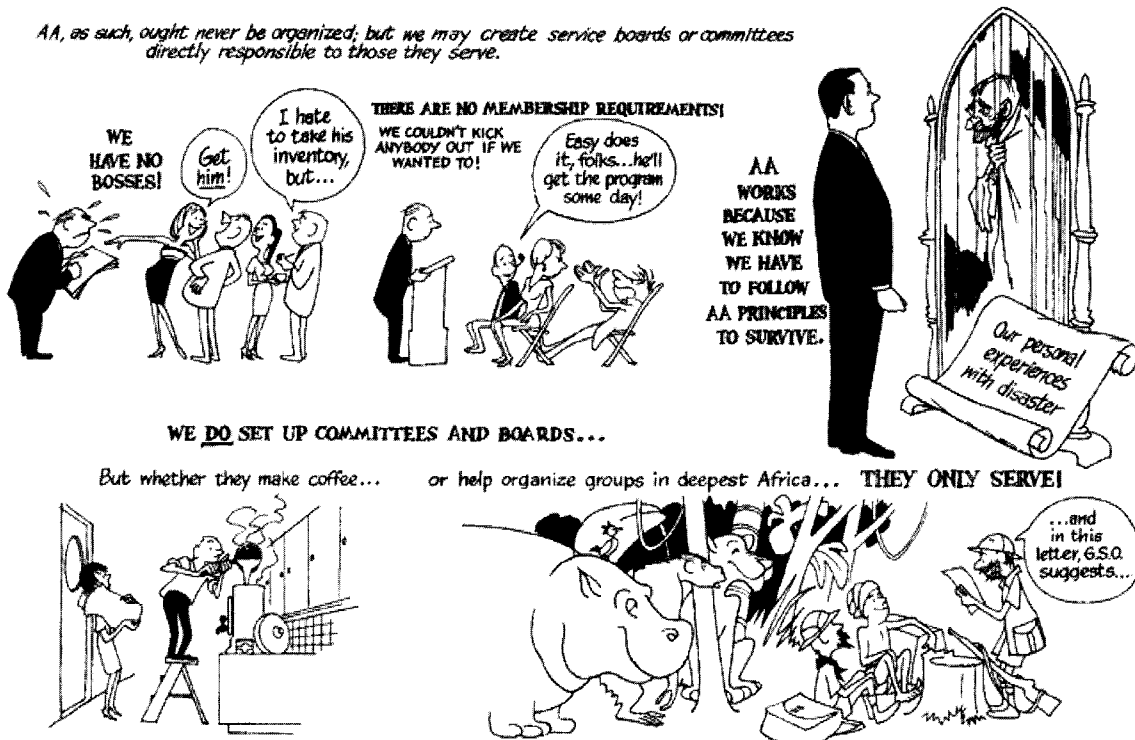
Danny S. Centerville, Massachusetts

Special service boards and committees. The General Service Conference, the board of trustees, and the group committees cannot issue directives to A.A. members or groups. A.A.'s can't be dictated to – individually or collectively. Absence of coercion works because unless each A.A. follows suggested Steps to recovery, he signs his own death warrant. Same condition applies to the group. Suffering and love are A.A.'s disciplinarians. There is a difference between spirit of authority and the spirit of service. The aim of our services is to bring sobriety within reach of all who want it.

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions

"Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities."

These experiences taught us that anonymity is real humility at work. Moved by the spirit of anonymity, we try to give up our natural desire for personal distinction.



Discussion Questions:

1. Do I still try to boss things in A.A.?
2. Do I resist formal aspects of A.A. because I fear them as authoritative?
3. Am I mature enough to understand and use all elements of the A.A. program – even if no one makes me do so – with a sense of personal responsibility?
4. Do I exercise patience and humility in any A.A. job I take?
5. Am I aware of all those to whom I am responsible in any A.A. job?
6. Why doesn't every A.A. group need a constitution and bylaws?
7. Have I learned to step out of an A.A. job gracefully – and profit thereby – when the time comes?
8. What has rotation to do with anonymity? With humility?