

Newsletter Area 69

Post-Conference Assembly
15 - 17 May 2015

Harmony

Pete G., Assembly / Agenda Chair, Panel 65

Harmony - An orderly or pleasing combination of elements in a whole.

If an outsider were assigned to write a book report on all of the amazing achievements of Alcoholics Anonymous, a quick overview might give the impression that we always have harmony. After all, take a look at some of our most vital accomplishments.

One hundred alcoholic men and women writing the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous in two years. This book has been our basic text, virtually unchanged, for over 75 years now.

Another amazing achievement is the Traditions. Formulated during the mid-to-late 40's, during a period of growth that was rapid and tumultuous. The Traditions were born out of a need to have a set of guidelines giving certain suggestions to the groups. During the convention in Cleveland in 1950, the Traditions were adopted unanimously by the 7000 alcoholics in attendance.

The Concepts were adopted by the General Service Conference in 1962- The 'Why it Works' of our service structure. Surely this is a great example of harmonious cooperation in action. The adoption and use of these tenets for AA service invokes a vision of unity.

The remarkable achievements adopted in these manners might appear to the *casual* observer to be evidence of a harmonious spirit within the Fellowship; akin to scouts singing Kumbayah around a picturesque campfire. It may even appear that once a good idea is put forth, an entire assembly nods at the enlightenment and quietly

votes in the affirmative. That casual observer would be mistaken.

One would do well to attend an AA business meeting at the Group, District or Area level to begin the journey of harmonious enlightenment, AA style. Step over to the nearest business meeting and try some alcoholic-control. Try changes abruptly. Try it more than once. It won't take long for you to decide and it might be worth a bad case of jitters for you to receive the answers you seek. Most outside observers would clearly see the wisdom in the phrase "Normally we do not mix".

Yet the Groups, Districts, Area and even Central Offices and Intergroup achieve a state of substantial unanimity. Why? It's simple. We **must**. If any gathering of alcoholics cannot agree on a common course of action, the first Tradition clearly states that most of us will suffer dire consequences. This is a powerful motivation for unity but absolutely no guarantee of harmony.

We members of Alcoholics Anonymous are a spirited bunch working a spiritual program. Our passions include carrying the message of Alcoholics Anonymous to those who still suffer, staying sober, being self-supporting, practicing non-affiliation and remaining neutral (at least in meetings) about the goings-on in the outside world. Primarily, we are all here because we are selfish - we have the disease of self. We wanted, and *still* want, things to go our way - at our speed.

At times, the ideal and reality clash. Hard fought-for common sense goes out the window and looks elsewhere for understanding companionship and

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approval. The sense of harmony is gone. Self-will truly runs riot.

After these frightening ordeals called business meetings are over, the spell is broken and sanity returns. Participants hug and go off to a neutral corner to discuss a course of action or to decide which meetings to attend together in the near future.

How is this remarkable transformation achieved? Harmony is achieved through that ten dollar phrase - substantial unanimity. That unanimity is vital to our Fellowship.

The importance of unanimity is illustrated using an example from a recent event. Four options for a meeting were presented to a group. Option A receives the support of 10 members. Option B also receives the support of 10 members. Option C receives the support of 28 members. Option D receives the support of 20 members.

At first glance, Option C is the winner, receiving the majority of votes. But it is not a substantial majority of the meeting. If the meeting were to declare that a decision has been made and Option C is the course to follow, there is a possibility that 40 members of this group could take exception and leave the meeting. What once had been a meeting of 68 alcoholics has just become a meeting of 28 - drastically reducing the effectiveness of our message and the ability to carry on with our Primary Purpose.

AA provides a number of ways to help keep this decision from fragmenting and weakening this meeting. The first task is to narrow the options. By noting and appreciating the supporters of the first two options that received 10 votes apiece,

those options are then removed from consideration.

Now, the Options are narrowed to Option C and Option D. A second vote proves to be overwhelmingly in favor of Option C. Obviously the supporters of Options A and B have thrown their support behind Option C and it even appears that a few of the proponents of Option D have switched their support to Option C. Now the vote is 52 in favor of Option C and 16 in favor of Option D. This is clearly a substantial unanimity. Even if all supporters of Option D walked out of this meeting - a substantial core of 52 members remain to carry out the actions of the assembled body. Plus the fact that now 52 members support this course of action where before only 28 members fully supported the same action in question.

The will of our Higher Power is shown through the decisions of the group after each member has provided their input. Whether that group of alcoholics be a steering committee, a host committee, District meeting or Area Assembly - the will of the group is guided by the spirit of unity. The only thing left is to pick up the toolkit that has been laid at our feet and carry on as though the idea was your very own. It is no longer one member's idea - it is a *group* idea. Anonymity allows that no one member takes all the credit or shoulders the blame - it is a *group* action.

The standard thought is that the camel came from a committee that was supposed to design a horse. AA operates on committees. These committees operate under the spirit of unity. Throughout this marvelous process, Alcoholics Anonymous does indeed achieve harmony.

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Literature Can be Very Effective Doug R., Literature Chair, Panel 65

Literature can be very effective way of carrying the message of hope to those who still suffer. I love our literature for the fact that it has been gone over with a fine tooth comb by the literature committee. It does not become Conference approved literature until a substantial majority is confident that it carries the message of Alcoholics Anonymous. That's why it can take several years before new pamphlets or a new edition of the Big Book are published.

I personally love the committee process, even though it can seemingly slow down the process. What one person could accomplish in an hour can take a committee days, if not weeks. But the end product of the committee is so much more superior to one person's effort that it makes it worthwhile. If we didn't have the General Service structure, we as a fellowship would probably still only have the first edition of the Big Book and perhaps a few pamphlets. Or we would have several versions of our book and other literature that didn't necessarily reflect the message of Alcoholics Anonymous but only conveyed the views of a select few in a narrow demographic. All of which would make it very difficult to carry the message to alcoholics in today's world. I do trust the committee process!

As the text of our book Alcoholics Anonymous was being written Bill saw that something more was needed. There would have to be a story or case history section. We would have to produce evidence in the form of living proof, written testimonials of our membership itself. It was felt also that the story section could identify us

with the distant reader in a way that the text itself might not.¹

Most of the Literature Committee's agenda items at this year's conference were to consider revising pamphlets where the stories were either outdated or weren't as inclusive as they could be. All this in an effort to carry AA's message of hope to ALL who suffer from the disease of alcoholism.

¹ Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age, page 164. Copyright © 1957 AAWS, Inc.
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An Area Officer Article Shawn C., Treatment Chair, Panel 65

I am now into 5 months of my first year as area treatment standing chair, things are going well. There are a lot of material that are suggested reading to gain more knowledge concerning my service position.

It helps a lot to know there are many people in the area who are willing to help if there are any questions that I may have. However, most of the information that I need is in the Area Guidelines, A.A. Service Manual, and material from G.S.O. It is my responsibility to take the time to read each manual.

I will do my best and everything will work just fine

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The Communication Link Between the Groups and the Trustees Summary of Conference Process Using the A.A. Service Manual

In 1938 the "Alcoholic Foundation" (a trusteeship) was created. In 1954, it was renamed "The General Service Board of Alcoholic Anonymous". This trusteeship is responsible for inaugurating and maintaining AA services that cannot be done by single groups or areas (from AA Service Manual). The AA groups are ultimately responsible for AA as a whole (Concept I). Therefore, the AA groups and the trustees need to communicate with one another. The General Service Conference (GSC) is the vehicle that was created for the trustees and the groups (through their Delegate) to communicate with one another.

Keeping a balance between ultimate authority and responsibility and the active, day-to-day functioning of world services means there must be constant communication among all elements of the structure.

THE GROUP: The communication process starts with the group, which lets its group conscience – for or against change, approval of a proposed action – be known to its elected general service representative (G.S.R.). The G.S.R. makes sure the group's wishes are heard and fully considered at the district and area levels, and that they are part of the delegate's thinking at the Conference. After each annual Conference, the G.S.R. is responsible for making sure that group members are informed about what went on at the Conference and made aware of the full range of Advisory Actions.

THE DISTRICT: Groups are organized into districts, collections of groups located near one another. The G.S.R.s of these groups select district committee members (D.C.M.s), who become part of the area committee.

THE AREA: The U.S./Canada Conference is divided into 93 areas, made up of a state or province, part of a state or province, or in some cases parts of more than one state or province. At the area assembly, a delegate is elected to represent the area at the annual Conference meeting.

THE CONFERENCE AND THE DELEGATE: At the annual Conference meeting, matters of importance to the Fellowship as a whole are first considered and discussed by one of the standing Conference committees, then brought to the full Conference in the form of committee recommendations. All Conference members then have the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the recommendation before they are voted on. Committee recommendations that are approved before Conference Advisory Actions.

After the Conference, the delegate reports back to the area, working through D.C.M.s and group G.S.R.s. At the same time, any Conference Advisory Actions that were referred to the trustees are sent to either the appropriate trustees' committee, G.S.O., or the A.A. Grapevine for implementation.

Membership in the Conference consists of area delegates, trustees, directors of A.A. World Services and the Grapevine, and A.A. staff members of the General Service Office and the Grapevine. Traditionally, area delegates make up at least-two thirds of the Conference body.

THE TRUSTEES: The General Service Board is made up of 21 Trustees. It meets quarterly, and its actions are reported to the Fellowship through quarterly reports and also in the Final Conference Report. The board's two operating corporations, A.A. World Services, Inc. and A.A. Grapevine, Inc., report in the same way. A.A.W.S. is the corporation that employs G.S.O. personnel, directs G.S.O. services, and is responsible for book and pamphlet publishing. The Grapevine corporate board employs the magazine's editorial and business staffs and publishes A.A.'s monthly magazine and related materials.