

### **Social Media and the Internet**

In 2013, the 63rd General Service Conference affirmed that “the Internet, social media, and all forms of public communications are implicit in the last phrase of the short form of Tradition Eleven, which reads: ‘...at the level of press, radio, and films.’” As Bill W. wrote: “At this altitude [public], anonymity — 100 percent anonymity — was the only possible answer. Here, principles would have to come before personalities without exception.”

### **Points from the ‘Understanding Anonymity’ pamphlet published by AAWS:**

- A.A. members may disclose their identity and speak as recovered alcoholics, giving radio, TV and Internet interviews, without violating the Traditions — so long as their A.A. membership is not revealed.
- A.A. members may speak as A.A. members only if their names or faces are not revealed. They speak not for A.A. but as individual members.
- A.A. members generally think it unwise to break the anonymity of the member even after his or her death, but in each situation, the final decision must rest with the family. A.A. members, though, are in agreement that the anonymity of still living A.A. members should be respected in obituaries or in any type of printed remembrance or death notice.

### **Dr. Bob on Anonymity (from *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers*)**

...[Dr. Bob] said there were two ways to break the Anonymity Tradition: (1) by giving your name at the public level of press or radio; (2) by being so anonymous that you can't be reached by other drunks. - *Dr. Bob and the Good Old Timers*, page 264

“...within the group, every member should know the first name, last name, address and phone number of all the members in the group. If these are not known, then we as a group are operating ABOVE the level of anonymity intended..... We are not able to be of Service to One Another in Time of Need.”

"Since our Tradition on anonymity designates the exact level where the line should be held, it must be obvious to everyone who can read and understand the English language that to maintain anonymity at any other level is definitely a violation of this Tradition. The AA who hides his identity from his fellow AA by using only a given name violates the Tradition just as much as the AA who permits his name to appear in the press in connection with matters pertaining to AA. The former is maintaining his anonymity ABOVE the level of press, radio, and films, and the latter is maintaining his anonymity BELOW the level of press, radio, and films - whereas the Tradition states that we should maintain our anonymity AT the level of press, radio, and films."

**On anonymity, an editorial written by Bill W. for the AA Grapevine, October 1948**

*"Our relations with the general public should be characterized by personal anonymity. We think A.A. ought to avoid sensational advertising. Our names and pictures as A.A. members ought not be broadcast, filmed, or publicly printed. Our public relations should be guided by the principle of attraction rather than promotion. There is never need to praise ourselves. We feel it better to let our friends recommend us."*

Providence has been looking after the public relations of Alcoholics Anonymous. It can scarcely have been otherwise. Though more than a dozen years old, hardly a syllable of criticism or ridicule has ever been spoken of A.A. Somehow we have been spared all the pains of medical or religious controversy and we have good friends both wet and dry, right and left. Like most societies, we are sometimes scandalous -- but never yet in public. From all over the world, naught comes but keen sympathy and downright admiration. Our friends of the press and radio have outdone themselves. Anyone can see that we are in a fair way to be spoiled. Our reputation is already so much better than our actual character!

Surely these phenomenal blessings must have a deep purpose. Who doubts that this purpose wishes to let every alcoholic in the world know that A.A. is truly for him, can he only want his liberation enough. Hence, our messages through public channels have never been seriously discolored, nor has the searing breath of prejudice ever issued from anywhere.

Good public relations are A.A. lifelines reaching out to the brother alcoholic who still does not know us. For years to come, our growth is sure to depend upon the strength and number of these lifelines. One serious public relations calamity could always turn thousands away from us to perish -- a matter of life and death indeed!

The future poses no greater problem or challenge to A.A. than how best to preserve a friendly and vital relation to all the world about us. Success will heavily rest upon right principles, a wise vigilance and the deepest personal responsibility on the part of every man jack of us. Nothing less will do. Else our brother may again turn his face to the wall because we did not care enough.

So, the 11th Tradition stands sentinel over the lifelines, announcing that there is no need for self-praise, that it is better to let our friends recommend us, and that our whole public relations policy, contrary to usual customs, should be based upon the principle of *attraction* rather than promotion. Shot in the arm methods are not for us -- no press agents, no promotional devices, no big names. The hazards are too great. Immediate results will always be illusive because easy shortcuts to notoriety can generate permanent and smothering liabilities.

More and more, therefore, are we emphasizing the principle of personal anonymity as it applies to our public relations. We ask of each other the highest degree of personal responsibility in this respect. As a movement, we have been, before now, tempted to exploit the names of our well known public characters. We have rationalized that other societies, even the best, do the

same. As individuals, we have sometimes believed that the public use of our names could demonstrate our personal courage in the face of stigma; so lending power and conviction to news stories and magazine articles.

But these are not the allures they once were. Vividly, we are becoming aware that no member ought to describe himself in full view of the general public as an A.A., even for the most worthy purpose, lest a perilous precedent be set which would tempt others to do likewise for purposes not so worthy.

We see that on breaking anonymity by press, radio or pictures, anyone of us could easily transfer the valuable name of Alcoholics Anonymous over onto any enterprise or into the midst of any controversy.

So, it is becoming our code that there are things that no A.A. ever does, lest he divert A.A. from its sole purpose and injure our public relations. And thereby the chances of those sick ones yet to come.

To the million alcoholics who have not yet heard our A.A. story we should ever say, "Greetings and welcome. Be assured that we shall never weaken the lifelines which we float out to you. In our public relations, we shall, God willing, keep the faith."

Bill W., The A.A. Grapevine, October, 1948

## Glossary

**Ardent** Very enthusiastic or passionate. (p181)

**Availed** Use or take advantage of (p182)

**Baffled** Totally bewildered or perplex. (p181)

**Irrepressible** Not able to be controlled or restrained. (p181)

**Legions** A vast number of people or things. (p180)

**Temperament** A person's nature, especially as it affects their behavior. (p181)

*Definitions from Oxford Dictionary*