

Tradition 2 // Twelve and Twelve Notes

Short Form:

For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.

Long Form: The long form of this tradition is actually shorter than the short form, and is just the first sentence of the short form.

Tradition Two Checklist

From the Grapevine, November 1969

- Do I criticize or do I trust and support my group officers, AA committees, and office workers? Newcomers? Old-timers?
- Am I absolutely trustworthy, even in secret, with AA Twelfth Step jobs or other AA responsibility?
- Do I look for credit in my AA jobs? Praise for my AA ideas?
- Do I have to save face in group discussion, or can I yield in good spirit to the group conscience and work cheerfully along with it?
- Although I have been sober a few years, am I willing to serve my turn at AA chores?
- In group discussions, do I sound off about matters on which I have no experience and little knowledge?

Leaders

From "A Study of Tradition Two", Buddy T.

This tradition has been misquoted many times as "we have no leaders." But it clearly states that each group does have its leaders, they just have no authority over the rest of the group. Whether they be the group's representative to the area or district, or the secretary or treasurer, they have been entrusted with the responsibility to serve the group, not make decisions for it.

Groups clearly have other "leaders" also. There are those, who by sharing their wisdom and strength in the meetings, who are quietly recognized by the group as "spiritual leaders." There are those members, who are so well founded in the principles and traditions of the program, the group turns to when questions arise involving possible violations of those principles and traditions. These too are leaders, but they do not govern either.

Minority Opinion

Those voting against a motion have the right to express their opinion in an effort to sway the majority and bring about a unanimous opinion.

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From Concept V (5) of the 12 Concepts for AA World Service:

- Do we encourage the minority opinion, the “Right of Appeal,” to be heard at our home group, district committee meetings, area assemblies and the Conference?
- What does our group accept as “substantial unanimity”?
- Has our group experienced the “tyranny of the majority” or the “tyranny of the minority”? Tyranny of the majority is when the majority of a home group can and does place its own interests above, and at the expense of, those in the minority. This results in oppression of minority groups (hence the word Tyranny). Tyranny of the minority is when a group avoids change to appease the minority, at the expense of the group’s ability to function effectively.
- Does our group understand the importance of all points of view being heard before a vote is taken?

The late Barry L, author of “Do You Think You’re Different” and “Living Sober” was a GSO staff member in 1973 and 1974 and tells of the story when the Conference had to decide if Gay meetings could be so identified in AA directories. The mood of the floor was dead-set against the idea. Remember that homosexuality was still a felony and gay men and women were spoken of as deviants. In Barry’s 1985 World Conference talk in Montreal he recalls, “The discussion in 1974 went back and forth, back and forth for two days and two nights. Much of the agenda was wiped out. I remember one man saying, ‘I guess if this year you list the sex deviants, next year you’ll list the rapists AA groups.’ “A delightful woman from one of the northern States or maybe Canada, standing about three feet tall, came to the middle microphone and pulled it down to her face and said, ‘Where I come from alcoholics are considered deviants.’ The chairman astutely saw that the mood of the floor had changed and he asked if anyone wanted to call the question. The vote was cast and only two delegates voted against the gay and lesbian groups inclusion; it was almost unanimous, 129 votes to two.”

The Spirit of Rotation

Do we practice rotating leadership, stepping out of office regardless if we believe others are not available, not willing and not qualified or do we remain frozen in office?

"Traditionally, Rotation keeps AA members from becoming frozen in office. It also ensures that group tasks, like nearly everything else in AA, are passed around for all to share...to step out of an AA office you love can be hard. If you have been doing a good job, if you honestly don't see anyone else around willing, qualified, or with the time to do it, and if your friends agree, it is especially tough. But it can be a real step forward in growth--a step into the humility that is, for some people, the spiritual essence of anonymity...rotation helps to bring us spiritual rewards far more enduring than any fame. With no AA "status" at stake, we needn't compete for titles or praise--we have complete freedom to serve as we are needed". – AA Group Pamphlet, p34

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"But then I began to see rotation in action, and i learned the difference between ruling and serving. Rotation is one of the ways we use to make sure we serve and don't rule...AA's tradition of rotation (even if it permits some inexperience and even ignorance) was a bit shocking. Could such a structure stay intact? Wouldn't it finally fall apart? The answer, i discovered, was this: AA is unified and strong, because we are not organized...we've insisted that all those serving AA derive their authority from a loving god expressing himself within the informed group conscience." -AA Grapevine, September 1992

What is an Informed Group Conscience

The group conscience strives for unanimity (the state of being unanimous) through group enlightenment, spirituality and adherence to our Steps, Traditions and Concepts. What is the best way to get there? The group conscience is the collective conscience of the group membership and this represents substantial unanimity on one issue before definitive action is taken. This is achieved by the group members through the sharing of full information, individual points of view, and the practice of A.A.'s principles. To be fully informed requires a willingness to listen to minority opinions with an open mind.

On sensitive issues, the group works slowly, discouraging formal motions until a clear sense of its collective view emerges. Placing principles before personalities, the membership is wary of dominant opinions. Its voice is heard when a well-informed group arrives at a decision. The result rests on more than a "yes" or "no" count, precisely because it is the spiritual expression of the group conscience. The term "informed group conscience" implies that pertinent information has been studied and all views have been heard before the group votes. (*Excerpted from a talk by Ottis D., 2005*)

Glossary

Benign Gentle and kind. (p133)

Compel Force or oblige (p132)

Connives Conspire to do something immoral, illegal, or harmful. (p135)

Hemorrhage An escape of blood from a ruptured blood vessel (p135)

Hierarchy A system in which members of an organization or society are ranked according to relative status or authority. (p133)

"Lay Therapist" A non-professional person assisting a professional therapist (p136)

Mandate Require (something) to be done; make mandatory (p135)

Nebulous vague or ill-defined (p132)

"Summarily Beached" Removed from a position (p134)

Associated Reading:

Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age, p98-102