

Tradition 4 // Twelve and Twelve Notes

Short Form:

Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.

Long Form:

With respect to its own affairs, each A.A. group should be responsible to no other authority than its own conscience. But when its plans concern the welfare of neighboring groups also, those groups ought to be consulted. And no group, regional committee, or individual should ever take any action that might greatly affect A.A. as a whole without conferring with the trustees of the General Service Board. On such issues our common welfare is paramount.

Principle Behind Tradition Four

Autonomy: Is simply a form of independence that gives each group the latitude to be creative in their way. Alcoholics Anonymous states that the freedom individual groups have carried with it the admonition to protect the fellowship as a whole.

Connecting with the Big Book

“Our Society then entered a fearsome and exciting adolescent period. The test that it faced was this: Could these large numbers of erstwhile erratic alcoholics successfully meet and work together? Would there be quarrels over membership, leadership and money? Would there be strivings for power and prestige? Would there be schisms which would split A.A. apart? Soon A.A. was beset by these very problems on every side and in every group. But out of this frightening and at first disrupting experience the conviction grew that A.A.'s had to hang together or die separately. We had to unify our Fellowship or pass off the scene. –[pg xviii FOREWORD, AA Big Book

Tradition Four: Group Inventory Questions

“Some groups take inventory by examining our Twelve Traditions, one at a time, to determine how well they are living up to these principles.” -From “The AA Group”

- Does our group insist that there are only a few right ways of doing things in AA?
- Does our group consider the welfare of nearby groups in its actions and decisions? Or AA “as a whole”?
- Does our group judge or criticize other groups’ behavior or do we learn from them?
- Does our group bear in mind that our actions/behaviors reflect on the Fellowship?

- Does our group help a newcomer go to any lengths within the perimeters of the group conscience?
- Does our group truly honor the concept of “minority opinion.”

The story of Rule 62 “Don’t take yourself so damn seriously.”

The story is described in our 12 and 12. The basic story is that early in the history of AA, a group out in the hinterlands somewhere convinced the local town to fund a recovery/treatment/AA facility. This was going to be an elaborate facility with space for medical treatment, residential recovery, and AA meetings. The local group setting all this up started coming up with rules on how the place would be run, who could be admitted etc. And naturally, there was much disagreement over all this.

To try to resolve their differences, they sent a copy of their 61 rules to the NY office of AA. The volunteers at NY had no idea on how to run a large facility or what to say to this group about their rules. While they were discussing it, another message from the group was delivered saying simply: Rule 62, don’t take yourself so damn seriously. Apparently, they had decided that the potential ego-driven rewards of running a big facility were not worth the risk of tearing their group apart.

This episode is used to illustrate the development of AA’s fourth tradition: Each group should be autonomous...

Tradition Four: Personal Checklist

- Do I insist that there are only a few right ways of doing things in AA?
- Does my group consider the welfare of nearby groups in its actions and decisions? Of AA “as a whole”?
- Do I judge or criticize other members’ behavior when it is different from mine, or do I learn from it?
- Do I always bear in mind that, to those outsiders who know I am in AA, I may to some extent represent our entire beloved Fellowship?
- Am I willing to help a newcomer go to any lengths—their lengths, not mine—to stay sober?
- Do I ever criticize certain groups because I think they don’t do things how I believe AA should be done?

Glossary

Autonomy very simply that every AA group manages it’s affairs p. 146

Foundation Office General Service Office New York aka GSO p. 148

Traditions (first published in 1946) The group, like the individual, must eventually conform to principals that guarantee survival. p.10