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Bill W.'s Twelve Concepts for World Service

The Twelfth Concept

General Warranties of the Conference: in all its proceedings, the General Service Conference shall observe the spirit of the AA tradition, taking great care that the Conference never becomes the seat of perilous wealth or power; that sufficient operating funds, plus an ample reserve, be its prudent financial principle; that none of the Conference members shall ever be placed in a position of unqualified authority over any of the others; that all important decisions be reached by discussion, vote, and, whenever possible, by substantial unanimity; that no Conference action ever be personally punitive or an incitement to public controversy; that, though the Conference may act for the service of Alcoholics Anonymous, it shall never perform any acts of government; and that, like the Society of Alcoholics Anonymous which it serves, the Conference itself will always remain democratic in thought and action.

THE CONCEPT here considered consists of Article 12 of the Conference Charter. There are good reasons for placing it in this context.

Taken as a whole, our Conference Charter is the substance of an informal agreement which was made between the AA groups and their Trustees in 1955. It is the agreed basis upon which the General Service Conference operates. In part, the Charter is an elastic document; its first eleven Articles can be readily amended by the Conference itself at any time.

But Article 12 of the Charter

stands in a class by itself. An amendment or a cancellation of any of its vital Warranties would require the written consent of three-quarters of all the directory-listed AA groups who would actually vote on any such proposals, and the considerable time of six months is allowed for careful deliberation. Although changes in the Warranties of Article 12 thus have been made difficult, they have not been made impossible.

It is clear that all of these Warranties have a high and permanent importance to AA's general welfare. This is why we believe we should

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permit change in them only upon positive evidence of their defectiveness and then only by common consent of the AA groups themselves. We have ranked them therefore with AA's Twelve Traditions, feeling that they are quite as important to AA's world services as the Traditions are to AA as a whole.

Notice, for example, that all of them are counsels of *prudence* — prudence in personal relatedness, prudence in money matters, and prudence in our relations with the world about us. For us, prudence is a workable middle ground, a channel of clear sailing between the obstacles of fear on the one side and of recklessness on the other. Prudence in practice creates a definite climate, the only climate in which harmony, effectiveness, and consistent spiritual progress can be achieved. The Warranties of Article 12 express the wisdom of taking forethought for the future based on the lessons of the past, beginning: "In all its proceedings, the General Service Conference shall observe the spirit of the AA tradition, taking great care ..."

Warranty One: "that the Conference never becomes the seat of perilous wealth or power." What is meant by "perilous wealth or power"? Does it mean that the Conference should have virtually no money

and no authority? Obviously not. Such a condition would be dangerous and absurd. Nothing but an ineffective anarchy could result from it. We must use *some* money, and there must be *some* authority to serve. But how much? How and where should we draw these lines?

The principal protection against the accumulation of too much money and too much authority in Conference hands is to be found in the AA tradition itself. So long as our General Service Board refuses to take outside contributions and holds each individual's gift to AA's world services at a modest figure, we may be sure that we shall not become wealthy in any perilous sense. No great excess of group contributions over legitimate operating expenses is ever likely to be seen. Indeed, it seems that the chief difficulty will continue to be that of effectively informing the AA groups as to what the financial needs of their world services actually are.

In the matter of giving Delegates, Trustees, and staffs enough authority, there can be little risk, either. We are protected from the calamities of too much authority by rotation, by voting participation, and by careful chartering. Our Delegates, directly representing the groups, control the ultimate supply of our service funds. Therefore, they constitute a direct check upon the rise of too much personal authority. Taken all together, these factors seem to be reliable safeguards

against too much money and too much authority.

We have seen why the Conference can never have any dangerous degree of human power, but we must not overlook the fact that there is another sort of authority and power which it cannot be *without*: the spiritual power which flows from the activities and attitudes of truly humble, unselfish, and dedicated AA servants. This is the real power that causes our Conference to function. **Warranty Two:** "that sufficient operating funds, plus an ample reserve, be its prudent financial principle."

In this connection, we should pause to review our attitudes concerning money and its relation to service effort.

Our attitude toward the giving of time when compared with our attitude toward giving money presents an interesting contrast. Of course, we give a lot of our time to AA activities for our own protection and growth. But we also engage ourselves in a truly sacrificial giving for the sake of our groups, our areas, and AA as a whole.

Above all, we devote ourselves to the newcomer. In this activity, we often take large amounts of time from business hours. Considered in terms of money, these collective sacrifices add up to a huge sum. We do not think that this is anything unusual. We remember that people once gave their time to us as we struggled for sobriety.

But when it comes to the actual

spending of cash, particularly for AA service overhead, many of us are apt to turn a bit reluctant. We think of the loss of all that earning power in our drinking years, of those sums we might have laid by for emergencies or for education of the kids. We find, too, that when we drop money in the meeting hat, there is no such bang as when we talk for hours to a newcomer. There is not much romance in paying the landlord. Sometimes we hold off when we are asked to meet area or intergroup service expenses. As to world services, we may remark, "Well, those activities are a long way off, and our group does not really need them. Maybe nobody needs them."

But in recent years these attitudes are everywhere on the decline; they quickly disappear when the real need for a given AA service becomes clear. To make such a need clear is simply a matter of right information and education. We see this in the continuous job now being done with good effect for our world service by Delegates, Committee Members, and General Service Representatives. They are finding that money-begging by pressure exhortation is unwanted and unneeded in AA. They simply portray what the giver's service dollar really brings in terms of steering alcoholics to AA and in terms of our over-all unity and effectiveness. This much done, the hoped-for contributions are forthcoming.

These reassurances, of course,

cannot be taken as a basis for the abandonment of the policy of financial prudence. The fact and the symbol of AA's fiscal common sense can be seen in the Reserve Fund of our General Service Board. In about half of the last twenty years, AA group contributions have failed to meet our world needs. [From 1961 to 1971, there was only one year when group contributions covered these needs.] But the Reserve Fund, constantly renewed by book sales, has been able to meet these deficits — and save money besides. What this has meant in the lives of uncounted alcoholics who might never have reached us had our services been weak or nonexistent, no one can guess. Financial prudence has paid off in lives saved.

Warranty Three: "that none of the Conference members shall ever be placed in a position of unqualified authority over any of the others."

We have learned that this principle is of incalculable value to the harmonious conduct of our Conference affairs. Its application in our structure has already been extensively discussed under the Concept entitled "The Right of Participation," which emphasizes that our world servants, both as individuals and as groups, shall be entitled to voting rights in reasonable proportion to their several responsibilities.

This Warranty against absolute authority is far more general and sweeping in its nature than a guarantee of voting participation. It really

means that we of AA will not tolerate absolute human authority in any form. Many AAs have already begun to call Article 12 of the Conference Charter "The AA Service Bill of Rights." This is because they see in these Warranties, and especially in this one, an expression of deep and loving respect for the spiritual liberties of their fellows. May God grant that we shall never be so unwise as to settle for anything less. **Warranty Four:** "that all important decisions be reached by discussion, vote, and, whenever possible, by substantial unanimity."

Here, on the one hand, we erect a safeguard against any hasty or overbearing authority of a simple majority; and on the other hand, we take notice of the rights and the frequent wisdom of minorities, however small. This principle further guarantees that all matters of importance, time permitting, will be extensively debated, and that such debates will continue until a really heavy majority can support every critical decision that we are called upon to make in the Conference.

When we take decisions in this fashion, the Conference voice speaks with an authority and a confidence that a simple majority could never give it. If any remain in opposition, they are far better satisfied because their case has had a full and fair hearing. And when a decision taken in substantial unanimity does happen to go wrong, there can be no heated recriminations.

Warranty Five: "that no Conference action ever be personally punitive or an incitement to public controversy."

Practically all societies and governments feel it necessary to inflict personal punishments upon individual members for violations of their beliefs, principles, or laws. Because of its special situation, Alcoholics Anonymous finds this practice unnecessary. When we of AA fail to follow sound spiritual principles, alcohol cuts us down. Therefore, no humanly administered system of penalties is needed. This unique condition is an enormous advantage to us all, one on which we can fully rely and one which we should never abandon by a resort to the methods of personal attack and punishment. Of all societies, ours can least afford to risk the resentments and conflicts which would result were we ever to yield to the temptation to punish in anger.

For much the same reason, we cannot and should not enter into public controversy, even in self-defense. This is an exacting assignment, because in our drinking days we were prone to anger, hostility, rebellion, and aggression. And even though we are now sober, the old patterns of behavior are to a degree still with us, always threatening to explode on any good excuse. But we *know* this, and therefore I feel confident that in the conduct of our public affairs we shall always find the grace to exert an effective re-

straint.

Because our General Service Conference represents us all, this body is especially charged with the duty of setting the highest possible standard with respect to these attitudes of no punishments and no public controversy. The Conference will have to do more than just represent these principles; it will frequently have to apply them to specific situations. And, at times, the Conference will need to take certain protective actions, especially in the area of Tradition violations. This action, however, never need be punitively or aggressively controversial at the public level.

Let us suppose that AA falls under sharp public attack or heavy ridicule; and let us take the particular case where such pronouncements happen to have little or no justification in fact.

Almost without exception, it can be confidently estimated that our best defense in these situations would be no defense whatever — namely, complete silence at the public level. Unreasonable people are stimulated all the more by opposition. If in good humor we leave them strictly alone, they are apt to subside the more quickly. If their attacks persist and it is plain that they are misinformed, it may be wise to communicate with them in a temperate and informative way, also in such a manner that they cannot use our communication as a springboard for fresh assault. Such communications

need seldom be made by the Conference officially. Very often, we can use the good offices of friends. Such messages from us should never question the motives of the attackers; they should be purely informative. These communications should also be private. If made public, they will often be seized upon as a fresh excuse for controversy.

If, however, a given criticism of AA is partly or wholly justified, it may be well to acknowledge this privately to the critics, together with our thanks — still keeping away, however, from the public level. **Warranty Six:** "that, though the Conference may act for the service of Alcoholics Anonymous, it shall never perform any acts of government; and that, like the Society of Alcoholics Anonymous which it serves, the Conference itself will always remain democratic in thought and action."

It is probable that we AAs possess more and greater freedoms than any fellowship in the world today. As we have already seen, we claim this as no virtue. We know that we personally have to choose conformity to AA's Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions or else face dissolution and death, both as individuals and as groups.

Because we set such a high value on our great liberties, and cannot conceive a time when they will need to be limited, we here specially enjoin our General Service Conference to abstain completely from any and

all acts of authoritative government which could in any wise curtail AA's freedom under God. The maintenance of these freedoms in our Conference is a great and practical guarantee that the Conference itself will always remain democratic in action and in spirit.

Therefore, we expect that our Conferences will always try to act in the spirit of mutual respect and love — one member for another. This signifies that mutual trust should prevail; that no action ought to be taken in anger, haste, or recklessness; that care will be observed to respect and protect all minorities; that no action should ever be personally punitive; that, whenever possible, important actions will be taken in substantial unanimity; and that our Conference will ever be prudently on guard against tyrannies, great or small, whether these be found in the majority or in the minority.

The sum of these several attitudes and practices is, in our view, the very essence of democracy — in thought and action.

Freedom under God to grow in His likeness and image will ever be the quest of Alcoholics Anonymous. May our General Service Conference be always seen as a chief symbol of this cherished liberty.

To a man, we of AA believe that our freedom to serve is truly the freedom by which we live — the freedom in which we have our being.