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Seeking Guidance for Safe Use of Money

By Bill

In Alcoholics Anonymous, does money make the mare go or is it the root of all evil? We are in the process of solving that riddle. Nobody pretends to have the complete answer. Where the proper use of money ends - and its misuse begins - is the point in "spiritual space" we are all seeking. Few group problems are giving thoughtful A.A.s more concern than this. Every one is asking, "What shall be our attitude toward voluntary contributions, paid workers, professionalism, and outside donations?"

In the first years of A.A. we had no money problems. We met in homes where our women folk made sandwiches and coffee. If an individual A.A. wished to grub stake a fellow alcoholic, he did so. It was purely his own affair. We had no group funds, hence no group money troubles. And it must be recorded that many an oldtime A.A. wishes we could now return to those early days of halcyon simplicity. Knowing that quarrels over material things have crushed the spirit of many a good undertaking it is often thought that too much money may prove an evil for us too.

For Essential Services

It's small use yearning for the impossible. Money *has* entered our picture and we *are definitely committed* to its sparing use. No one would seriously think of abolishing our meeting

places and clubs for the sake of avoiding money altogether. Experience has shown that we very much need these facilities, so we must accept whatever risk there is in them.

But how shall we keep these risks to a minimum; how shall we traditionally limit the use of money so that it may never topple the spiritual foundation upon which each A.A. life so completely depends? That is our real problem today. So let us look together at the main phases of our financial situation, seeking to discover what is essential, what is non-essential, what is legitimate and harmless, and what may be dangerous or unnecessary.

Suppose we begin with voluntary contributions. Each A.A. finds himself dropping money in "the hat" to pay the rent of a meeting place, a club, or the maintenance of his local or national headquarters. Though not all of us believe in clubs, and while a few A.A.s see no necessity for any local or national offices, it can be said fairly that the vast majority of us believe that these services are basically necessary. Provided such facilities are efficiently handled, and their funds properly accounted for, we are only too glad to pledge them our regular support, with the full understanding of course, that such contributions are in no wise a condition of our A.A. membership. These particular uses of our money are now generally accepted and, with some qualifications, there is little worry of dire long range consequences.

Yet some concern does remain, arising mostly in connection with our clubs, local offices and the national headquarters. Because these places customarily employ paid workers, and amount of business management, it is sometimes felt that we may get bogged down with a heavy officialdom or, still worse, a downright professionalization of A.A. though it must be said that these doubts are not always unreasonable, we have already had enough experience to relieve them in large part.

Remedy Always at Hand

To begin with it seems most certain that we need never be overwhelmed by our clubs, local offices or by the General Headquarters at New York City. These are places of service; they cannot really control or govern A.A. If any of them were to become inefficient or overbearing the remedy is simple enough. The average A.A. would stop his financial support until conditions were changed. As our A.A. *membership does not depend on fees or dues* we can always "take our special facilities or leave them alone." These services must always serve us well or go out of business. Because no one is compelled to support them they can never dictate, nor can they stray from the main body of A.A. tradition for very long.

In direct line with the principle of "taking our facilities or leaving them alone" there is an encouraging tendency

to incorporate all such special functions separately if they involve any great amount of money, property or management. More and more, the A.A. groups are realizing that they are spiritual entities, not business organizations. Of course the small club rooms or meeting places often remain unincorporated because their business aspect is only nominal. But as large growth takes place it is usually found wise to incorporate and so set the club apart from surrounding groups. *Support of the club then becomes an individual matter rather than a group matter.* If, however, the club also provides a central office secretary serving the surrounding area it seems only fair that group treasuries in that area should shoulder this particular expense because such a secretary serves all groups, even though the club itself may not. Our evolution in large A.A. centers is beginning to indicate most clearly that while it is a proper function of a cluster of groups, or their Central Committee, to support a paid secretary for their area, it is not a Group or Central Committee function to support clubs financially. Not all A.A.s care for clubs. Therefore club support has to come mainly from those individual A.A.s who need or like clubs. Which, by the way, is the majority. But the majority ought not to try to coerce the minority into supporting clubs they do not want or need.

A Division of Activity

Of course clubs get a certain amount of help from meetings held in them. Where central meetings for an area take

place in a club it is customary to divide the collections between the club and the central committee for the area, heavily favoring the club of course, because the club is providing the meeting place. The same arrangement may be entered into between the club and any particular group which wishes to use the club whether for meeting or entertainment. Generally speaking, the Board of Directors of a club looks after the financial management and the social life of the place. But strictly A.A. matters remain the function of the surrounding groups themselves. This division of activity is by no means the rule everywhere: It is offered as a suggestion only, much in keeping, however, with the present trend.

A large club or central office usually means one or more paid workers. What about them - are they professionalizing A.A.? About this, there is a hot debate every time a club or central committee gets large enough to require paid help. On this subject we have all done a pile of fuzzy thinking. And I would be one of the first to plead guilty to that charge.

The reason for our fuzzy thinking is the usual one - it is fear. To each one of us, the ideal of A.A., however short we may be of it personally, is a thing of all beauty and perfection. It is a Power greater than ourselves which has lifted us out of the quicksand and set us safe on shore. The slightest thought of marring our ideal, much less bartering it for gold, is to most of us unthinkable. So we are constantly on the alert against the rise, within A.A., of a paid class of practitioners or missionaries. In A.A.,

where each of us is a good will practitioner and missionary in his own right, there is no need for anyone to be paid for simple 12th Step work - a purely spiritual undertaking. While I suppose fear of any kind ought to be deplored, I must confess that I am rather glad that we exercise such great vigilance in this critical matter.

A Guiding Principle

Yet there is a principle upon which I believe we can honestly solve our dilemma. It is this: A janitor can sweep the floor, a cook can boil the beef, a steward can eject a troublesome drunk, a secretary can manage an office, an editor can get out a newspaper - all, I am sure without professionalizing A.A. If we didn't do these jobs ourselves we would have to hire non-alcoholics to do them for us. We would not ask any non-alcoholic to do these things full time without pay. So why should some of us, who are earning good livings ourselves in the outside world, expect other A.A.s to be full time caretakers, cooks or secretaries. Why should these A.A.s work for nothing at jobs which the rest of us could not or would not attempt ourselves? Or why, for that matter should they be any less well paid than for similar labor elsewhere? And what difference should it make, if in the course of their duties, they do some 12th Step work besides? Clearly the principle seems to be that we may pay well for special services - but never for straight 12th Step work.

How then, could A.A. be professionalized? Quite simply I might, for example, hire an office and hang on the door a sign reading: "Bill W. - Alcoholics Anonymous Therapist. Charges \$10.00 per hour." That would be a face to face treatment of alcoholism for a fee. And I would surely be trading on the name of Alcoholics Anonymous, a purely amateur organization, to enlarge my professional practice. That *would* be professionalizing A.A. - and how! It would be quite legal, but hardly ethical.

We're Not "Pros"

Now does this mean that we should criticize therapists as a class - even A.A.s who might choose to go into that field? Not at all. The point is, that no one ought to advertise himself as an A.A. therapist. As we are strictly amateur there could be no such thing. That would be a distortion of the facts which none of us could afford to try. As the tennis player has to drop his amateur status when he turns professional so should A.A.s who become therapists cease publishing their A.A. connection. While I

doubt if many A.A.s ever go into the field of alcohol therapy, none ought to feel excluded, especially if they are trained social workers, psychologists or psychiatrists. But they certainly ought never to use their A.A. connection publicly or in such a way as to make people feel that A.A. has such a special class within its own ranks. That is where we all must draw the line.

(To be continued)