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Anonymity at the Public Level What's at Issue?



At issue is anonymity as the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions; our great symbol of self-sacrifice. It protects the individual member from notoriety, disciplines AA to place principles before personalities, retards the growth of self-appointed oracles, and insures a safe haven for newcomers.

That being said, how then can we make sure that the media doesn't break the anonymity Traditions? At issue is understanding and helping other AAs to understand that it is *we* — not the media — who are responsible for anonymity at the public level. Each month an average of fifteen AA members break their anonymity at the level of press, radio, TV, and film. We must help them to see that nothing short of 100 percent ano-

nymity is vital to the health of our society. On an annual basis, we request cooperation from the media, and, in most cases, they do cooperate. Let's be careful not to berate the media for reporting what an AA member has told them! Yes, we inform the media, but it is we who must be both humble enough and assertive enough to remain anonymous at the public level.

At issue, as we all know, is that there is no spokesperson for the Fellowship. Our *personal* anonymity in public assures each the freedom to journey along his or her own sober path; to bring an individual perspective to the same truth, to experience the precious gift of sobriety firsthand. AA is a Fellowship in the truest sense; we get sober and we stay sober with the help of our group. By prac-

ticing anonymity at the public level, we are protected from the egocentric individual who would not hesitate to interpret the Fellowship for all of us — and straighten out all of us. Easily inflated egos, so often our own, are safeguarded by this inspired Tradition of self-government.

the newcomer — and all of us — from prejudice, and enables us to assure the still suffering alcoholic that he or she is safe with us.

In view of these important considerations, then, why do we need public information? Why not just keep quiet about our Fellowship? At issue is the fact that far from being a secret society, we need, in Bill W.'s words, "The increasing goodwill of editors, writers and television and radio channels." Yes, we need to publicize AA but not to publicize *AA members*. The principle of anonymity reveals to us its "immense spiritual significance," and teaches us to "practice a genuine humility." We may then be moved to see that anonymity is so much "more than a sound public relations policy. It is more than a denial of self-seeking. It is a constant and practical reminder that personal ambition has no place in AA." May we treasure it with wisdom, courage, and love.

E. G., Manhattan, N.Y.

At issue, too, is our trendy world, in which some now say AA is respectable — even fashionable. We need to stay aware of the considerable stigma that surrounds our disease in the minds of many, including the potential AA member. Anonymity shields