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Bill W.'s Twelve Concepts for World Service

The Second Concept

When, in 1955, the AA groups confirmed the permanent charter for their General Service Conference, they thereby delegated to the Conference complete authority for the active maintenance of our world services and thereby made the Conference — excepting for any change in the Twelve Traditions or in Article 12 of the Conference Charter — the actual voice and the effective conscience for our whole Society.

IT is SELF-EVIDENT that the thousands of AA groups and the many thousands of AA members, scattered as they are all over the globe, cannot *of themselves* actually manage and conduct our manifold world services. The group conscience is out there among them, and so are the needed funds. The power of the groups and members to alter their world-service structure and to criticize its operation is virtually supreme. They have all of the final responsibility and authority that there is. The operation is really theirs; they really own it. This has

been true ever since the groups took over from the founders and old-timers at St. *Louis* in 1955.

But an ultimate authority and responsibility in the AA groups for world services — if that were all there were to it — could not amount to anything. Nothing could be accomplished on that basis alone. In order to get effective action, the groups must delegate the actual operational authority to chosen service representatives who are fully empowered to speak and to act for them. The group conscience of AA could not be heard unless a prop-

erly chosen Conference were fully trusted to speak for it respecting most matters of world service. Hence, the principle of amply delegated authority and responsibility to "trusted servants" must be implicit from the top to the bottom of our active structure of service. This is the clear implication of AA's Tradition Two.

Even from the beginning, large delegations of service authority had to be the rule. It will be recalled how, in 1937, the Akron and New York Groups authorized Doctor Bob and me to create over-all services which could spread the AA message worldwide. Those two fledgling groups gave to us the authority to create and manage world services. Following their action, we held both the final responsibility and the immediate authorization to get this project under way and keep it going. On our own, however, we

knew we could do little, and so we had to find trusted servants who in turn would help us. As time went by, we found that we had to delegate to these friends a very large part of our own authority and responsibility. That process of delegation was as follows:

First of all, Doctor Bob transferred nearly all of his immediate responsibility for the creation of world service to me. In New York, we stood a better chance of finding friends and funds, and we saw that our world-service center consequently would have to be located in that city. I started the search for trusted nonalcoholic friends who could help, and in 1938 the Alcoholic Foundation was formed as a small trusteeship of AA members and our nonalcoholic friends.

At first, the Trustees of our new Foundation took jurisdiction over money matters only. Little by little,

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however, they were obliged to assume many other responsibilities, because I alone could not discharge these on any permanent basis. Hence, I gave the Trustees added responsibility and corresponding authority as fast as possible.

For example, in 1940, a year after the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* was published, we all saw that this great new asset had to be put in trust for our whole Fellowship. Therefore, the stock ownership of Works Publishing, Inc.* (a publishing corporation which I had helped to separately organize), was turned over to the Board of Trustees.

Nearly all the income from the AA book was then needed to finance the over-all service office that we had set up for AA. The Trustees, therefore, presently took over the primary management of office oper-

ation, because they were now responsible for the funds upon which its support depended. Consequently, so far as financial decisions were concerned, I became an adviser only. Another sizable chunk of my original authority was thus delegated. When, in 1941, the AA groups began to send contributions to the Alcoholic Foundation for the support of our over-all service office, the Trustees' control of our world-service monies became complete.

After some time, it became apparent that AA's public relations, a vital matter indeed, could not continue to be entrusted to me alone. Therefore, the AA groups were asked to give the Trustees of the Foundation complete control in this critical area. Later on, the Trustees took jurisdiction over our national magazine, the AA Grapevine, which had been separately organized by

another group of volunteers.

Thus it went with every one of our world services. I still functioned in an advisory capacity in our headquarters operation, but the Board of Trustees was in full legal charge of all our affairs. As Doctor Bob and I looked to the future, it was clear that ample delegation to the Board was the only possible way.

Notwithstanding these delegations, Doctor Bob and I did quite properly feel that we still held an ultimate responsibility to AA, and to the future, for the proper organization and structuring of our AA world services. If anything were to go wrong with them, we would be held accountable, because the groups still looked to us, rather than to their then little-known Trustees, for leadership in AA's world affairs.

In the course of these developments, the great difference between *ultimate* and *immediate* service au-

thority became apparent.

As early as 1945, it began to be evident that the co-founders' ultimate responsibility and authority for services should never be wholly vested in a Board of Trustees. Certainly, our Trustees must be given a large share of the active and immediate responsibility. But the ultimate and final responsibility which Doctor Bob and I still possessed simply could not be transferred to a self-appointing Board which was relatively unknown among AAs as a whole. But where, then, would our ultimate responsibility for world services finally be lodged? And what would become of my own leadership in world-service matters? AA's history now shows where the ultimate authority finally went. At St. Louis, it went from Doctor Bob and me to the AA groups themselves.

But the groups' acceptance of ultimate service authority and respon-

*Works Publishing, Inc., was renamed AA Publishing, Inc., then AA World Services, Inc.

sibility was not enough. No matter what authority the groups had, they could not meet their new responsibilities until they had actually delegated most of the active ones. It was precisely in order to meet this need that the General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous was given the general responsibility for the maintenance of AA's world services and so became the service conscience for AA as a whole.

Exactly as Doctor Bob and I earlier had found it necessary to delegate a large part of our active authority to the Trustees, so have the AA groups since found it necessary to delegate these same powers to their General Service Conference. The final say — the ultimate sanction in matters of large importance — has not been given to the Trustees

alone. By the Conference Charter, confirmed at St. Louis, this authority is now delegated to the AA groups and thence to their Conference, a body which is a representative cross section of our entire Fellowship.

Therefore, the General Service Conference of AA — plus any later-formed sections — has become for nearly every practical purpose the active voice and the effective conscience of our whole Society in its world affairs.

In making this momentous transfer, we old-timers deeply hope that we have avoided those pitfalls into which societies have so often fallen because their originators have failed, during their lifetimes, to properly delegate and distribute their own authority, responsibility, and leadership.