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Bill W.'s Twelve Concepts for World Service

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The Third Concept

As a traditional means of creating and maintaining a clearly defined working relation between the groups, the Conference, the AA General Service Board, and its several service corporations, staffs, committees, and executives, and of thus insuring their effective leadership, it is here suggested that we endow each of these elements of world service with a traditional "Right of Decision."

WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK of their general responsibilities, whether these be defined by charter, by resolution, or by custom, it should be the traditional right of all world-service boards, committees, and executives to decide which problems they will dispose of themselves and upon which matters they will report, consult, or ask specific directions. We ought to trust our world servants with these discretions, because otherwise no effective leadership can be possible. Let us consider in detail, therefore, why the need for a "right of decision" in our leadership is imperative, and let us examine how this principle can be applied practically in all levels of our structure of world service.

We have seen how the AA groups, under the concept of the "group conscience," are today holding the ultimate authority and the final responsibility for world services. We have also noted how, by reason of the Conference Charter and the "trusted servant" provision of Tradition Two, the groups have delegated to their General Service Conference full authority to manage and conduct AA's world affairs.

The Conference and General Service Board Charters in broad terms define the responsibility of the Conference to act on behalf of AA as a whole. In these two documents, a necessarily large area of delegated service authority and responsibility has been staked out. These instru-

ments, in a general way, describe the relation between the groups, the Conference, the Trustees, and the active service units. These broad definitions and descriptions are an indispensable frame of reference, and we could not function without them.

Nevertheless, it has long been evident that these highly important Charter provisions cannot *by themselves* ensure smooth functioning and proper leadership at the several different levels of service which are involved. This has become crystal clear, and we need not seek very far for the reasons.

For example, knowing that theirs is the final authority, the groups are sometimes tempted to instruct their Delegates exactly how to vote upon certain matters in the Conference. Because they hold the ultimate authority, there is no doubt that the AA groups have the *right* to do this. If they insist, they *can* give directives to their Delegates on any and all AA matters.

But good management seldom means the full exercise of a stated set of ultimate rights. For example, were the groups to carry their instruction of Delegates to extremes,

then we would be proceeding on the false theory that group opinion in most world-service matters would somehow be much superior to Conference opinion. Practically speaking, this could almost never be the case. There would be very few questions indeed that "instructed" Delegates could better settle than a Conference acting on the spot with full facts and debate to guide it. Of course, it is understood that complete *reporting* of Conference actions is always desirable. So is full *consultation* with Committee Members and Group Representatives. Nevertheless, the "instructed" Delegate *who cannot act on his own conscience* in a final Conference vote is not a "trusted servant" at all; he is just a messenger.

Now, the Conference Charter does not actually solve typical problems like this. It is a broad document which can be variously construed. Under one interpretation, the groups can instruct the Delegates all they like. Under another, the Delegates and Trustees actually can ignore such instructions, whenever they believe that to be desirable. How, then, shall we practically understand and

reconcile such a condition?

Let us look at two more illustrations. The Conference, as will be later demonstrated, is in a state of nearly complete practical authority over the Trustees, despite the legal rights of the Board. Suppose the Conference Delegates began to use this ultimate power of theirs unwisely. Suppose they began to issue hasty and flat directives to the Trustees on matters respecting which the Trustees would be far more knowledgeable than the Delegates. What then?

This same kind of confusing problem used to beset the relations between the Trustees and their wholly owned active service corporations, entities which are nowadays partly directed by non-Trustee volunteers and paid service workers. But the Board of Trustees certainly does own these outfits. Therefore, the Trustees can hire and fire; their authority is final. Yet if the Trustees were con-

stantly to exert their really full and absolute authority, if they were to attempt to manage these operating entities *in detail*, then the volunteers and Staff members working in them would quickly become demoralized; they would be turned into buck-passers and rubber stamps; their choice would be to rebel and resign, or to submit and rot.

Therefore, some traditional and practical principle has to be devised which at all levels *will continuously balance the right relation between ultimate authority and delegated responsibility*. How, then, are we going to accomplish this?

There are three possible attitudes that we might take toward such a state of affairs. We could, for instance, throw away all corporate charters, bylaws, job definitions, and the like. This would leave it entirely to each group of trusted servants to figure out what its authority and re-

sponsibility really is. But such an absence of any chartered structure would be absurd; nothing but anarchy could result.

Then, of course, we could take the opposite tack. Refusing to give our leadership any worthwhile discretion at all, we could add to our present Charters great numbers of rules, regulations, and bylaws that would attempt to cover every conceivable action or contingency. That would be altogether too much red tape — more than we AAs could stand.

The right AA solution for this problem is to be found, however, in the latter part of Tradition Two, which provides for "trusted servants." This really means that we ought to trust our responsible leaders *to decide*, within the understood framework of their duties, *how they will interpret and apply their own authority and responsibility to each*

particular problem or situation as it arises. This sort of leadership discretion should be the essence of "*the Right of Decision*," and I am certain that we need not have the slightest fear of granting this indispensable privilege at nearly every level of world service.

There will always be plenty of ultimate authority to correct inefficiency, ineffectiveness, or abuse. If the Conference does not function well, the groups can send in better Delegates. If the Trustees get badly out of line, the Conference can censure them, or even reorganize them. If the Headquarters'* services go sour, the Trustees can elect better directors and hire better help. These remedies are ample and direct. But for so long as our world services function reasonably well — and there should always be charity for occasional mistakes — then "trust" must

* Now the AA General Service Office

be our watchword; otherwise, we shall wind up leaderless.

These are the reasons for my belief that we should forthwith invest in all of our service bodies and people a traditional "Right of Decision." In our structure of world service, this "Right of Decision" could be practically applied as follows:

A. Excepting its Charter provisions to the contrary, the Conference always should be able to decide which matters it will fully dispose of on its own responsibility, and which questions it will refer to the AA groups (or, more usually, to their Committee Members or GSRs) for opinion or for definite guidance. Therefore, it ought to be clearly understood and agreed that our Conference Delegates are *primarily* the world servants of AA as a whole, that only in a secondary sense do they represent their respective areas. Consequently, they should, on final decisions, be entitled to cast their votes in the General Service Conference *according to the best dictates of their own judgment and conscience at that time.*

B. Similarly, the Trustees of the General Service Board (operating, of course, within the provisions of their own Charter and Bylaws) should be able at all times to decide

when they will act fully on their own responsibility and when they will ask the Conference for its guidance, its approval of a recommendation, or its actual decision and direction.

C. Within the scope of their definitely defined or normally implied responsibilities, all Headquarters service corporations, committees, staff, or executives should also be possessed of the right to decide when they will act wholly on their own and when they will refer their problems to the next higher authority.

This "Right of Decision" should never be made an excuse for failure to render proper reports of all significant actions taken; it ought never be used as a reason for constantly exceeding a clearly defined authority, nor as an excuse for persistently failing to consult those who are entitled to be consulted before an important decision or action is taken.

Our entire AA program rests squarely upon the principle of mutual trust. We trust God, we trust AA, and we trust each other. Therefore, we cannot do less than trust our leaders in service. The "Right of Decision" that we offer them is, not only the practical means by which they may act and lead effectively, but also the symbol of our implicit confidence.