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Bill W.'s Twelve Concepts for World Service

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The Ninth Concept

Good service leaders, together with sound and appropriate methods of choosing them, are at all levels indispensable for our future functioning and safety. The primary world service leadership once exercised by the founders of AA must necessarily be assumed by the Trustees of the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous.

No MATTER how carefully we design our service structure of principles and relationships, no matter how well we apportion authority and responsibility, the operating results of our structure can be no better than the personal performance of those who must man it and make it work. Good leadership cannot function well in a poorly designed structure. Weak leadership can hardly function at all, even in the best of structures. But once we have created a basically sound structure, that job is finished, except for occasional refinements.

With *leadership* we shall have a continuous problem. Good leadership can be here today and gone tomorrow. Furnishing our service structure with able and willing workers has to be a continuous activity. It is therefore a problem that in its

very nature cannot be permanently solved. We must continuously find the right people for our many service tasks. Since our future effectiveness must thus depend upon ever-new generations of leaders, it seems desirable that we now proceed to define what a good service leader should be; that we carefully indicate in each level of service, especially in our Board of Trustees, what special skills will always be required; and that we review our present methods of finding and choosing that leadership.

First, let's remember that the base for our service structure rests on the dedication and ability of several thousand General Service Representatives (GSRs), several hundred area Committee Members, and nearly a hundred Delegates. These are the direct agents of the AA groups; these are the indispensable linkage

between our Fellowship and its world service; these are the primary representatives of AA's group conscience. Without their support and activity, we could not operate permanently at all.

When making their choices of GSRs, the AA groups should therefore have such facts well in mind. It ought to be remembered that *it is only the GSRs* who, in Area Assembly meetings (or in caucus), can name Committee Members and finally name the Delegates. Hence, great care needs to be taken by the groups as they choose these Representatives. Hit-or-miss methods should be avoided. Groups who name no GSRs should be encouraged to do so. In this area, a degree of weakness tends to persist. The needed improvement seems to be a matter of increased care, responsibility, and education.

As the GSRs meet in their Assemblies to name Delegates, an even greater degree of care and dedication will be required. Personal ambitions will have to be cast aside, feuds and controversy forgotten. "Who are the best qualified people that we can name?" This should be the thought of all.

Thus far, our Third Legacy method of naming Delegates by a two-thirds vote or by lot has proved

highly satisfactory. This system of choosing has greatly reduced political friction; it has made each Delegate feel that he or she is truly a world servant rather than just the winner of a contest. In Committee Members and Delegates alike, our Third Legacy methods have generally produced people of a high level of dedication and competence. In this area of service, we are in good shape. Our Area Assemblies need only to continue to act with care and in selfless good spirit.

It should be reported that some members still doubt whether choice by lot is ever a good idea. They say that the best man does not always win. In answer, it must be pointed out that each time we have abandoned the "two-thirds vote or lot" in naming Delegates, there has been a sense of defeat and disturbance in the minority camp which is nowhere nearly offset by the advantage of naming the supposedly best man. Indeed, the second-best man can often be as good a Delegate as the Assembly's first choice; he may even be a better Delegate.

We now come to the principal theme of this particular Concept: How can we best strengthen the composition and the leadership of the future Board of Trustees, the Board which in years to come will have to exercise AA's primary leadership in world service administration, the trusteeship which will in fact have to assume most of my former duties and responsibilities in

connection with AA's world services?

As previously noted, the actual transference of authority and responsibility from me to the Trustees has been going on for a long time. I am still around and still serving as an adviser, and I have also been finishing a few remaining chores (for example, the development of these Concepts) which were left over from the 1955 St. Louis Convention. But the time approaches when I shall have to withdraw from nearly all world service activity. This is why I feel a great interest now in doing everything possible to strengthen the administrative composition and AA leadership of our General Service Board, so that future Trustees may be better able to cope with the problems and dangers which time will no doubt bring.

My admiration for what AA's alcoholic and nonalcoholic Trustees have done for us all is boundless.

During the time of our infancy and adolescence, nothing could have been structurally better than the set-up we have had. Looking at this record, many AAs naturally feel that what was good for the past will surely be good for the future; that any change in the induction methods, in the Trustee ratio of alcoholics to nonalcoholics, or in the present composition of our Board will prove dangerous rather than beneficial.

But change has been pressing upon us right along, and it is still doing so. For example, our Board operated in all the years between 1938 and 1951 without the support of a Conference. But it was finally and reluctantly realized that this relatively unseen and unknown Board could not continue without a permanent linkage to AA, something that Doctor Bob and I could not give it forever. We did not like to face this change, but we had to. The trusteeship had to be securely anchored to

AA or it eventually would have collapsed. The Conference simply *had* to come into being.

This change profoundly altered the position of the Trustees. Their former authority was modified; they were firmly linked to AA and were thus made directly accountable to our Fellowship. Nobody today questions the wisdom of that momentous change, because everybody can now see that it has provided an essential protection for the service effectiveness and security of AA's future. Experience has refuted the idea that changes which are needed to meet altered conditions are necessarily unwise.

We now stand on the edge of still another great change. Though we have already solved the problem of the Trustees' authority, their responsibility, and their linkage to AA, we *have by no means solved, in my belief, the question of the Board's future role in service leadership.*

Hence, it is my deep conviction that the administrative and AA-leadership strength of the Board should be considerably increased; that these and other improvements can place it in a much better position, practically and psychologically; that such changes are truly necessary to meet the conditions which will be certain to follow when my own world service leadership has been terminated.

Students of history recognize that the transference of the original leadership of a society to its successors in leadership is always a critical turning point. This difficult question of leadership, this problem of transference, must now be faced.

In the book Twelve Concepts for World Service, this chapter concludes with Bill's Grapevine article "Leadership in AA: Ever a Vital Need," published in the April 1959 issue and reprinted in September 1968.