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SERVICES MAKE AA TICK

By Bill

A COFFEE pot simmers on the kitchen stove, a hospital sobers the stricken sufferer, General Headquarters broadcasts the AA message; our Service lifelines span the Seven Seas. All these symbolize AA in action. For action is the magic word of Alcoholics Anonymous. So it is, that every AA service daily proves that so-called "material activities" can lead to magnificent spiritual results.

Service in the Parlor

Once upon a time, all AA meet-

ings were held in homes. There weren't any committees and nobody put up a cent. We hadn't even a name and "founders" were unheard of. It was that simple.

Yet we did enjoy one "service" — a valuable one, too. Wives baked cakes and brewed strong coffee for us alkies huddling together in the front parlors, still terrified that our new program might not work after all. Those wifely dispensations of good cheer smoothed the way and so lightened our burden of doubt. Thus, from the very beginning, did

such gracious service make AA tick.

Into the Halls

By and by, meetings got big. Our front parlors couldn't hold them. We had to move into halls. Gathering places seldom came free so we must needs pay rent. Landlords weren't a particle interested in the spiritual advantages of Group poverty. So someone passed the hat and we dropped money into it voluntarily. We knew we couldn't meet or function as a group unless we did. We grudgingly learned that rent was necessary to insure sobriety — our spiritual dividend, life itself.

This rent paying process also produced the first AA "official." The gent we picked to pass the hat soon became our treasurer. Then phone calls had to be answered, letters written, literature ordered and distributed. The now familiar group Secretary put in his - or her - appearance. Presently newspaper interviews had to be given, preachers and doctors canvassed, hospital arrangements made, banquets set up. Not by anybody, either. Somebody special had to be picked to do these chores. That "somebody" became the Group Service Chairman.

Of course this was all quite troublesome, for it marred our sometimes fallible serenity. Squabbling began, dark forecasts of our future were made and everybody yearned to go back into the parlors. But we

didn't because we couldn't. We saw we'd have to have service committees or fail to function, perhaps fall apart entirely. We'd actually *have to organize services in order to keep AA simple.*

Hospital Service

Hospitals, we early found, disliked drunks. We had been noisy nuisances who ducked paying bills and seldom got well. Yet we quickly saw that many an alcoholic might never get a real chance with AA unless hospitalized. What could we do?

At first, we went in for home "tapering." But instead of "tapering off," our new clients usually "tapered on" - and right back into the bars again. Some Groups tried to organize "AA hospitals" with M.D.s on call. This carried matters too far, it put our Groups straight into serious business. All these early attempts were busts. We finally learned that each AA Group ought to be *primarily a spiritual entity*, not a *business corporation*. Then individual AAs and their friends began to set up rest homes and drunk farms as private enterprises. This worked a lot better, but still it wasn't enough.

At length the medics began to come to our aid. Agreeing with our hard earned conclusion that doctoring ought to be the affair of doctors, they commenced to help us make hospital connections. Our first attempts to cooperate with

hospitals in city areas often led to damaging confusion. Anybody sponsored anybody, and those hospital bills still didn't get paid. Cocksure AAs told doctors how to run wards. This easy going lack of head or tail in our hospital relations didn't keep AA simple at all. Confusion was general until some hospitals bluntly told metropolitan AA Groups that responsible members with whom they could consistently deal would have to be named - or else. Nobody, said the hospitals, could possibly cooperate with an anarchy.

It began to dawn upon AA that *Group responsibility* would have to reach *much further than the meeting hall doorstep* on Tuesday and Thursday nights only. Otherwise the new man approaching our door might miss his chance, might lose his life.

Intergroup Services

Slowly, most reluctantly, Groups in densely populated areas saw they would have to form associations, open small offices, pay a few full-time Secretaries. Terrific outcries went up. To many, this really meant destructive organization, politics, professionalism, big expense, a ruling officialdom and government. "Believe us," they argued, "A local Central Office could cost metropolitan AA members 50 cents a month apiece. That could turn into a damned head tax — what about our AA Tradition of no 'fees or dues'?"

Of course these exaggerated

fears never materialized. We have lots of good intergroup associations now, voluntarily supported. The new man is getting a better break, the hospitals are pleased. The office of one large association has sponsored and hospitalized 7,000 alcoholics. Prompt interview and phone service is planting the seeds of recovery in other thousands. Local meeting directories are issued, public relations attended to, regional gatherings and dinners set up. We found these last couldn't be carelessly left to anybody who happened to feel like giving interviews or printing up a bundle of tickets and handbills. In short, intergroups do those area chores that no single individual or group could. They unify regions; they make AA tick.

That Vital Service - The AA Book

By 1937, some of us realized that AA needed a standard literature. There would have to be a book. Our word of mouth program could be garbled, we might be destroyed by dissention over basic principles and then our public relations would surely go to pot. We'd fall flat on our obligation to the alcoholic who hadn't yet heard unless we put our knowledge on paper.

But not everybody agreed, many were badly scared by this proposal. Money in some quantity would be needed, there would be huge disputes over authorship, royalties,

profits, prices and the contents of the book itself. Some truly believed that this seemingly reckless project would blow our little society to bits. "Let's avoid trouble, let's keep things simple," they said.

Well, we did quarrel violently over the preparation and distribution of that AA book. In fact, it took five years for the clamor to die down. Should any AA's dream that the old timers who put the book together went about at the time in serene meditation and white robes, then they had best forget it. The inspiration readers now say they find in the volume, must have got there by the Grace of God only!

Yet see what has happened. Two-hundred-thousand AA books circulated in this year 1951, silently scattering our message world-wide, lighting the path of progress for nearly every incoming member. Without doubt, that book is the backbone of our unity, it has unbelievably *simplified* our task. Although its preparation was, in part, a very "material" proceeding indeed, those early labor pains of its creation did help form our society and cause it to function. The spiritual result, in sobriety, happiness and faith, is altogether beyond any reckoning.

Foundation, General Office, Grapevine

This Group of Headquarters Services enables AA to function as a whole. They guard our tradition,

they issue our principal literature. They watch over our general public relations and sorelate us right-ly to the world outside. They mediate our difficulties, they guide our policy. Therefore, these indispensable services are AA's principal lifelines to the million who do not know.

It is this world center of service which constitutes the principal bequest in our recently announced Third Legacy. And it is by the terms of this Legacy of Service that the General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous, a representative body of State and Provincial Delegates, assumed control and guidance of these principal affairs of AA last April.

That event marked the passing of responsibility for our world services from Dr. Bob, our friends, and myself, to you — the members of Alcoholics Anonymous. Support and guard these assets well; the lives and fortunes of millions, the very survival of AA itself may depend much upon how well you discharge this, your new found obligation.

In Conclusion

Let us make our services respectable; let us rank them in importance with the Twelve Steps of Recovery and the Twelve Principles of AA Tradition. Let us forget our fear of over organization; let us remember that AA as a whole cannot be organized; but that we

must so organize and support our special services that AA can function. Let us forget our early fears of professionalism, of the accumulation of wealth, of government. Experience, now fortified by our Tradition, has already assured us none of these evils are likely to descend upon us.

Above all, let's change our old attitudes about money. Collectively, AA members earn an enormous income because of their sobriety, it's a one half a billion dollar bonanza each year. Can we not wisely, gratefully and humbly re-invest a tiny fraction of this vast

sum in those vital services that make AA tick? I think we can, and I think we shall. For in our own lives we have seen sobriety produce money, and in our AA services we have seen a little money produce incalculable spiritual dividends. Let's think this all through again.

By our Twelve Steps we have recovered, by our Twelve Traditions we have unified and through our Third Legacy- Service - we shall carry the AA message down through all the corridors of time to come. Of this, I am happily confident.