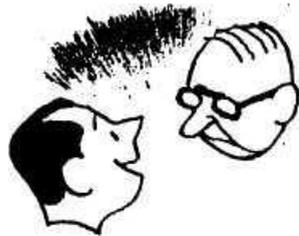


Tradition 9: AA, as such, ought never to be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.



The Deacon and the Delegate

THE Deacon and the Delegate had been sitting for some little while, chatting and sipping coffee with great civility, when at last the Deacon broached the subject uppermost in both their minds.

"I hear by the grapevine," he said, "that you are off to New York for the great Conference soon."

"Ah yes," said the Delegate. "A chance to see a bit of the world, and AA in action, too."

"AA in action?" queried the Deacon. "I thought we managed to have some action right here."

"Of course," the Delegate replied, "but, you know, it's important to see some of the larger picture. Hear what's new in AA all

over the world. Check out the latest developments in AA's General Services."

"I suppose," said the Deacon, "that we have both been in AA long enough not to get resentments over each other's hobbyhorses. But, you *know*, I find my hackles rising at the suggestion of so much organization and centralization. Is *everybody* in this great fellowship eventually going to sound like a committeeman and say things like 'larger picture,' and 'latest developments'?"

The Delegate pondered his answer for a moment. He knew where the conversation was headed. The Deacon's position on conferences and committees and the like was well known to all in the group; why carry coals to Newcastle?

"It's only my own opinion," said the Delegate, "but I think there is more to AA than leaping out on a Twelfth Step call at the drop of a fifth of whiskey."

"There is..." the Deacon started to say.

"There *are*," said the Delegate

with a smile at the Deacon as if to forgive him for getting the verb wrong. "There *are* the services our AA groups provide through all our service headquarters and AA centers as well as the General Service Office in New York.

"That's what gives me the fidgets, exactly," said the Deacon. "All this talk of headquarters. Let me tell you, the real headquarters of AA is right here on the group firing line where we stand ready to receive the individual suffering drunk, with loving kindness of course, and help the poor miserable slob get sober — if he wants to, that is. This palavering at New York, not to mention junketing thereto and from, may serve useful purposes (I say *may*; I find I have not come to believe it), but it's very much secondary to hitting the individual drunk locally with the help he needs."

"A brave speech. I do not disagree with a word of it," said the Delegate. "You are absolutely right. The organization of AA services, *general services*, *world services*, came *after* the first alcoholics sobered up in the first group. But it came *soon* after, and has been important since. The whole point of having a headquarters supported by the groups is to see if we can use it to help us do a better job at the individual group level."

"It's really a matter of communications," the Delegate went on. "The groups need to keep in touch with the groups; there have to be

centralized communication functions for that. The General Service Conference is the annual Big Effort of all-AA communications. It's 'sharing experience' on a grand scale."

"The groups keep in touch with the groups?" demanded the Deacon. "What about Intergroup?"

"Sure enough," said the Delegate. "Intergroup at the local level, for our own small area. But the Conference is for all the U.S. and Canada, and General Services covers the whole world."

"What I've always failed to grasp," said the Deacon, "is just how one piece of the AA jigsaw relates to another. Intergroup is 'local area.' Okay, we'll put it to one side for this discussion. But what about the rest of it? You've got GSRs, assorted kinds of conferences, Trustees, General Services, World Services, and, presumably, headquarters staff. All, I should guess, stepping all over one another. How do they keep things straight? Who runs the show?"

"Nobody does except the groups. You really can't say that even the General Service Board, which has legal responsibility for headquarters and the General Service budget, *runs* AA. The groups run it."

"I'm aware that the groups run themselves," said the Deacon, "but I fail to see that the groups run everything else, so I submit that headquarters runs itself and no doubt does so in a high-handed

fashion, spending money on any project at all it fancies."

"Patience," thought the Delegate, but aloud he said: "The question of budgets is precisely one of the things submitted to the annual General Service Conference. The headquarters budgets are presented in complete detail; the delegates have plenty of chance to swing away at anything they don't like. The groups express themselves *through* their delegates to the General Service Conference. The Conference delegates hear reports from the Trustees, from everybody involved in General Services at headquarters, from the Grapevine, from their own committees of delegates who have been working throughout the year."

"All right," said the Deacon, "I was only stirring you up."

The Delegate wondered if he should go on. Or retreat. No, he would take the bull by the horns. "Do you," he said to the Deacon who was smiling slightly into the smoke of his cigarette, "see that blackboard over there?"

"I do," said the Deacon unenthusiastically.

"Can you spare me a quiet half-hour?"

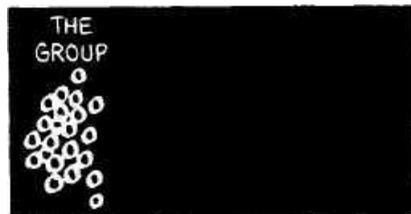
"Why, yes, I think so."

"I mean," said the Delegate, "will you keep quiet for a half hour? In other words, I wish to talk while you listen."

"Fire away," said the Deacon, settling back in the chair. After fourteen years in AA he found it

pleasurable that his juniors thought he was worth educating.

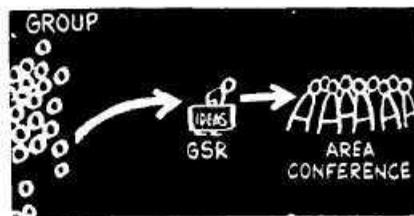
"First," began the Delegate, "let me draw on the board the beginning-point in AA: the group.



There are, as you know, about 11,000 groups all over the world. Each one is as good as the next one. The group is the cornerstone of AA, right?"

The Deacon put his finger to his lips indicating that he would keep quiet. The Delegate warmed to his task.

"Each group may elect a General Service Representative (GSR). I say *may* because they don't all see fit to do so. In my personal opinion groups are missing the boat if they don't participate in General Service, but that's their privilege. Now the GSR carries his — or her — group's ideas to the Area Assembly. Here's a GSR carrying an idea to the Area Assembly.



"The Area Assemblies of GSRs, besides meeting annually (sometimes quarterly), work in committees throughout the year to study area problems and needs."

"This is great artwork," the Deacon interrupted. "Tell me, what kind of ideas do the GSRs carry in those suitcases?"

The Delegate decided to remain unruffled. "I'm glad you asked that question," he said. "Comment, criticism, suggestions for change in AA policies and general services, or objection to any changes. Just about anything on the subject of AA you can think of."

"Proceed," the Deacon ordered.

"Now the U.S. and Canada are divided into eighty-five geographical areas; thus there are eighty-five delegates. (Eventually we hope other countries will have their own General Service set-ups paralleling this North American one.) Each Area Assembly elects a delegate and an alternate for two year terms. Delegates are charged by their Area Assemblies with ideas to carry to the annual meeting of the General Service Conference. In other words, the delegate represents all the groups of his area at the big annual meeting of the Conference; he carries to it their hopes and problems. When he comes *back* from the General Service Conference, he's expected to report on it to the GSRs of his Area and to as many of the individual groups as will hear him, and that he can physically get to.

True representative democracy."

"I trust that you represent us with the utmost judiciousness?" said the Deacon.

"I try, although I can't deny that an occasional human error might creep in."

"Well, that," said the Deacon kindly, "is one of the perils of democracy."

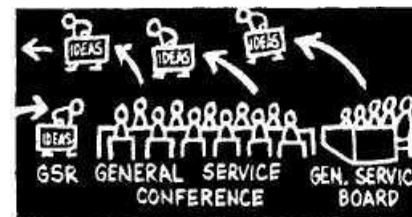
The Delegate started to answer, thought better of it, and turned back to the blackboard.

He drew a picture of himself (or any of the other eighty-four delegates) carrying ideas to the annual General Service Conference.

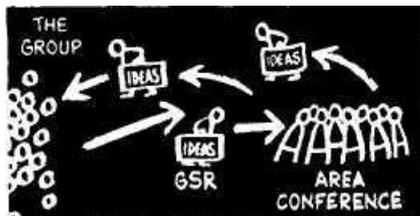
He then drew in the Conference. He put in the Trustees (The General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous, Inc.).



"And now," he said, "let me show the Area delegates returning from the General Service Conference with ideas to report to the Area Assemblies.



"And the GSRs in turn reporting to their groups."

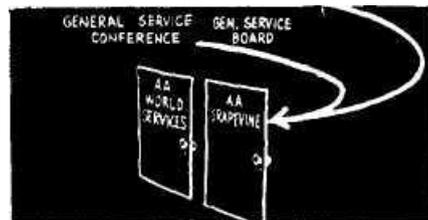


"Very effective," the Deacon commented. "Is that the story?"

"Thank you," said the Delegate. "It's only about half the story."

The Deacon groaned. The Delegate went on unperturbed: "Since we are embarked on this description of AA structure, let me show you how headquarters provides services for groups." The Delegate sketched rapidly, talking as he drew. "The General Service Conference, representing the groups, and the Trustees who are the custodians of AA's legal corporations and of AA funds, together guide our AA service functions.

The Trustees (The General Service Board) nominate and elect the Directors of AA World Services, Inc., and the Corporate Board of the AA Grapevine, Inc.



"The Grapevine corporation's sole function is to put out the monthly AA magazine, which groups or individuals may buy."

"A fine magazine," said the Deacon, "if a little wordy."

"Do you think so? Well, I like the cartoons myself."

"A kinship with fellow artists, I suppose?" the Deacon proposed.

"Or fellow alcoholics," the Delegate answered.

"You win that round," sighed the Deacon.

The Delegate went back to work. "AA World Services is the corporation which conducts most of what we consider General Services. Its directorate is made up of seven AAs, one of whom is a staff member, and another the manager of General Services. It includes the entire AA publishing operation, the AA books and pamphlets, you know.

"Lots of money in that," the Deacon suggested.

"Not a *lot*. Some. Not enough to support the show by a long shot. Thus the appeal to groups that can afford it to contribute \$3.00 per member annually to General Services. Individual contributions help, too, except that GSO cannot accept more than \$100.00 from anyone in a single year."

"That \$100.00 clause ought to keep us from inheriting the earth, I'm glad to say. But listen, some of this terminology you're using

baffles me. You just now mentioned "General Services," and a moment ago you were talking about "World Services." How do you keep one separate from the other or are they the same thing?"

"Really they're the same. AA World Services, Inc. is responsible to The General Service Board. But AA *World Services* conducts what we call *General Services*, or what we call The General Service Office in New York. Matter of names. It might simplify it if we gave the different parts numbers. You know: The Trustees could be GS1. World Services would become GS2. The Grapevine, GS3 ..."

"Stop. You'd make it worse; you would all be up for being spies."

"Maybe so, anyway, let me finish. It's really impossible to pin down in a drawing or a few words the variety of services AA World Services (or GSO Staff, if you pre-

fer) performs. They are in touch with groups in the United States and Canada and all over the world, with groups in prisons and hospitals, with loners and sea-going Internationalists. Besides, they serve as secretaries of the various Trustee, World Service, and Conference committees, and work on the big every-five-year AA Convention. (The next one's in '65 in Canada.) They work on AA publications, put out the *Exchange Bulletin*, the *World Directory*, the *Internationalists' Round Robin* ... I think we've material for another whole lecture like this to do a fair job describing World Services."

"Another time," the Deacon commented.

"Another time," the Delegate agreed, stepping back from the blackboard to survey his design of the way headquarters provides services to the groups.

"Is that all there is to it?" asked the Deacon. "That's the structure?"

"Well, I've left out. . ."

"I knew it," sighed the Deacon. "Go on."

"I left out the fact that the Conference delegates divide themselves into committees in order to cover their work more efficiently.

"And the Trustees have committees, made up of some of their own members and additional AA volunteers, to make studies and recommendations.

"And we haven't shown the accounting, records, shipping, and clerical departments of AA World Services."

"Spare me that," the Deacon waved his hand.

"And the Grapevine has a business department..."

"A veritable Versailles of departments and committees," the Deacon drawled.

"Yes," said the Delegate, "but they get a whale of a lot of work done for the 350,000 members of AA. A lot of AA communication reaches some of the umpteen millions of still suffering alcoholics in the world. The whole thing wouldn't make sense unless it was building toward more active AA members, sober drunks. I give you my personal word that's why I'm going to New York: to see if we can, working together, reach more and more alcoholics."

"I remain not entirely convinced about it all," the Deacon responded gently.

"That's your privilege," said the Delegate. "I'll be checking with you when I get back from New York, and will fill you in on what transpired."

"I'd like to know, at that," said the Deacon.

Anonymous

