

A Design for Living: Traditions and Concepts

2002 | Part 3 | Reading edition

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Have them come over and work the steps. No, if I am busy with someone, I will tell you that. I am currently busy because your lack of good planning does not become my crisis. If it's a genuine crisis, then I talk with a person that I'm in the room with. Most of the time when I'm working with someone, I do not answer the phone. If I'm expecting something, then I will. Or if I'm prompted by the spirit, I will. I will not fluff you off, but I know this. If you've called me in a crisis, particularly in the middle of the night, you're going down a long list of people. If you don't get me, you've got somebody next in line. So I used to worry about that more than I do now. And most crises pass with sunrise. They just become calamities at that point. So.

But I won't fluff you off, but each thing is separate. Okay? So we're trying to figure out how we're going to maintain unity and harmony within the group and then within the groups. That's what our traditions are about. Our experiences taught us that for us to survive as individuals, despite the fact that God's got me and keep me sober, I need people. I need people more today than I did when I got here. It's a different kind of need, but it's very real. My obligation to the past and my duty to the future is to make sure that A is intact when they get here.

And that means I don't change too much. And I have learned that I have to be a little bit vocal. If you want to change things too much, I need to speak up. Learning how to do that and keep brothering in harmonious action when we have all these different styles of doing A becomes an interesting, not a problem, but an interesting journey. We used to trade people. In fact, some of us still do. You end up somehow in our little group and we can see that our style just is not going to work right for you.

I just had to make sure it was real. I've heard that and there was nobody else in the room. Thank you for responding. It's real. Well, I'm not here. So I need to know some people need nursed for a while before they can get into the steps. Some people need to get into the steps before they can be nursed. And we need to know who's doing what and be on such terms that if you're in my group and we're really not helping you, I can suggest that you might want to work with someone else.

Don't leave our group, but you might want to go work with Roy for a while or go over here for a while. We still do that. I got really tickled the other day. We were in Nashville visiting with some friends. We were out at the mall because we wanted to go shopping. When I'm on vacation with my wife, it's a 5,000 mile shopping trip. It's what I did. And I like it too. Every Walmart in the country has its own flavor. It needs to be checked out.

It used to be Kroger's. That's why we're going up in the world. I'm in the middle of the mall and I get a call from Peggy Martin in Omaha. Now Peggy's style is very different than mine, but we're good friends. And there was a girl that we could not help. So we sent her to Peggy. And Peggy was calling wondering what she should do because she's running into some problems. And we treatment teamed this deal in the middle of the mall.

And it all worked out fine. They had a young musician in Omaha that at six years, they were just tired of his arrogance. They couldn't deal with him. So he came to Denver. They sent him to me. And he's still arrogant, but I can deal with it. This is really important that this happened. If you go into the into the south, if you're going

down to Lafayette, Louisiana, I'll give you a name and a number. Not just go to a meeting.

See this person. Okay, make contact here. And that may not be the way I would do it, but it's the contact there. So anyway, that's really important. I come to, oh, you're welcome. I come to Spokane and it's my job to fit in. You see, one of the greatest lessons I've ever learned is whether I need to feel like, I belong and that I'm accepted. And whether I feel that I'm accepted or not has nothing to do with whether you accept me or not, it has to do with whether I accept you or not.

And so this all becomes very personal again. This is an inside job. You're fine with me. You have problems up here. I'm glad I don't have and I don't want to hear about them. Really? But I accept you anyway, because I don't have to solve your problems. We can have a good time together and maybe come to a common solution of all of our problems by dealing with principles instead of personalities. We are by nature control freaks.

I can say I don't know about you, but I do know about you. You're like me. My active alcoholism was a constant attempt to control my universe. How I felt, how I saw things, what you did, self-centered control. Recovery means then I've got to let go of the control and still have things somewhat organized. So our spiritual principle is it's covered in the ninth tradition. Each AA group needs the least possible organization.

We can achieve that without even trying. Oh yeah, I'm cheering tonight. I picked this topic and the first person follows orders. It talks about the topic. The second person mentions the topic briefly and then goes to La La Land. And the third person comes back from La La Land with it anyway. It's just the way it is. And I have to resist the temptation to say, oh, that isn't what we're talking about. And sometimes I have to say that isn't what we're talking about.

But in terms of the group, we need only a little bit of organization. My groups are very simple. Our organizational structure, we don't have any ritual in my group. Several years ago, notice how much time was taken up at meetings with the ritual. Read this, read that, read this, read that, do this. 20 minutes into the meeting, it finally starts. We don't have any ritual. We open the old-fashioned way. This is by group conscience.

At six o'clock, everyone gets quiet. And we stay quiet until someone is inspired to speak. Now that's someone generally because we have a little organization and we're doing a step of tradition and a concept back-to-back is the person that we have chosen for a three-month period of time to keep us on track, to remind us where we were last time. And they're usually the one that speaks. So we don't say we will have a moment of silence followed by the Serenity Prayer.

We don't say anything at all. We just get quiet. And then this person, so that's one job we have, one little bit of organization. John and I get there early. Because we have to get the tables back because we meet in a circle. Somebody has to move the tables back and make sure the room is open. We have delegated the authority to contact the security guard to open the door to either John or I because we tend to be early risers.

It's just a habit for me if we have a six o'clock appointment, ten minutes before and ten minutes after is the leeway, and I tend to be ten minutes ahead. Okay? Rather than ten minutes late. So that's the little bit of organization we have. We have a GSR. Our GSR is really expected to perform. There to be at all district meetings, all assemblies, and once a month they get the whole meeting and we expect a report. And they chair

our group conscience meeting, which occurs during our business meeting, to inform us and to inform that person.

That's the only organization we have. The contact with the hospital has to be decided. The hospital doesn't want everybody showing up at Barbara's office asking questions. So it's been delegated to two people to contact Barbara, by the way, is the administrator of the hospital, the one that makes the decisions. Don't ask the nurse. They don't know. Ask Barbara. And she'll tell the nurse or get the information from the nurse.

It's like corrections. Corrections chair people should never be the one that go to all the prison meetings. They should pick the teams that go to the prison meetings because their job is to negotiate with the administrators of the different prisons. They don't want fifty people showing up wanting this and that. So we have to organize a little bit to delegate that little piece of authority so things run smoothly, because your job in mind is carrying the message.

We need enough organization that that can occur without interruption. We moved from a community corrections center to a hospital because we couldn't get in. And none of our negotiators were able to pull it together, so our decision was all. They didn't want us here then. So we moved. How are you all organized? Some larger group needs a steering committee. I don't know why, but they seem to need a steering committee. The steering committee does not run things by the way.

The steering committee takes the action that the group has decided needs to be taken. General service is our major operating committee. That's all it is. The trustees are a committee that we use. The delegates form a committee to carry our wishes to take certain actions. The trustees, for instance, no action of the General Service Conference is binding on you and I. Did you know that? It's only binding on the trustees.

You and I can ignore it completely. We need this pamphlet. My group doesn't. We just ignore it. Even if you put it out, we ignore it. We don't need it. Whatever actions are taken are binding only on the trustees. They're the operating committee. They're charged for this year, get this done, and the next conference come tell us about it. That's really in theory how it works. It doesn't really work that way, but that's how it should work.

If we're being responsible, how many past delegates we have in the room? Is that a clear statement? Current delegates count. You're way past. Rotating leadership, hi, is the best. Throughout this now, and when we get into the concepts, you'll see it even more. Our principles remove personal power from individuals and put it in the hands of the group. That's the way spiritual principles work. We have been given power.

We're told that in the big book. We're all power seekers. Lack of power is my dilemma. I'm going to seek power. And here I get power, but I'm only given the power for one reason to help others. If I use the power for myself, it'll eat me. I've watched it. I've seen very powerful people fall by the wayside. Because they appropriated the power to themselves. It's really hard not to. I've got this delicate, sensitive ego.

Doesn't have any power in all of a sudden. It's got some. I like this. So our principles, by putting principles before personality, our principles give us guides to remove the power from our personal agenda and focus me again like the first tradition says on the welfare of the whole. It has to come first. A very wise man, one of the people that I follow, said it is not selfish of me to live my life so that it pleases me.

It is selfish of me to expect you to live your life so it pleases me. And that kind of goes along with this. Don't

step on your brother's toes. Find out what your actions are going to cause happen over across the street. Hard for us to do. Hi. We have authorized the General Service Conference, the groups that we, you and I have authorized them to handle our overall public relations and to guarantee the integrity of our principal newspaper, the grapevine.

Grapevine's a funny little thing. It's really a poorly written magazine. You know why? We write it. That's why. The best editor in the world was Ames Sweet. And there's stuff he just couldn't clean up. It just came off funky cause we wrote it. The integrity of the grapevine is critical. All major decisions have to go through the conference process. There is no place where you and I can speak out except on a grapevine.

And speak out is what we're about. We must have an arena where we can express personal opinion, viewpoint and experience. There are a number of really good books written by A members. One that comes to mind is new pair of glasses. When it was offered a General Service, they could not publish that. It's one person's experience. General Service must reflect the whole fellowship. No matter how good it is, it has to go through the process so the reflection of the fellowship shows up.

So it had to be published elsewhere. Our public relations are handled by General Service. They're overall public relations. And I'm really glad. Can you imagine taking group conscience on, let me give you one. It should come with the tenth tradition. But when I was on the board, I'm kind of a basic person. I had to be reminded to buy a suit for the trust of the only dinner because I didn't own a suit. Why would I wear a suit?

I was told why. I got a suit by the way. Board weekends were interesting for me because I'm a basic A member from the West. An irreverent as hell, I was brought up by a father who insisted question authority at every opportunity and lied to a policeman at least once a month. Just to stay in practice. So I didn't feel like I was good, trusty material. You know, a three-piece suit and area diet. Isn't that a great word?

That means you sound good. You can put words together so that they stir people's souls. I tend to be a little more direct. So when I got there, I really enjoyed the committee work that we did as trustees in the conference. There's real passion and real purpose in committee activities. And I really believe the committee system is the best for us because it automatically delays any major decision. And we should always delay all of our major decisions as long as possible until we're absolutely certain they're right because they do affect the very lives of the people that are affected by them.

So we need to really consider them. So committee work was great for me. Trusty, the only dinner always bothered me. We went, well, I can't say it on tape. No, that's all right. I'll say it on tape. My perception, and please understand I love these guys. I did not always agree with my compatriots. Our committee work was wonderful, but once each session we spent way too much money in my view and went to some really fancy penthouse and had supper.

I know it was at least a hundred bucks at plate. We became 21 assholes. Did you get it? Good. Self-serving, pompous, pumped up, CS ain't we cute. And we, me included, got caught in that somehow. I mean, we're up 60th floor overlooking New York, talking like we knew something. It's a drive me crazy. If it hadn't been for the heavy work that we actually got done, this would have bothered me beyond my ability to go back again.

I know I had a point to all this. Anyway, the board meetings were interesting because all the stuff that happened has to be ratified by the board by law. We're a non-profit corporation chartered under the laws of the state of New York. And conference actions are only binding on the conference and the trustees, but they must be ratified to make them legal or we lose our chartered. This one particular weekend was wonderful.

I mean, most weekends I went home saying, I don't need this. I'm not going back, honey. I'm not going back, honey. You nurse me. What the hell did I give up my home and family for this floor? I can get this crap going to your group. But this weekend was really great. The committee work was wonderful. The dinner was good. We didn't become assholes. We really functioned this weekend. The board meeting went well. We're right at the end of this board meeting getting ready to catch our airplanes.

When Betty Little said, we have one more piece of business. Nancy Reagan has written us and said that some friends of ours would like to put us forward for the Nobel Peace Prize. And what they'd like to know is if that happened, would we accept it? We went berserk. Now, can you imagine if that question came up and we took that back to the groups, we'd still be talking about it. We have authorized these people to handle that kind of public relations because we'd make a mess out of it.

I mean, those of us who were sane and well-informed with berserk, we had AA destroyed. We made one. We would not accept the financial piece. At that time it was a \$50,000 award. We would not take that, of course. We went through all the reasons that this would be a bad idea. And really agitated. Couldn't come to an answer. Some were for it. Some were against it. It was just a mess. And Eileen Gatsu is one of the staff members and understand participation is the most critical thing in Alcoholics Anonymous.

Everybody participates. The staff does not have a vote at the board, only board members, but they have a voice because they have the information that that board needs. We need to keep that channel open. They have history, they have provenance, they have information. Anyway, Eileen got up and said, it seems to me that this is a tenth tradition problem. It's an outside issue and we should have no opinion whatsoever. And we all got sane again.

Because that was true. And that's what we sent back to Nancy Reagan. That it's an outside issue and we have no opinion. We got a letter back from her in a couple weeks saying that's what we thought you would say. Because of the continuity and the living by principles today's history has shown that's what they thought we would say. That we're consistent if we're following principle. We're predictable if we're following principle.

They had to ask. We didn't get it by the way. We weren't even put forward because it was clear that this is a name we were even interested in. Nor should we be given the Nobel Peace Prize. We're a bunch of incompetent self-centered selfish drunks who can't even get locked up in the right places. And all we do is help one another out of desperation. This does not call for a Nobel Peace Prize. Nobel Peace Prize, I've ever been to a group conscious.

Sac, psychiatric evaluation comes closer to better. But we have authorized them to handle this kind of public relations. Have you all seen Days of Wine and Roses? Pretty good, wasn't it? Gave a great portrayal of alcoholics anonymous a long way. Not only was the film good, but the portrayal of AA was right on the money. That's because we helped them make it. They called us in and the people at that time, the staff, the board, our

representatives gave them the information so that the AA piece would be just exactly like it is.

We've given them the authority to do that. Can you imagine if the request came in from a producer in the film to have a little help? Let's take this to the groups. What's that good I do? Who's going to be the advisor? Me? We're going to show AA from six o'clock Friday morning viewport. We've authorized them to do certain things like that. When the newspapers call for information, we have policy and principles. We have committees that do that work.

They do not govern. The way it's put here, and I love this, trusted and experienced servants of the whole. Our leaders, and we have leaders, there's a mistaken idea that there are no leaders. There certainly are. Without leaders, we have nothing. Our leaders do not govern. They are experienced and trusted servants of the whole. As we get into the concept, Bill reminds us that good ways of picking our leaders is critical.

They have to have some experience, and they have to be trustworthy. I've got to be able to count on you. If you're my GSR or my DCM or my delegate, I need to be able to count on you as an AA member to make decisions based on principle. Not coercion, not personal opinion. I've got to be able to trust you to change your mind from what I told you to say if you need to do that. If you get more information, I've got to trust you.

You have to be able to trust me. The weakness in the AA service structure is not in the service. It's in the fellowship that doesn't care. That's our weakness. You and I have a question for everybody these days. Because people come and bitch at me a lot. You run into that? This is wrong. It's a question I ask myself once because something happened. We came out with a little third edition with no stories in it and it freaked me out.

Because in the big book, the stories are referred to twice as being absolutely critical. I had to ask myself, where was I when that happened? I was uninvolved, that's where. It's got me involved now that I'm paying the ass again. That's the question I have to ask. If I'm going to help promote unity, if I'm going to live by these principles, where am I today? What am I doing today? When things happen. Am I available? You betcha.

I don't like that. It interferes with a whole lot of other things. It puts me on the line. Our delegates know the hardest thing in the world, once you finally get accepted by your peers, is to have to stand up on a microphone and go contrary to what your peers have been saying. Really hard to do. Really hard. It takes a special kind of courage to do that without polarizing and making it a fight. But to step outside the circle, really tough.

If you run with bald people, you will shave your head if it's that important. But sometimes the hair just grow and you look in the mirror some morning and say, I look better with hair. But I don't want to lose my friends. There's a thousand silly little ways of looking at that. It takes courage. I heard one time that this was a selfish program. I had never understood that phrase. This is the most selfless program I've ever seen in my life.

It's all about helping others, not me. I grow spiritually through work and self-sacrifice for others. Not through working on myself and my issues. God, I love my issues. When I work on them, I get really good at them. Oh, yeah. Still don't want to give up lying entirely. There's times that's just better than the truth. So you have to practice it. The test is this. If I question myself, if you were looking at me from the outside, could I be perceived as an experienced and trusted servant of the whole?

Would my actions reflect that? Because most people don't hear our words anyway, whether they can hear

them or they hear what they think they heard us say. Do my actions to the things that I do represent trusted and experienced? It's a good way to take your inventory, both at the group level and how many of you are involved or about to be involved in general service? Really important there to watch. People watch. Service people are by nature suspected.

Human nature. They go to these secret meetings that I can't go to. Oh, yeah. Politics is the art of compromise. It's a very important part of human negotiations. Personal politics means I'm negotiating for my benefit. But there's a political way of doing things that's for the good of the whole. How many of you are negotiators? When you go into any negotiation, the man with the plan always wins. And part of the plan is a couple throwaways.

You want this and I want this and between us are some steps. And I've got a couple that I'm going to be willing to just trash in order to keep the thing going. It's not fake, it's just negotiation. If I can get them through, I will, but they're not critical to the end result. And you have some too, and I know that. And if we're negotiating in terms of alcoholics and Anonymous, we call it discussion. It's negotiation.

We want to come out with the best for the most. But it starts out with my plan. I know what's right. And at the beginning, I am so noble, I'm going to give you the right to be wrong. That's all. Well, it's true. But after we negotiate or discuss for a while, I begin to see you have some points here that I hadn't. Good negotiators don't talk much. They ask questions and then sit and listen. Correct? Why would I want to do that?

It's the best question of all. You come with an idea of why would I want to do that? I'm willing to listen while you tell me why I want to do that. Because I can tell you why I don't. And all I'll do is polarize this. We're talking about experience here. This is not general rule, but it's my experience. But I have to present things in such a way that I don't polarize you and make you firm in your stand. We won't negotiate.

We won't discuss. We'll battle. I want tension. Not battle. Trusted. I trust truly even my enemies because I really do believe they think they're doing the right thing. I'll give them credit for that. They honestly believe what they're going to do is the best for the whole. We need to talk about it because case in point. At one of the conferences I was at, we had spent two years researching the question, why are there not more?

There are black members in Alcoholics Anonymous. Which was the wrong question, but it's the one we researched. Because I had the latitude as Trustee at large to do it, I went to black cities where there's plenty of blacks in A. Because it was leading to do we need a pamphlet for the black members or for black people. And I asked that question. See, in areas where there aren't a whole lot of black people, they're not going to be a lot of black people in A either.

Isn't that amazing? We also found out one of the reasons is that black religious leaders, church leaders truly didn't want them going to A. They wanted to keep it in house. Natural and normal. This is what the black folks were telling me. When it came to the pamphlet they said clearly, please don't do that. We're isolated enough as it is. Don't make us any more isolated. So there are those who genuinely looking at a crowd of white faces wonder, why aren't there more blacks here?

And can't we do something about that? And maybe a pamphlet would help. And they really mean it. I got to bring the other piece of information in. So we don't screw things all up here. And somewhere in the middle there.

That's all we're talking about here. Experience and trust. We have a couple of really funny pamphlets. We have one of the funniest videos I've ever seen. I don't know how it got through the conference.

It's a rap video. Like, who's going to watch that one? To kid on the street? No. We have a corrections video to recruit people into corrections work. It's only watched by corrections people. General membership doesn't even know about it. But it's all an effort on somebody's part to truly address a problem. But without full discussion, we don't get that. I've got to be able as a trusted servant to trust you enough to communicate with me.

You gave me the job as trusty at large. I don't have a clue as to what that means. I've read the manuals. I still don't have a clue as to what that means to me. I know what the job is now. It was an undefined job when I got it. The main purpose of the trusty at large is to fill in for the original trustees if they got sick. They were all healthy. What am I going to do? If you don't tell me what to do as a trustee or as a delegate or a DCM, if your group does not communicate with me so I know what your needs are, I am by human nature required to do something.

You gave me this title. I've got to do something. And I'll do what I perceive as the best. And that may or may not be good. In fact, it may be good. But as Bill warned us, the good is all from the enemy of the best. So the trust thing is important to me in this. I've got to be able to trust that your group, whether you do it my way or not, is still doing some pretty good things. Does it irritate you when you run across a group of people that, they've got people 10, 15, 20 years sober and are just not doing it right, but they're staying sober anyway, just didn't right.

Just waiting for somebody to drink and they don't. It's just not fair. That's the human condition. What I've done is started going to their meetings. I found out I didn't like them, so I don't go back. Except every now and then to do a little trolling. But I like the people. I just don't like the style of the meeting, but I like the people. Anyway, I don't want to get one and after. They derive no real authority from their duties or their titles.

They do not govern. Universal respect is a key to their usefulness. I had the privilege of knowing Dr. Jack Norris, probably one of the finest people I've ever known. He came from, was Kodak, I think. Dr. Jack was one of the founders of the conference, and he was chairman of the board quite often, and chairman emeritus, trustee emeritus, he was just a remarkable human being. I asked him one time, what is your greatest concern for alcoholics anonymous today?

He said, tradition lawyers. We get away from the spirit here and get too locked in. And then he said, this is all about respect and trust. And trust and respect do not automatically come with a title. You have to earn it. You have to perform in such a way that the people watching, while they may not understand what you just did, trust what you just did. And that puts the heat on me. The big book gives me an answer. At the end of the sex inventory, it tells me what I'm to do with every situation that comes up in my life.

In meditation, I'm to ask God what to do about each specific matter. The right answers will come if I want it. Each specific matter. So I have to trash rules. These are not rules. These are principles. And the principles are those things that guide me when there are no rules. Isn't that nice? I stole that about a month ago for somebody. Six months from now, I'm not giving credit. You notice I didn't tell you who I got it from either.

That was a joke. Yeah. I sometimes kid around because it gets as serious as I can't stand it. So the question becomes, do I trust myself and my participation so that the leader we just picked is the right one for the time? Or

did I pick it because of personality? It's a hard thing not to have personalities. We've got to have them. Wouldn't this be dull if we all looked the same? And acted the same. Got to have personalities.

Currently, for instance, I think about this. We just elected a delegate. We had four really good candidates. It's my perception that right now Alcoholics Anonymous needs communicators and people of great courage. That's what we need at the conference right now. Because the great weakness at the conference right now from all the delegates I listen to is a lack of communication and a lack of courage. So I need to pick from along these four, if I'm going to vote, not their personality, but who is the best communicator and who has stepped out from time to time over the past few years and shown some courage?

Well, we got one. Our current delegate, I already have from him and he didn't even take office until January. He has sent to all of us who are on the area committee a recap of all area actions from the very beginning of our area. He's done all the homework necessary and he sent all the information out. That's pretty risky, you know. Because some of that information has already caused me to say, wait a minute. We're not acting that way.

And he's the one who's going to take the heat for that. That's courage. Anyway, let's just an example. You and I must participate if this is going to work. No AA group or member should ever in such a way as to implicate AA express any opinion on outside controversial issues. Oh, that's so hard. That's so hard. What do you think of treatment? Don't want to answer that question. I love treatment. I don't like what they do, but I love treatment.

They hold them still for 28 to 30 days. They detox them. They encourage an open mind. All I've got to do is show up. Look at the prospects. I'm an old salesman. We used to dig for prospects. My God, treatment has got them by the thousands. Just go there. It's also necessary for me to show up in treatment to tell these people what AA is about. Because if I don't, somebody will tell them. And usually it's somebody who doesn't know.

And they will come to us with skewed ideas. And it's very hard to unskew an idea. Had one kid come out of treatment and he was wild. Talking wild stuff. And the chairman stopped him. He says, you can't do that, oh man, this is AA. I can talk about anything I want. He'd been told that. How are you going to undo that one? Again, it's me participating. But I need to participate in a way that we don't cause controversy. Colorado, I guess, 10, 12 years ago was debating on having, whether or not to have legalized gambling.

Limited stakes gambling. And there were hearings and all that stuff that goes on in the political arena. And one of our clubs had gambling for years down the base when an illegal poker game. Well, clubs do that. You had to have the password to get in and all that. They would like to see it legalized. It helped pay the rent. And it was a service to the people who hang around clubs. Now this wasn't AA. It was a club. As a club manager he rightfully went to the hearings and signed in.

He had a voice as a club manager correctly. He had a chance to speak endorsing limited stakes gambling the next day in the Rocky Mountain News on the front page is Alcoholics Anonymous endorses. Okay. No way. And he wasn't a member. But he shouldn't have entered into the public controversy then. It was a club in Dallas that really did well with it. They were making more money than casinos. And the boys showed up one day and said you guys are doing pretty good.

We want a little piece of this action. And they said screw you. And the next day in the paper I'll blown up.

And they went into the detail. It was something. Remember that one? Yeah. Oh man. So I must ask myself is my action going to create any public controversy. And that doesn't mean necessarily hitting the newspapers. As an AA member if I am known as an AA member I'm expected to conduct myself a little bit differently to a little higher standard.

Not for ego reasons but we're not the front line troops in the battle of alcoholism. Okay. We don't do triage. Triage is done by police officers and doctors and nurses and families and social workers. They make the initial determination most of the time. We want them to send them to us. Because from triage we do what's necessary to help them recover. There has to be a real trust between me and that community. So is my actions going to cause this?

Doctors say don't bother to send them to all so-and-so's over there and here's what he did. We don't need that. And unfortunately in today's world that has happened often enough that quite often we don't get the prospects anymore. Particularly in corrections. We try to get it. We had a meeting at the Denver County Jail and it ended. Several years later some of us went back out to see if we could get it started again.

Captain Olivas was very straight. He says I'm not inclined to give you guys a meeting because you don't show up. My experience is we had a meeting here and you guys didn't show up. And it's a lot of work for me. I've got to move them from the cell block to this room. It takes extra guards. We've got all this going on and you don't show up. The only way we'll give you a meeting is if you can guarantee me five people, the same five people for six months that will show up.

Until then don't bother me. We had lost our trust. Sometimes the action that we take that incites public controversies is no action at all. We cop out. So I have to ask myself, what was that when that happened? We should particularly avoid politics, alcohol reform or sectarian religion. They're always controversial. Politics isn't hard to stay out of. Although we just had a... It got into the AA meetings. Our last political race in Colorado.

I don't know if you've been following the news, but we've got a congressman that's only 122 votes different between the two of them. And it was a nasty little race. It doesn't belong in AA. On a personal level, I just retreat into my... I don't have an opinion. I don't trust politicians. But I don't have an opinion. I'm an American citizen. My vote is private. My opinion is private. It sounds like a cop out, and it is.

It keeps me out of trouble. It's an application of this principle. I don't care. I can't do anything about it anyway. I vote every time. I'm a good citizen. I vote. Sometimes I vote no for president. There's a way to do that, you know. In fact, there's an initiative to put it on the ballot. It's never going to go anywhere, but... I need to participate, but I need to participate in a way that doesn't hurt anybody. The Alcoholics Anonymous groups oppose no one.

Not even the other Alcoholics Anonymous groups. And any of you have been guilty of opposing the group down the street? I have. And big book Nazis. I did that until someone reminded me that I was one. Yes, please. Wait a minute. This is going to be a long enough question. Could you come to this, Mike? Because I'm not going to be able to repeat it. Is it turned on? Thank you. Okay. At the group level, and we're having a problem with individuals sharing their individual preferences on religion, let's say.

Where's the fine line to one draws for taking the problem at hand publicly during a meeting, or if it continues to keep happening, how does one best go about resolving the issue of trying not to break up the unity of the group or the meeting? If the group conscience is functioning, the format of that meeting in inappropriate things are already laid out by the group. One of the reasons that I told you about the group that has five to seven minutes, it's a closed meeting.

We have it in the format itself. If someone who's a non-alcoholic introduces themselves, we have to give our chairperson guidelines for that. So we have it written right into the format. For instance, someone will say, my name is so-and-so and I'm a drug addict. The meeting stops. While the chairperson asks, do you have a problem with alcohol? And if the answer is no, then they're reminded by group conscience, this is a closed meeting for alcoholics.

But five of our members will go with you into another room because you came for a meeting. And we'll have a meeting. And generally it's more than five. But it is a 12-step call over here to help them find out for sure. But it's not so much for that person, it's for a chairperson. We have to maintain the integrity of the group. So if this is happening, the group conscience has to deal with it. By laying out, we don't do that here.

When we talk about that, let's go to breakfast. There has to be a principle or a policy laid down by the group conscience. It's tough to put it on anybody in the group. You can't stop them. That's how we handle that because you get a lot of that. And a chairperson in the way I was brought up, their job is to say, excuse me, this is the topic for now. It takes a particular kind of courage. But if we're going to maintain the integrity and the unity of the group, it sometimes has to be done.

I generally talk to the people afterwards, and I make enemies. Sometimes, sometimes we make friends. They didn't know. What do they know? Unless we tell them. I don't know if it's the right answer, but that's... We try to do everything we love anyway. It's a tough one. Your kid died last night. You got to tell somebody about it. On my group, go ahead. This is a special circumstance. Go ahead, get it done. We'll take the whole meeting if need be.

Six weeks from now, we don't hear about it anymore. Not at the meeting. We'll deal with it out here. The meeting cannot be focused on that. Because the new person, I don't care when I'm new, I'm only interested in one thing. I'm sorry your kid died, but how do I not take a drink today? That's what I got a hold to, and it's really a tightrope. It's really a tightrope. How do I not take a drink today? That's what we're here for.

I'm going to be able to trust the group to be able to do that with love. We can go off on a lot. Thank you, I'm just exploring my head. Oh, I thought you were going to the microphone. Since it's on tape, we won't tell her where she really went. Anonymity is interesting because there are two aspects of anonymity. The 11th tradition talks very specifically about remaining anonymous at the public level. Press, radio, films, any public meetings, convention meetings, I think, or public meetings.

So at a convention meeting, I'm done. I'm an alcoholic and a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. In an A meeting where it's all alcoholics, you can have my full name, address, phone number, fax, email, the whole business. So that we do not present a picture of anyone speaking for AA. This is contrary to the world, you know. I was at a deal in Ohio several years back. Big convention. Banner up there and all that. And the

newspaper sent a reporter over.

And the reporter wanted full names and pictures of all the dignitaries that were there. We said, no. And he said, well, I won't be able to print the story if we don't have full names. We said, well, good. We don't need the story anyway. And that began negotiations and what we ended up with, because we wanted to be kind to him and let him have his story. Four of us stood there looking at the banner and he shot a picture from behind us that got the banner.

And then he wrote the story. No one knows what names that worked out. There's a different aspect of anonymity, the spiritual value of anonymity. I get to live with that today. You have me standing up front here talking at you as if I knew something. I do. Not anywhere near as much as you think, but I do. But I don't speak for AA. My inclination is to say to you, why are you wasting the afternoon? Go home and read this thing.

But I know that you either won't or if you do, it won't make enough sense because you have to have the experience of it to make it come alive. So there's a value in what I do. There's a value in what you're doing. I had some fun with the spiritual anonymity. There's some poetry here. I want to read the 12th tradition because it's poetry to me. And finally, we have Alcoholics Anonymous believe that the principle of anonymity has an immense spiritual significance.

It reminds us that we are to place principles before personalities. That we actually practice a genuine humility. This to the end that our great blessings may never spoil us and that we shall forever live in thankful contemplation of him who presides over us all. That's poetry. When I was on the board, part of the trustee's large job was to fill in. I think this was in my second year and I had become fully aware that I was no longer just a local AA member.

I really was now public.