 **SOBER VOICES**

 **Fall 2020**

**Many thanks to the members who have written and submitted their perceptions of AA’s traditions and steps. Thanks for being part of the solution. Without your help, none of this would be possible. Together we can make your newsletter a tool for others and ourselves.**

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

 **Please forward any announcements to:**

**Newsletter@vasouthcentralaa.org**

**Please check the website at vasouthcentralaa.org. The website is updated more frequently than the newsletter is published.**

**ONLINE RESOURCES**

**https://www.aa-intergroup.org/directory.php If interested, you can lick on “Online Meetings” tab to reveal a massive directory of online meetings nationally and internationally.  We can travel for free!**

**https://www.recoverytapers.com  There are fliers posted on the website for upcoming conferences, workshop and meetings, as well as recordings from workshops/conferences.**

**www.aagrapevine.org/we-are-here-to-help**

**https://aavirginia.org/meetings/as-you-like-it/?d=0&t=OL&v=list  There are no zoom id #s listed for the meetings that are online for the state, however.  If you know of zoom meetings taking place in *OUR DISTRICT, please share the information with our Website Chair, Tammy N*., and she will post to our website. There are a few currently listed on the website. And the website is being updated on a regular basis as information is passed on by our fellows.**

***Resource* for anyone in *any type* of *CRISIS*, whether it is alcohol related or life related.  You can access more information if you dial 211 or ask any district volunteer.**

**Phone watch volunteers are always needed. Sign up to receive calls or be someone who switches contacts for each shift. Contact Myles M, our District volunteer for Phone Watch service opportunities.**

 ***TRADITIONS 10-12***

 ***The spiritual foundation for***

 ***each tradition is anonymity.***

**Tradition 10: “Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A. A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.”**

**Spiritual Principle: Neutrality**

 **“Here, I began to understand that as an AA member, I owed certain disciplines, obligations, and responsibilities to AA as a whole. I could speak out as an individual on any matter with which I was concerned; but**

**as an AA member, I had to operate within certain limits, try to "engage the mind before opening the mouth.” (From Silkworth.net)**

**Since the beginning of AA, never has it been divided by a major controversial issue. Political and religious**

**(Tradition 10 – continued from page 2)**

**controversies brought up issues and aided in the demise of the Oxford Group, as well as the Washingtonians. The 12&12 states that so long as we don’t argue 0ver religious, political or reform issues, it’s a cinch we never shall publicly. My understanding is that each individual is not to back away from their responsibilities to act as they see fit concerning the issues of our time. This speaks to AA as a whole.**

**AA was designed to be all inclusive, not exclusive. This tradition allows us to maintain some sense of unity as long as we do not allow outside issues enter into our meetings. We don’t exclude members based on their opinions on outside issues. There is no place for outside issues…. recovery is a fulltime job, as we apply the principles of the steps, traditions and concepts to all of our affairs.**

**This by no means, guarantees that all AA members have gone “peaceable, and become one great being happy family.” We are still human and we don’t always agree. The spirit of Tradition 12 teaches us that we place principles of the program over our own personalities and the personalities of others also. Live and let live, as the saying goes. Our focus is to carry the message to the alcoholic still suffering and to fit ourselves to maximum service to our fellows.**

**Submitted by Bev B.**

**Tradition 11:  “Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the leve of press, radio, and films.”**

**Spiritual Principle: Personal ambition has no place in A.A. There is never need to praise ourselves. (Attraction**

**(Tradition 11 – continued from page 3)**

**Rather Than Promotion) -**

**Tradition 11 states: “Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films.”**

**There was an addition to our public relations policy that came out some years ago on anonymity on the Internet. This policy can be viewed and read on the AA website at https://www.aa.org/assets/en\_US/mg-18\_internet.pdf.**

**The idea of attraction rather than promotion may leave some questioning: “Why don’t we want to promote AA? Hasn’t it done so much for us?” “If we don’t promote AA, people won’t know where to go to get sober.” Throughout time, the history and growth of the AA program and community has proven attraction rather than promotion is an effective strategy, to both protect the program as a whole, as well as each individual within it. This tradition**

**emphasizes the importance of individual anonymity. This includes the Internet, especially on Facebook. The Internet policy has guidelines for teleconference such as the new resource of zoom meetings. If the individual wants to break their own anonymity that’s fine, but we, as members of AA, do not have the right to break another individual’s anonymity.**

**Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our principles. Through anonymity of the individual, we are able to represent AA better as a whole. What would happen if someone became the poster child for AA, then relapsed? People would think, “Oh, AA doesn’t work. It’s a bunch of bologna.” But, within the program, we all know relapses occur for many different reasons, and it’s not a failure of the program and principles shared within the rooms. By attracting people rather than promoting AA, we are able to put our principles and foundation of the program into the world, and allow people to decide whether it’s right for them. If this program were promoted, I would have been**

**(Tradition 11 continued from page 4)**

**reluctant to go to my first meeting. I would have seen it as a sham, where there’s an ulterior motive. Sometimes it’s best to catch a fly with honey than to try to hunt it down. The idea and implementation of attraction rather than promotion is one principle that has kept AA successful.**

**Submitted by Krystal L.**

**Tradition 12: “Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.”**

**Spiritual Principle: Spirituality**

I heard a story on anonymity when I first began my journey. A woman, so thrilled with her progress in AA, called a meeting of her work-mates and shared her alcoholism, which they had been unaware of, and also the miracle of her “cure.” Soon after that she relapsed. When she came back, humbled and ashamed, she realized that she had broken the message of principles before personalities, and might have given AA a bad name. Worse, she might have turned off people that could have needed AA, as she had successfully proven that it didn’t work.

When I first came into AA, I was scared to be found out. I was ashamed to be an alcoholic. I was glad for the anonymity provided, but I didn’t really understand it. However, as time passed, and my confidence grew, I wanted to shout it from the rooftops. I wanted to help anyone that displayed alcoholic tendencies, whether they wanted the help or not!

In typical alcoholic fashion, I felt important, and liked the feeling of being the “healer” of the people I helped. I, alone, had the answer! I did not understand that it is the largeness of AA’s spirituality that heals, and not me, ever. The more I came to depend on this “largeness,” the less important my desire for attention and

achievement became. I began to appreciate the quiet way we move in

(Tradition 12 continued from page 5)

society, and the safeness anonymity provides to everyone involved

In the long version of Tradition 12, it says “we try to give up our natural desires for personal distinction as AA members.” We selflessly help others, with no expectations. The reward is silent, but the glow of hope we give to those still suffering is priceless.

Submitted by Loni

 ***Steps 10-12***

**Step 10: “Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.”**

**Spiritual Principle:  Perserverance**

**10th Step Prayer: I pray I may continue my effectiveness; to take daily spot check inventories of myself; to correct mistakes when I make them; to take responsibility for my actions; to be ever aware of my negative & self-defeating attitudes & behaviors; to keep my willfulness in check; to always remember I need Your help; to keep love & tolerance of others as my code; and to continue in daily prayer how I can best serve You, My Higher Power.**

**Promise:** Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us.

**Let’s take a look at the first paragraph of 12 Steps and Twelve Traditions….**

**Sentence one states, “As we work the first nine Steps, we prepare ourselves for the adventure of a new life.” To think of life as an adventure, when up to that point it had been anything but an adventure, was certainly a new idea. I guess when I started using alcohol to party, meet guys, and have FUN, I thought life was supposed to be one big adventure. But it wasn’t. I woke up alone. I took my family and loved ones for granted and ignored their needs. I lost friends and I lost my way. Life quickly became a disaster.**

**But in those early days of sobriety, people I’d met in the rooms and the literature I was reading were telling me that**

**the world now held promises and that I was on a path towards a new life and a new adventure. The second sentence says, “But when we approach Step Ten we commence to put our A.A. way of living to practical use, day by day, in fair weather or foul.”**

**By that time in my early sobriety I had found that the structure afforded by those regular actions gave me a sense of peace and comfort and predictability that alleviated much of my anxiety, anger, and confusion. Finally I had things I could hold onto, look forward to, and rely on. The idea that maybe this new way of living could save me had started to take hold in my heart. And then the third and last sentence of that first paragraph, “Then comes the acid test: can we stay sober, keep in emotional balance, and live to good purpose under all conditions?”**

**So right there, in one paragraph was the idea that we could have a new life full of promises and adventure, and that we would learn to practice daily a new way of living, but then it immediately yanks us back to reality with big questions: How will we keep this new life? How will we stay in emotional balance? Can we stay sober under all conditions? In the chapter on Step Ten in the 12&12 we are then instructed to do a personal housecleaning and take inventory of our actions, thoughts, and attitudes every day. The book provides specific actions we need to take to take on a daily basis to keep our ‘emotional balance,’ to ‘live to good purpose under all conditions,’ and to ‘stay sober.’ The word daily is repeated so often as this is not just an action to be done once and finished with. The underlying message in this first paragraph is that to maintain a sober life of purpose one must do certain things daily, repeatedly, and whenever necessary. We have to examine out own behavior and admit when we are wrong and make amends whenever needed in order to maintain a daily emotional balance, a clean conscience, and purposeful life. Submitted by Lori C.**

**Step 10: We had two people write about their experience with Step 10….so now here the 2nd perception:**

After working the first 9 steps, I have prepared myself for life as a sober individual. I have changed, hopefully, and have cleaned my side of the street. Now what? Am I never to offend again? Wrong! The 10th step is vital to my continued sobriety and if I am to keep my side of the street clean I must continue to “right” my “wrongs” when they crop up. I am human, after all, and to think that I won’t have an occasional “bad day” is to set myself up for disaster. I worked really hard to get through those first 9 and am grateful for this maintenance step.

The 10th step, to me, is about holding myself accountable to my behavior. When I was in active addiction to alcohol, I never kept a tally of whom I had harmed and my life became quickly unmanageable. I had no guidebook to living and with the mountain of crap I had created; I had no structure or rules to live by. That guilt and remorse of my actions quickly buried me and I was accountable to no one. It was everyone else’s fault that I had offended them. (Laughing) I told lie upon lie and used everyone’s defensiveness against them so that I did not have to be accountable.

This step is not an excuse to reoffend!! It’s very important that I practice all of the principles every day. It’s also very important that I understand that this step does not give me an excuse to step on the toes of others. I am an alcoholic and I can very easily fall back into bad behavior.

At the end of my day, and sometimes during, when I am aware that I have been selfish, dishonest, self-centered, jealous, acted in anger or resentment or felt the need to exhibit false pride in order to feel better about myself, then I have reason to apply this step. I take personal inventory and I write it down. I pray on this and speak with my sponsor, if necessary. When I admit my wrongs to those I have injured, however small, I am “picking up that pebble on my path” and can continue my journey unfettered. Submitted by Tammy N.

**Step 11:  “Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.”**

**Spiritual Principle: Spiritual Awareness**

**11th Step Prayer: Higher Power, as I understand You,
I pray to keep my connection with You open & clear from the confusion of daily life. Through my prayers & meditation I ask especially for freedom from self-will, rationalization, & wishful thinking. I pray for the guidance of correct thought & positive action. Your will Higher Power, not mine, be done.**

**Promise:   We will intuitively know how to handle situations, which used to baffle us.**

**Prayer and meditation is one of my primary tools for serenity. Without taking the time to thank and praise the God of my own understanding and meditating so I can listen for His answers and guidance, my serenity would definitely suffer. I take time each morning to read at least one of my devotionals and always set aside time each evening to sit and meditate.**

**Since learning this step in my recovery, serenity comes much more easily in my life. I have learned the importance of one of the favorite sayings that you will find in almost any**

**location where AA meets regularly… “Let Go and Let God”.**

**Submitted by Lisa H.**

**Step 12: “Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affiars.”**

**Spiritual Principle: Service**

**12th Step Prayer:** Dear God, My spiritual awakening continues to unfold. The help I have received I shall pass on and give to others, both in and out of the Fellowship. For this opportunity I am grateful.
I pray most humbly to continue walking day by day on the road of spiritual progress. I pray for the inner strength and wisdom; to practice the principles of this way of life in all I do and say. I need You, my friends, and the program every hour of every day. This is a better way to live.

**Promise: We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.**

Just what is a spiritual awakening?  What does it look like, feel like, how do I know if I have had one?  After all, few of us have a burning bush experience. Well, sad to say (or perhaps it is wonderful to say) I can’t tell you.  Each of us has our own, and it is not always easy for us to explain or describe it to another person.  Others may see something in us that is the result of our awakening, and we may see and feel in ourselves that a change has taken place, but we may not equate those changes as the result of an awakening.

For the majority of people I have known in the program, and for me, we seem to have slowly slipped into some sort of awakening while we were busy living our sober life.  We did not experience the experience as a specific event; we merely, slowly, grew in to the change.  We slowly realized that our lives had become less chaotic.  We recognized moments of peace as we started being less concerned with how we were perceived by others.  We were less likely to be pulled into drama; sometimes, others came to us for advice on how to handle difficult situations.  We began to be an asset in our jobs instead of a liability; our families were happy to have us around.

It is the process of doing the steps that shapes us into new beings.  It is the process that is the awaking. One thing to be aware of – when I was relatively new to the program, I heard someone say, “You can’t practice this stuff out there.”  I guess he was having a bad time with someone in his life.  Somehow, he wasn’t getting what he wanted and was (as many of us do - even today) holding on to his ego position.  He had forgotten that the whole point of the program was to practice these principles in ALL our affairs.

**Submitted by Mary Jane F.**

A.A.® Guidelines Internet from G.S.O., Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163

A.A. Guidelines are compiled from the shared experience of A.A. members in various service areas. They also reflect guidance given through the Twelve Traditions and the General Service Conference (U.S. and Canada). In keeping with our Tradition of autonomy, except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole, most decisions are made by the group conscience of the members involved. The purpose of these Guidelines is to assist in reaching an informed group conscience. of anonymity or any other Traditions. It is the actions of the individual that may cause harm to themselves, to others, or to A.A. as a whole. For that we are, each of us, individually responsible to our fellowship, to ourselves and to our personal higher powers. Using these platforms to provide information about anonymity online may actually strengthen the principle of anonymity at the public level. Individual members can take clear steps to safeguard their own anonymity. For example, an individual or group might create an entirely anonymous social media account without use of their full name or face and for sharing about recovery only. Others may choose to use their names but not photographs of themselves. Both the letter and the spirit of the Eleventh Tradition are clear guideposts for our fellowship in this respect. When it comes to the Twelfth Tradition this has proven to be something that only the individual can answer because of its foundation in humility. The following questions have proven useful tools for evaluating if our actions may or may not be in conflict with the principle described in Tradition Twelve. • Is my posting about the message or the messenger? • Am I carrying the A.A. message in the hopes of helping someone else, or simply “shouting from the rooftops”? • Am I taking my story and affiliating it with political causes? • Am I being extra cautious about not identifying other members as A.A. members in photographs or statements? • Am I avoiding the temptation to incite controversy with caustic argument or bully others who disagree with me? • Am I providing helpful links to my local A.A. website, aa.org, or the aagrapevine.org? As long as individuals do not identify themselves as A.A. members, there is no conflict of interest. However, someone identifying themselves as an A.A. member using their full name and/or a likeness, such as a full-face photograph, would be contrary to the spirit of the Eleventh Tradition, which states in the Long Form that, “…our [last] names and pictures as A.A. members ought not be broadcast, filmed or publicly printed.” Experience suggests that it is in keeping with the Eleventh Tradition to not disclose A.A. membership on social networking sites as well as on any other website, blog, electronic bulletin board, etc., unless composed solely of A.A. members and password protected. Websites and social networking offer individuals the chance to post a great deal of personal information about themselves (and others). Our experience suggests that some A.A. members do not post anything that is “A.A. jargon” on their personal profiles and in “status updates,” while others feel it is alright to do so as long as A.A. or Alcoholics Anonymous is not mentioned. These websites often allow users to create social networking “groups” and the ability to invite others to “events” for like-minded individuals. Some A.A.s have chosen to create A.A.-related groups. Since this is an evolving medium, A.A. members are frequently “learning as they go,” as technology and applications change practically on a daily basis. Our experience has shown that the evolving nature of social networking platforms makes it difficult to provide specific guidelines for using these resources for A.A. purposes. Any A.A. group or member that is thinking about entering this public arena should closely consider the privacy policies of such sites, in light of A.A.’s tradition of anonymity. For example, social networking sites may provide full names and pictures of group members, contrary to A.A.’s practice of avoiding such disclosures in public media. Even “closed” or “private” groups might still reveal an individual’s identity. Being well-informed prior to joining or starting such a group is the key to protecting your own anonymity, and that of others. G.S.O. has received numerous complaints from concerned A.A. members regarding anonymity breaks online, inappropriate use of the A.A. name, and copyrighted materials and protected trademarks being improperly used on Facebook and other social networking websites. No online A.A. or non-A.A. entity should purport itself to be a spokesperson for A.A. or act as if they represent the General Service Office, A.A.W.S., or the General Service Board. Each A.A. entity is autonomous and encouraged to make decisions by informed group conscience decision in light of the guidance provided in our Twelve Traditions. A.A. members sometimes contact G.S.O. for suggestions on how to remain within the Traditions on Facebook and other social networking websites. Keep in mind that G.S.O. staff members are not specifically trained in technology, but can act as a resource regarding A.A.’s Twelve Traditions and the shared experience of the Fellowship in the U.S. and Canada. How A.A.’s spiritual principles play out in the digital environment needs to be carefully discussed by each A.A. individual or entity creating an online presence. A.A. WEBSITES — SETTING UP A LOCAL WEBSITE Decisions in the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous are made through an informed group conscience and the decision to create a website is no different. Whether area or district, central office or intergroup, A.A. experience suggests forming a committee to discuss all aspects of the project, including all possible concerns about the Traditions. Unless password-protected and for members only, an A.A. website is a public medium, and, therefore, requires the same safeguards that we use at the level of press, radio, and film. Early on, it is important to agree upon a method for achieving the group conscience that represents the local A.A. community, and for informing local groups, districts and central/intergroup offices in an area (if affected) about the committee’s progress. When the committee has reached a consensus about its role and responsibilities and the scope of the website, its findings are shared with the whole body (district, area, etc.) and a decision is made through an informed group conscience vote on whether to move ahead with the development of a website. As part of this process, committees may wish to bring technical questions to experts in the field. A guiding resource of shared A.A. experience regarding websites is the G.S.O. service piece “Frequently Asked Questions About A.A. Websites.” SPIRITUAL CONSIDERATIONS Based on A.A.’s strength and history of personal and intimate sharing, the spiritual nature of “one drunk talking to another” is an ongoing concern when discussing technology as a source of A.A. information. Even many Internet-savvy A.A. members say that they do not want the ease of new technology to detract from the one-on-one sharing that 2 has been so essential to our Fellowship and our recovery from alcoholism. It is helpful to remember that there is no need to let the speed of technology dictate the speed of our actions. Based on shared experience to date, website committees not only discuss the technical aspects of developing a website but also address questions related to preserving the spiritual connection created by one alcoholic talking with another. Some committees have reported a loss of “personal touch” when relying too heavily on technology, while others report that they have found a balance that works for them. It will be up to a committee’s informed group conscience to determine what A.A. content is useful and appropriate. The good news is that today’s decisions can be reviewed, revised, abandoned or expanded. A committee can always try something for a certain length of time and then come back and determine how well it is working. This is the A.A. way! WEBSITE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES After an informed group conscience structure is in place to decide the contents, policies and procedures involved in setting up and maintaining an A.A. website, it has been suggested that a webmaster (web manager) be appointed or elected. The webmaster is responsible to the committee or the groups served. One area has the following experience: Their website committee is composed of six A.A.s: the web chairperson, area Public Information (P.I.) chairperson, a current district committee member (D.C.M.), a past delegate, a current general service representative (G.S.R.) and an ad hoc member. The latter three individuals are selected by the website chairperson, and their term of service is two years. In addition, a webmaster, alternate webmaster and other ad hoc members are responsible for the day-to-day maintenance of the website. (Experience indicates this can be time-consuming if the webmaster is responsible for updating local meeting information.) Some committees choose to create their own website guidelines, including: description of the site’s purpose; details of the website’s content; procedures for adding or removing content; committee rotation schedule; defining the difference between a website committee and a website maintenance team (e.g. webmaster and alternate); guidelines for the website committee and, if applicable, guidelines for the web team outlining its composition and responsibilities. SELECTING A DOMAIN NAME The choice of a domain name should, as other critical elements, be determined by an informed group conscience. To preserve Alcoholics Anonymous’ trademarks and service marks, website committees are asked to avoid using the marks “A.A.,” “Alcoholics Anonymous,” and/ or “The Big Book” in their domain names. It has been our experience that many service entities have integrated lower case “aa” into their domain names along with other identifying information (e.g., www.aacentraloffice.org or www.area999aa.org). This has proved to be a positive resolution in support of A.A.’s trademarks and service marks. USE OF COPYRIGHTED MATERIALS Copyright restrictions protect material displayed on a website just as copyrights protect A.A.’s printed literature. Permission must be obtained from G.S.O. prior to including A.A.W.S. or A.A. Grapevine and La Viña material. A link to the aa.org Terms of Use can be found at the bottom of every page on www.aa.org. Just as with A.A. newsletters, websites created by A.A. areas, districts and central/intergroup offices can quote a phrase, sentence or brief paragraph excerpted from A.A. literature — such as the Big Book (Alcoholics Anonymous), Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, The A.A. Service Manual, and Conference-approved pamphlets — without a prior, written request. When this occurs, the proper credit line should be included to ensure that A.A. literature copyrights are protected. After a brief quotation from a book or pamphlet, the following credit line should appear: Reprinted from (name of publication, page number), with permission of A.A. World Services, Inc. As the A.A. Preamble is copyrighted by A.A. Grapevine, the following words should appear beneath the Preamble or any article reprinted from the Grapevine: From the (date) Grapevine. Reprinted with permission of A.A. Grapevine, Inc. We ask that you do not recreate items that are currently available on the G.S.O. or A.A. Grapevine websites. Instead, link to the appropriate pages of the sites: www.aa.org and www.aagrapevine.org. POSTING SERVICE MINUTES AND REPORTS Deciding what contents to post on public websites requires careful consideration. While it can be helpful when websites make minutes of meetings, reports and background material readily available to a broad population, it is also paramount to keep in mind that these documents may be posted in a public medium. Each document needs to be reviewed and edited to insure that the full names of A.A. members are not included. Some committees have one version of minutes for A.A. members only, which includes full names and personal phone numbers and email addresses, and a second version of the report that omits names and personal contact information so that minutes can be placed on the committee’s public website. In addition to local A.A. members, please remember that the following individuals are A.A. members and that their full names and photographs should not appear in publicly posted reports or on publicly posted flyers: Class B (alcoholic) General Service Board Trustees, A.A.W.S. and Grapevine Directors, G.S.O. staff members and some Grapevine and La Viña employees. If there is any doubt about placing a person’s full name in a report, it would be best to ask permission first. Some committees may find it perfectly acceptable to post full names and personal contact information on a password-protected website meant for A.A. members only. This will be up to the informed group conscience to decide. PERSONAL PHONE NUMBERS ON A.A. EVENT FLYERS Until relatively recently, A.A. members usually had little concern about placing their first names, last initials and personal phone numbers on flyers announcing upcoming A.A. events, since these flyers were typically given out only in A.A. meetings, left on tables at other A.A. events or distributed to members. Today, event flyers can be easily uploaded and viewed on websites, accessible to the general public. 3 Due to search services on the Internet, it is now possible to utilize phone numbers to find out a person’s identity, including full names and, possibly, other personal information. If A.A. members become increasingly uneasy with personal phone numbers being placed on flyers, event committees may need to look into alternate ways of providing contact information such as an event email address. “PRIVATE” SECTIONS OF A.A. WEBSITES G.S.O. has heard of some districts and areas that have designated certain parts of their websites as “private,” which require the use of usernames and passwords to gain entrance. In some instances, the only requirement to receive a username and password is to state to the webmaster or another trusted servant that you are an A.A. member. In other cases, access is only available to those holding specific service positions. Website committees that are considering creating password-protected sections of their websites may wish to consider: what content is private and what is public; who will be given access to the private information, and how; and how usernames and passwords will be communicated, stored and/or maintained. Some websites use these private sections to change or update meeting information or trusted servant contact information. When giving the ability to a service worker to change content on a website or database, committees may wish to proceed with care. Members with the ability to change content may need training on the software used, and the committee may want to designate someone to review the data for accuracy. To date, G.S.O. has not heard of any major problems regarding non-A.A.s retrieving confidential A.A. information from these private sections. However, website committees may wish to discuss how they will safeguard confidential A.A. information, and how to avoid a breach in security. A.A.’s shared experience thus far is that some A.A. members feel comfortable using their full names and giving personal contact information on a password-protected A.A. website. However, other members are less comfortable providing this information for communication purposes, even for a password-protected site. Committees usually exercise care in helping members learn about new modes of communication, and continue to offer members the option of receiving A.A. correspondence by mail if preferred. G.S.O. has some experience with private, password-protected A.A. sites. First, the A.A.W.S. Directors and then the General Service Board of Trustees agreed to receive their background information via a “dashboard” — a username/password protected electronic communication tool. In 2008, the General Service Conference members also received their background information on a private dashboard for the first time. (All Conference members were also given the choice of receiving their background on CD and/or on paper.) ANONYMITY AND EMAIL Electronic mail is a widely used and accepted method of communication. It is now used regularly as a service tool in A.A., but as with any service, we need to ensure the Fellowship’s Traditions are maintained while still receiving the most benefit from this form of communication. When using email it is necessary to consider the anonymity of the recipients of messages. Sending messages to multiple recipients that disclose the email addresses of everyone on the addressee list is a potential break of someone else’s anonymity. Therefore, it is a good idea to obtain a recipient’s explicit permission before using his or her email address for A.A. correspondence, especially if it is a workplace email address. When sending A.A. mail to multiple recipients who wish to remain anonymous, use can be made of the BCC (Blind Courtesy Copy) option available on most computers. EMAIL IN A.A. — ACCESS, ADDRESSES AND ROTATION It is not necessary to own a personal computer or laptop to utilize email. Many A.A. members in service who do not have computers use free email services to obtain an email account and specifically designate it as their A.A. email service. A.A. members can check their email accounts at public libraries, Internet cafes, and anywhere else Internet service is available. For A.A. service positions, generic email addresses can be passed from one trusted servant to another at rotation time. For example, the sample email address and account for pichaird10a7@area999.com could, upon rotation, be passed on, maintaining the email address identity for the position, one rotation to the next. USING FULL NAMES IN EMAILS TO PROFESSIONALS It is suggested that email communication with professionals is similar to a letter-mailing project with two caveats: 1) emails can easily be forwarded, and 2) the contents of emails can easily be cut-and-pasted, changed and/or uploaded to websites. Professional “friends of A.A.” have shared that, for the purposes of Cooperation with the Professional Community (C.P.C.) or Public Information (P.I.) service, it lends credibility to the letter or email if a full name is used and if the letter or email has a professional look and feel. The Public Information coordinator at G.S.O. responds to email and letter requests from the media with the following signature: Sincerely, John Doe (name not for publication or broadcast) Coordinator of Public Information ANONYMITY ON PERSONAL COMPUTERS Some A.A.s think, “I have my own computer, so I have nothing to fear about the anonymity of A.A.s in my address book.” However, it is possible that a motivated individual could obtain a username and password to access another person’s email account. Hopefully, such an intrusion would not occur, but it may be prudent to select a password that is as unique as possible and to keep the password private. Even the most guarded email account could be “hacked” by a computer expert, but at this point we find that many A.A. members and committees are willing to take this risk, all the while utilizing prudence and good common sense. We may also want to consider that email address books used for A.A. correspondence on a home computer, laptop, smartphone, tablet, digital media device, etc., may be available to friends and family if more than one person uses the device. 4 THE DANGERS OF SPAM It is up to a committee’s informed group conscience to determine how best to approach service projects via the Internet, especially regarding C.P.C. or P.I. projects. It is strongly suggested that A.A. members not send bulk unsolicited email messages for A.A. service, i.e., email “mail shots.” By doing so they could be bringing the A.A. name into public controversy and damaging the reputation of A.A. as a whole. It may also be illegal, so get informed on the local and federal laws pertaining to email communication and spam. Instead, the committee could discuss the possibility of sending A.A. correspondence to a small number of recipients or sending personalized emails one at a time. Emails may be filtered into a recipient’s spam account so an alternative follow-up plan should also be in place in case there is no initial response. In addition to A.A. members continuing to make personal contacts, an effective route for interacting with professionals and the public has been to provide the link to G.S.O.’s A.A. website, aa.org. SPEAKER TALKS ONLINE Members report that audio files of A.A. talks increasingly are being disseminated over the Internet. If a member objects to having his or her A.A. story broadcast publicly, he or she may wish to contact the site’s webmaster and request its removal. Numerous members have acted, with good outcomes, on the following suggestion for speakers at A.A. events that appears in the G.S.O. service piece A.A. Guidelines for Conferences, Conventions and Roundups: Experience shows that it is best to encourage speakers not to use full names and not to identify third parties by full names in their talks. The strength of our Anonymity Traditions is reinforced by speakers who do not use their last names and by taping companies whose labels and catalogs do not identify speakers by last names, titles, service jobs or descriptions. In addition, some A.A. members, if being recorded for future play on a public website, may choose to leave out other details of their lives that may make themselves or their families identifiable. In recent years, the trustees’ Public Information Committee has requested that G.S.O. contact speaker taping companies and remind them of A.A.’s Tradition of Anonymity at the public level and ask for their cooperation. ONLINE A.A. MEETINGS/GROUPS Just like regular A.A. meetings, online A.A. meetings/groups are autonomous. Due to the lack of a central geographic location, online A.A. meetings/groups are not a direct part of the U.S./Canada service structure. A.A. members are encouraged to participate in service where they physically reside and to participate in group conscience decisions locally. In addition, some online A.A. meetings/groups have business meetings and collect Seventh Tradition contributions. INTERNET STREAMING AND WEB CONFERENCING Among A.A. members, there are various levels of experience in the use of computers, email and the Internet. It is important to remember that not all A.A. members have computers and not all who have access are comfortable using this technology. Some people are just now signing up for their first email accounts, while some are talking about things like “Internet streaming,” “Teleconferencing technology,” and “Web conferencing.” Since these topics are relatively new, G.S.O. is still collecting shared experience. One district has shared that they are considering how to utilize Internet streaming and/or teleconference/web technology so that general service representatives (G.S.R.s) may participate in area assemblies without traveling to the assembly site. They are considering several options: video and audio conference; audio-only conference; full-stream one-way video and audio with text chat return. Geographically isolated A.A. members are able to participate in weekly A.A. meetings thanks to the efforts of local A.A. committees to connect them via video conference. A.A. Conventions have also utilized the Internet to live stream portions of their programs to far distant members. Many technological options are possible and, presumably, more are being developed each day. Yet, as stated earlier, it is important not to let the speed of technological development pressure a committee into a quick solution as opposed to a well thought out A.A.-oriented decision. Of course, all decisions must include careful consideration of any situations where an A.A. member’s anonymity could be compromised at the public level. LOCAL SHARED EXPERIENCE REQUESTED Local A.A. needs and experience will determine how A.A. communications will develop in this evolving electronic age. If you have questions, or if you would like to share your website committee’s experience, please contact G.S.O. at: General Service Office P.O. Box 459 Grand Central Station New York, NY 10163 Tel: (212) 870-3400 www.aa.org