

PREPARING FOR THE FIRST CONCEPT OF SERVICE

(Read pp.6-12 of the “Twelve Concepts for World Service”)

THE FIRST CONCEPT:

We dedicate our sobriety to serving the group conscience.

1. Am I still not saying “no” to an A.A. request?
2. Am I able to extend this attitude to requests at home, at work, and in the world?
3. Am I ready to consecrate my life a day at a time to serving anyone who is sent to me?

“UNITY INSURES RECOVERY THROUGH SERVICE”
MEETING OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

THE FIRST CONCEPT OF SERVICE:
We dedicate our sobriety to serving the group conscience

Homework: Writing Inventory on the First Concept of Service
By Dennis F.

(It is suggested that Bill Wilson’s booklet, “Twelve Concepts for World Service”. (Published by Alcoholics Anonymous, World Service, Inc., New York, available for 85 cents) be purchased and each concept be read in full that is assigned for each week since only excerpts are read at each meeting.)

INTRODUCTION

When we love, we want to serve. Love requires an action in order to express itself. That action is called service.

The steps brought us recovery. The traditions taught us how to love and live in unity and the concepts of service will teach us how to express that unity through service. Thus we have the full potential of sobriety in Alcoholics Anonymous: recovery, unity, service.

The twelve concepts of service are nothing more than a list of twelve problem areas alcoholics have in giving service. By writing inventory on these areas and working the other steps on them, we become free to offer service. The motto of this meeting can then become a reality in our lives: “unity insures recovery through service.”

In the first paragraph of the introduction to “Twelve Concepts for World Service,” Bill describes the purpose of his book:

The “Twelve Concepts for World Service” to be described in this manual are an interpretation of A.A.’s world service movement. They reveal the evolution by which it has arrived in its present form, and they detail the experience and reasoning on which our operation stands today. These Concepts therefore aim to record the “why” of our service structure in such a fashion that the highly valuable experience of the past, and the lessons we have drawn from that experience, can never be forgotten or lost.

Bill then describes the essential problem he encountered in writing the concepts: controlling our dictatorial natures with checks and balances.

In the A.A. services, we have always had to choose between the authoritarian setup, whereby one group or one person is set in unqualified authority over another, and the democratic concept, which calls for checks and balances that would prevent unqualified authority from running unrestrained. The first approach is that of the “institutional” or authoritarian type. The second is the

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method of “constitutional” governments and many large business corporations in their upper echelons.

Well knowing our own propensities for power-driving, it is natural and even imperative that our service concepts be based on the system of “checks and balances.” We have had to face the fact that we usually try to enlarge our own authority and prestige when we are in the saddle. But when we are not, we strenuously resist a heavy-handed management wherein someone else holds the reins. I’m the more sure of this because I possess these traits myself.

Consequently, ideas like the following pervade the Concepts: “No group or individual should be set in *unqualified* authority over another”, “Large, active, and *dissimilar* operations should be separately incorporated and managed, each with its own staff, equipment and working capital”, “We ought to avoid undue concentration of money or personal influence in any service group or entity”. “At each level of service, authority should be equal to responsibility”, “Double-headed executive direction should be avoided.” These and other similar provisions define working relations that can be friendly and yet efficient. They would especially restrain our tendency to concentrate money and power, this being nearly always the underlying (though not always the conscious) motivation of our recurrent passion for the “consolidation” of world service entities.¹

In the final two paragraphs of the Introduction, Bill describes the Concepts as a group of related principles. We have identified what we think are the unifying themes behind these related principles at the beginning of each concept.

Because of the large range of topics which had to be included, these Concepts have been difficult to organize and write. Since each Concept is really *a group of related principles*, abbreviated statements of the kind used in A.A.’s Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions have not been possible. However, these Concepts do represent the best summation that I am able to make after more than twenty years’ experience in the creation of our service structure and in the conduct of A.A.’s world affairs. Like the earlier-written Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, and the Conference Charter, these service principles are also the outcome of long reflection and extensive consultation.

It is much to be hoped that these Twelve Concepts will become a welcome companion to our “A.A. Service Manual.” And that they will prove to be a reliable working guide in the years that lie ahead.

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**THE FIRST CONCEPT OF SERVICE:
We dedicate our sobriety to serving the group conscience ²**

I believe that there is a basic theme behind each concept of service that I can apply not only to the A.A. group but to my relationships with God, with you, my job, and other areas.

The principle behind the first concept is that we dedicate our sober lives to serving the group conscience. We serve each person God sends into our lives. We also help others to serve the group conscience.

We give up living for our own ambitions in life in order to be of service to others. Selfishness becomes selflessness. To place our common welfare first I find that I must dedicate my life to serving the group consciousness and voluntarily become accountable to it.

To work the first concept in my life in A.A. and in my relationship with God, I need to ask myself if I am willing to volunteer my time and heart whenever God lets me know that the group needs me? Will I place the greater good first in my life? In my marriage and intimate human relationships, I need to ask myself if I am willing to truly be a giver rather than a taker? In my work am I willing to dedicate myself to serving the customer through my company's services rather than working for as much money as I can get?

The true measure of my willingness to work the first concept in my life is my willingness to be accountable to the group conscience for my service and to improve it when change is indicated by the group.

The reading describes Bill taking the first concept in his own life by transferring the world service responsibility to our entire fellowship. He unselfishly turned over to others what was largely his own creation in order that his vision might endure. As a result you and I are sober in A.A. today!

² The wording of the "concepts" as given here and in the following chapters is an interpretation by Dennis Fitzpatrick.

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The final responsibility and the ultimate authority for A.A. world services should always reside in the collective conscience of our whole Fellowship.

The A.A. groups today hold ultimate responsibility and final authority for our world services - those special elements of over-all service activity which make it possible for our Society to function as a whole. The groups assumed that responsibility at the St. Louis International Convention of 1955. There, on behalf of Dr. Bob, the trustees, and A.A.'s old time leaders, I made the transfer of world service responsibility to our entire Fellowship.

Why and by what authority was this done? There were reasons of stark necessity for it, and there were further reasons which have to do with A.A.'s fundamental structure and tradition.

The fact had to be faced that A.A.'s founders were perishable. When Dr. Bob and I had gone, who would then advise the trustees? Who could link our little-known board to our thousands of groups? For the first time, it was seen that only a representative conference could take the place of Dr. Bob and me. This gap simply had to be filled without delay. Such a dangerous open end in our affairs could not be tolerated. Regardless of trouble or expense, we had to call an A.A. General Service Conference and deliver our world services into its permanent keeping. It took little imagination to see that future collapse would be the certain penalty if we did not act boldly and decisively. Thus propelled by events, we did take the necessary action. Now that the Conference is in its second decade (its third began in 1971), we find that our former fears of the troubles a Conference might involve were largely groundless. The results of the Conference have exceeded our highest expectations. It now stands proven that the A.A. groups can and will take the final responsibility for their world services.

Bill now describes other reasons for surrendering A.A. to the group conscience. He proclaims his lasting belief in the wisdom of trusting the group conscience.

There were other reasons for this basic shift of ultimate responsibility and authority to A.A. as a whole. These reasons center around Tradition Two, which declares, "For our group purpose, there is but one ultimate authority – a loving God as He may express himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern."

Tradition Two, like all the A.A. Traditions, is the voice of experience, based upon the trials of thousands of groups in our pioneering time. The main principles of Tradition Two are crystal-clear: The A.A. groups are to be the final authority; their leaders are to be entrusted with delegated responsibilities only.

Perhaps many of us are still vague about the "Group Conscience" of Alcoholics Anonymous, about what it really is.

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Throughout the entire world today, we are witnessing the breakdown of “Group Conscience.” It has always been the hope of democratic nations that their citizens would always be enlightened enough, moral enough, and responsible enough to manage their own affairs through chosen representatives. But in many self-governing countries we are now seeing the inroads of ignorance, apathy, and power-seeking upon democratic systems. Their spiritual resources of right purpose and collective intelligence are waning. Consequently, many a land has become so helpless that the only answer is dictatorship.

Happily for us, there seems little prospect of such a calamity in A.A. The life of each individual and of each group is built around our Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. We very well know that the penalty for extensive disobedience to these principles is death for the individual and dissolution for the group. An even greater force for A.A.’s unity is the compelling love that we have for our fellow members and for the principles upon which our lives today are founded.

Therefore we believe that we see in our Fellowship a spiritualized society characterized by enough enlightenment, enough responsibility, and enough love of man and of God to insure that our democracy of world service will work under all conditions. We are confident that we can rely on Tradition Two, our group conscience and its trusted servants. Hence it is with a sense of great security that we old-timers have now fully vested in A.A.’s General Service Conference the authority for giving shape – through the labors of its chosen delegates, trustees and service workers – to the destiny that we trust God, in His wisdom, is holding in store for all of us.

In the same way as Bill, I like to listen to this reading and take the first concept in my own life. To turn from being a self seeking loner to dedicating the rest of my life to serving the group conscience a day at a time is the essence of taking the first concept of service as I understand it in my life.

End of Reading

COMMENTARY

Each tradition contains an answer to a question posed in the parallel step. The first step poses the question, “What do I do about my disease now that I admit I am powerless over it and my life is unmanageable?”

The answer is found in the first tradition: “Our common welfare should come first, personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.” In other words, we go to meetings. We place our common welfare first because our personal recovery depends upon it.

The one word that describes what keeps me from practicing this tradition in my life is the word “loner.”

The question is am I willing to give up being a loner in my attitude at A.A. meetings? Am I willing to throw myself into the meeting? Will I give up separateness for interdependence? Am I willing to help others, especially newcomers, out of their loner shells for the sake of our common recovery?

The “12 & 12” puts it this way on page 130: “will I silence “the clamor of desires and ambitions within (me) whenever these could damage the group”? Do I really believe “that no personal sacrifice is too great for the preservation of the fellowship”?”³

If I say yes to these questions then I am ready to take the first concept of service. The tradition shows me how to correct my poor relationships with others. In the first tradition I give up being a loner.

Now, the parallel concepts of service show me the actions I must take in order to implement the traditions in my life.

My understanding of the first concept of service is this; “We dedicate our sobriety to serving the group conscience.”

The traditions show me how to have loving relationships. Love without action is an empty work. The first tradition demands the first concept of service. I cannot give up being a loner unless I am also willing to dedicate my life to serving the group conscience a day at a time. The price of my continued sobriety is a life of service.

The relationship of the first step, tradition and concept of service becomes clear: I am powerless over alcohol, so I join with you at meetings and serve the group conscience in order to stay sober. I turn from being a “loner” to being a “volunteer.”

I was struck by Bill’s statement on page 11 of the reading (“Twelve Concepts of World Service”) where he says, “Regardless of trouble or expense, we had to call an A.A. General Service Conference and deliver our world services into its permanent keeping. It took little imagination to see that future collapse would be the certain penalty if we did not act boldly and decisively.”

That is exactly what I felt about myself. If I did not make a decision to turn over my sober energy into service, I was going to die. I was going to choke because my spiritual life was going to stop.

Bill went through a similar experience. It’s interesting to me that on p. 9 of the reading he made the transfer of world service responsibility to the entire fellowship. This is exactly what I did when I took the first concept of service. I made the transfer to the fellowship of my energies for giving service. I dedicated my life to one of giving service. I didn’t do it because I was a good person. I did it for the same reason that Bill mentions. I was afraid of the future collapse of my sobriety unless I am of service.

³ 12 & 12,” First Tradition, p 130

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I have discovered that part of my alcoholic insanity is to separate living into being alone and relating to groups.

The essence of my insanity is the illusion of separateness. There is only a relationship to groups: God and I make up a group, my wife and I make up a group, and I am a part of a group at work.

When I drank, I didn't want to relate to God, or a wife, or a job. I simply wanted to live in my make-believe separate world. I thought I was God in my own life. I needed no one, I thought.

Therefore, I do not separate the traditions and concepts as they apply to the A.A. group and my individual life. They only refer to group involvement because that is all that there is. Relating to groups constitutes sanity. Trying to exist alone is insanity.

I consider the wholesome idea of not saying a no to an A.A. request to be putting the first concept of service into action in my life. I try to extend this attitude of willingness to all requests for help that are put to me by anybody, alcoholic or not. Am I giving the world an enthusiastic "yes" to any requests for service that are put to me?

There is a second aspect to each concept of service, and that is helping you be of service. I am not only concerned about my service but I am concerned about helping you be of service. So I say yes to any request you make of me to help you.

What do I sacrifice in order to work the first concept of service in my life? The kinds of things that I had to give up were my playboy grandiose dreams of personal goals of money, property and fame. My fantasy was that one day when I really get straightened out in A.A. and work the steps right, work the traditions correctly, and live the concepts in my life, the money is going to roll in. I thought that when I got straightened out spiritually, all the money is going to be there and then I will take cruises and feast on good food endlessly. When I took the first concept I gave up that dream. I now know it is nothing more than fantasy and grandiosity. It is exactly the opposite of being of service.

As long as I held on to these unspoken life-long fantasies, I was unable to be of much service. God did not call on me for much service either. He just called on me for what I was able to do.

But as soon as I surrendered my self-centered dreams and let God transform me through the first concept, I became able to give a lot more service. I find myself giving more service in my life today than I ever have. God is making new and unexpected calls on me for service that makes me feel so good in a way that I never did with money, power, or fame.

I feel that Bill Wilson was called to a crossroads in his life. He had started Alcoholics Anonymous with Dr. Bob and now he had to surrender it to the fellowship to save it from possible collapse.

Unless I turn myself over to God and give myself to service, I might collapse too, because I can't continue living for myself. I've come too far in my spiritual progress to go back. I

know that living for myself is a dead end. There isn't anything else there. The rule in A.A. for me is growth. I stay sober because I continue to grow spiritually. If I stand still, I go downhill. I have a progressive disease that requires a progressively more rigorous program.

The dedication required by the first concept of service is like the surrender asked of a monk. As an alcoholic I am called to a higher level of spiritual existence that demands that I surrender all self-seeking before I am capable of having the freedom to give selfless service (see the "Twelfth Concept of Service").

When I am of service, feelings of lack of self esteem leave me. I need to be of service to be at peace.

The steps taught me obedience (my safety net) if I wanted to live. As I developed better relationships by applying the principles of the traditions to my life, enthusiasm entered. (Enthusiasm is doing God's will because of the good things that come into my life.) Then when I began to live the principles of the concepts of service in my life, zeal took over. (Zeal is doing God's will simply for the joy of being close to God. All of living then seems effortless.)

Consecrating my resurrected life from an alcoholic death to one of service completes the triangle of recovery to love to service through living the principles of the steps, traditions, and concepts of service in my life.

Having answered the question, "Will I dedicate my life to serving the collective conscience of the fellowship," I now need to affirm that I have transferred complete responsibility for my sobriety to the entire fellowship just as Bill transferred world service responsibility to the entire fellowship in paragraph one of concept one.⁴

Since I am totally dependent on the group to stay sober, I need to serve it in order to see that it stays in existence.

This means, as Bill states on page 10, that I need to become accountable to the group for my service, I do this by taking written inventory on my service relationship to the group.

What are the service talents God has given me that make it possible for me to serve others in the world? My list shows five talents:

1. I can carry the message in A.A.
2. I can serve as a husband, father, and son.
3. I can serve in my business and music.
4. I can serve in worship and teaching.
5. I can serve in a sports capacity by being a loving tennis partner and opponent.

I suggest that we take inventory on where we fall short on this inventory list so that we can improve our service. I know that there are two areas where I need more improvement.

⁴ See page 10 of the "Twelve Concepts for World Service" are copyrighted 1962 by Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.

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Like the group, I need to assume responsibility for my service contributions. Otherwise I contribute to the breakdown of the group conscience, which Bill referred to in the reading.⁵

I would also ask myself, do I have any wild unfulfilled dreams of giving service that I have dismissed in the past because of financial or other reasons? Will I take this service request to God in prayer and ask him to make it possible since I am now willing to risk failure in fulfilling it?

One day, I would like to teach poor children of alcoholics to sing in a choir school and help revitalize worship through music. I believe God will make that dream possible when I have completed some of my present service assignments.

As we prepare for our three minute group meditation on the first concept of service, I would suggest that we ask ourselves, am I willing to let go of my grandiose self-seeking dreams and totally dedicate myself now to a life of service? And, having made that surrender, let us let our imaginations go on any unfulfilled dreams of how we can be of service with our many talents to each other. Let us meditate.

(Pause for 3 minutes of meditation.)

Through written inventory, I can become surrendered to new states of awareness that I need in order to stay sober. Inventory on the first concept suggests to me that I examine my commitment to be of service in all my relationships. In Part One, I examine how I am doing with my talents, and in Part Two, I examine how I can help you serve with your gifts.

⁵ See page 12 of the "Twelve Concepts for World Service" are copyrighted 1962 by Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.

HOMEWORK: WRITING INVENTORY – PART ONE
(Being of Service)

- 1) GOD and A.A.: Am I willing to carry the message in A.A. without being applauded? Have I volunteered for twelve step work at central office? Will I dedicate time to answering phones or assisting in the service areas of central office work? Am I willing to serve as G.S.R. and C.S.R.?

INVENTORY EXAMPLE - (Try to condense to three sentences)

- a) The Story: I am slow to volunteer to mop floors and do clean-up work after meetings.
b) What Did I Do Wrong? Laziness.
c) What Would God Have Me Do The Next Time? Volunteer without thinking and pray that my willingness will follow.

- 2) HOME: Am I willing to serve my mate's requests with no arguments or expectation of rewards? Will I say "yes" at home with the same willingness I say "yes" to an A.A. request? Do I only participate in my marriage on those things that interest me? When was the last time I surrendered to an evening I thought would bore me for the sake of the common welfare of our marriage? Am I in the relationship to serve her or to be served?

INVENTORY EXAMPLE - (Try to condense to three sentences)

- a) The Story: I automatically say "no" to evening out with my mate with people I don't know.
b) What Did I Do Wrong? I think of my lack of comfort in mixing with people I don't know.
c) What Would God Have Me Do Instead Next Time? Pray to be willing to say "yes" to new experiences that will enhance our relationship.

- 3) **WORK AND OTHER TALENTS:** (arts, sports, etc.): Am I of service at work because I am angling for a raise? Are my motives pure? Am I a financial loner at work, trying to get as much money as I can out of the company or will I contribute to the welfare of the company's work because it is the fulfillment of God's plan for that company to be of service to others?

INVENTORY EXAMPLE - (Try to condense to three sentences)

- a) The Story: My work sometimes makes me feel unhappy.
- b) What Did I Do Wrong? I think of my work as pleasing me or not pleasing me, rather than me pleasing God in my service.
- c) What Would God Have Me Do Instead Next Time? Pray that I have a spirit of willingness in my service at work to please my maker by serving my customers.

HOMework: WRITING INVENTORY - PART TWO (Helping you be of service)

- 4) **GOD AND A.A.:** Do I volunteer at meetings to help the secretary in thankless tasks? Do I look for ways to assist others or do I try to avoid such situations?

INVENTORY EXAMPLE - (Try to condense to three sentences)

- a) The Story: I am sometimes short on patience in listening to someone come to grips with their problems.
- b) What Did I Do Wrong? Self Centered.
- c) What Would God Have Me Do Instead Next Time? Pray to supply a listening ear and an understanding heart so that you can hear yourself.

- 5) **HOME:** Do I go out of my way at home to be reassuring when someone in my family needs confidence? Do I seek opportunities to be supportive?

INVENTORY EXAMPLE - (Try to condense to three sentences)

- a) The Story: If your decision doesn't directly concern me, I show little interest.
- b) What Did I Do Wrong? Self Centered.
- c) What Would God Have Me Do Instead Next Time? Pray to show you that I respect your judgment and will support your decisions.

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- 6) WORK AND OTHER TALENTS (art, sports, etc.): Will I go out of my way to help fellow workers be of service? Will freely teach others my skills and be helpful without seeking a reward?

INVENTORY EXAMPLE - (Try to condense to three sentences)

- a) The Story: I only help those whom I must to get my work done.
- b) What Did I Do Wrong? Self-centered
- c) What Would God Have Me Do Instead Next Time? Pray to share my skills freely with anybody at work who wants to know more.