

Preparing for the Eighth Concept of Service

(Read pp. 36-38 of the “Twelve Concepts for World Service”)

THE EIGHTH CONCEPT OF SERVICE: We are willing to be responsible¹

Let us prepare for the study of the eighth concept of service by examining our willingness to be responsible:

1. Am I willing to volunteer to clean up after A.A. meetings? Am I willing to serve as Secretary, Leader, Speaker, Coffee-maker, Central Service Representative or General Service Representative? Am I willing to take directions? Have I stopped saying “no” in my heart to any A.A. requests that involve responsibility? Am I responsible about going on any A.A. twelfth step calls when asked, day or night?
2. Am I willing to be responsible in love relationships and at work? Am I spiritually responsible for what I think and for my emotional moods? Am I willing to be responsible for my spiritual condition through working a program or do I still expect others to take care of me because I am unwilling to be responsible for myself?

¹ The wording of the “concepts” as given here is an interpretation by Dennis Fitzpatrick.

“UNITY INSURES RECOVERY THROUGH SERVICE”
MEETING OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

THE EIGHTH CONCEPT OF SERVICE
We are willing to be responsible

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

CONCEPT 8:

The sixth concept of service defined my responsibilities from those of my Higher Power: God has the ultimate responsibility for what happens in my life while I have the active responsibility to do His will. God is in charge of the results, while I am in charge of making the efforts.

The eighth concept now asks me if I am willing to be responsible to make the efforts God assigns to me.

The eighth concept tests my maturity in the program. Do I accept responsibility? Do I accept it willingly or reluctantly?

The basis of this concept is that I am of service to others by following God’s directions. He plans and administers my life and oversees all.

He expects me to carry out my responsibilities in his grand design. I am vital and important to God. He needs me! This is the source of my self-esteem. I am his eyes, ears, voice and body. He delegates to me the privilege and responsibility of carrying the message.

In the reading, Bill describes the importance of keeping separate the functions of custodial oversight and executive action. I see this idea as a parallel to my relationship with my Maker. God oversees my life and expects me to take action. I am not to be in charge of life and execute. I am here to execute only.

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The trustees of the General Service Board act in two primary capacities:

- a) With respect to the larger matters of overall policy and finance, they are the principal planners and administrators. They and their primary committees directly manage these affairs.**
- b) But with respect to our separately incorporated and constantly active services, the relation of the trustees is mainly that of full stock**

ownership and of custodial oversight which they exercise through their ability to elect all directors of these entities.

Since our trustees bear the primary responsibility for the good conduct of all our world service affairs, this discussion deals with the basic concepts and methods by which they can best discharge their heavy obligations. Long experience has now proved that our board as a whole must devote itself almost exclusively to the larger and more serious questions of policy, finance, group relations, public relations, and leadership that constantly confront it. In *these more critical matters*, the board must, of course, function with great care and deliberation. Here the board is expected skillfully to *plan, manage, and execute*.

It follows, therefore, that the close attention of the board to such large problems must not be subject to constant distraction and interference. Our trustees, as a body, cannot be burdened with a mass of lesser matters; they must not concern themselves with the endless questions and difficulties which arise daily, weekly, and monthly in the routine conduct of the World Service Office and of our publishing enterprises. In these areas, the board cannot possibly manage and conduct in detail; it must delegate its executive function.

Here the board's attitude has to be that of custodial oversight; it cannot be the executive. Hence, the trustees are the guarantors of the good management of A.A. World Services, Inc. and the A.A. Grapevine, Inc. They discharge their custodial obligation by electing the directors of these services, a part of whom must always be trustees. By this means, the executive direction of these functions is securely lodged in the active service corporations themselves, rather than in the General Service Board. Each corporate service entity should possess its own charter, its own working capital, its own executive, its own employees, its own offices and equipment. Except to mediate difficult situations and to see that the service corporations operate within their budgets and within the general framework of A.A. and Headquarters policy, the board will seldom need to do more, so far as routing service operations are concerned.

This arrangement is in line with modern corporate business practice. The General Service Board is in effect a holding company, charged with the custodial oversight of its wholly owned and separately incorporated subsidiaries, of which each has, for operating purposes, a separate management. We have demonstrated to our satisfaction that this corporate basis of operation is superior to any other.

This lesson, as we have observed before, has been learned the hard way. When discussing "Participation" in Concept IV, we saw that earlier attempts to manage the A.A. General Service Office and A.A. Publishing Company through a multiplicity of trustee committees did not work well. These were really efforts to make our services into departments of the old Alcoholic Foundation (now the General Service Board). It was found difficult to define the powers of these several trustee service committees respecting the work in hand. Responsibility and authority rarely could be kept in balance. Point-blank directives, rather than participating decisions, were the rule. In these committees, nobody held titles that fully denoted what individual responsibilities actually were; and, naturally enough, those who handled money and signed checks assumed the greater authority. The control of money, therefore, so often determined A.A. policy, regardless of the views of the workers and volunteers at the office who sometimes understood these matters better.

But the moment we consolidated our service office functions into a single and permanent corporate structure wherein officers and directors had legally defined titles and duties and responsibilities – the moment such a corporation was provided with its own working capital, employees, and facilities – the moment its directors could legally vote in proportion to their actual responsibilities – the moment we were able in this way to define clearly executive authority – from

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that moment, we began to see great improvement. More harmonious and effective conduct of our business has been the result ever since.

We finally learned what the business world well knows; that we could not, at the level of top management, run a large, active, and full-fledged business entity with loose-jointed committees and department. For example, how could our trustees function today if they were to become a mere “committee” or “department” of the General Service Conference instead of the legally chartered and carefully defined body that they necessarily are”?

Neither can our General Service Board be made into an operating corporation. Any corporation conducting a large and active business always must have a single executive head who is familiar with every department, who is actually on the job most of the time, and who therefore can directly coordinate the several departments and mediate their differences. This would mean (if we tried it) that the General Service Board “divisions” would have to report to the General Service Board chairman, as their chief executive. But unless he was *an executive in fact*, and constantly available to them, how could they do so? In the very nature of our particular setup, our board chairman can never be such an executive. He is usually a nonalcoholic and could not give the required time. Nor, as a trustee, could he be paid a salary for the work that would be required of him as the top executive of all our services.

Bill warns us about the dangers of “too much concentration of money and authority”. In a similar vein, I accept my financial situation as a reflection of my present spiritual capacity. As I grow spiritually, I become able to use more money and authority. If I have too much, too soon, I might become too content to carry the message!

In working this concept, I make A.A.’s motto my own: “I am responsible when anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help. I want the hand of A.A. always to be there: And for that, I am responsible.”

However, experience dating from our earliest days strongly suggests that future trustees and service workers, in the supposed interests of accounting simplicity, tax savings, and hoped-for efficiency, will be periodically tempted to go in for concentrations and consolidations of one kind or another. Should this be again attempted, we know that the risk of making an administrative shambles out of the total operation will be great indeed.

These observations are not intended to bar any future needful change. It is urged only that we avoid unnecessary repetitions of those painful experiences and mistakes of the past, which sometimes resulted from too much concentration of money and authority. It can only be left on the record that we still see no workable way to convert the Board of Trustees into an active, all-purpose service corporation.

End of Reading

COMMENTARY

The one word that describes the eighth concept of service to me is the word, “volunteer”. I am willing to volunteer because I am responsible

I surrender my old idea of never volunteering, of letting someone else take responsibility for whatever needs to be done. I become willing to raise my hand first at meetings when

volunteers are asked for. I am as willing to carry the message by mopping an A.A. floor, as I am to speak at a meeting. For me, this is the eighth concept of service in action!

I try to apply the same principle in my home and work life in order to be of service. I volunteer to do jobs at home that I used to shrink from. I volunteer at work to do the most unwelcome tasks. When I am responsible in this manner at home and work, I get the satisfaction of giving selfless service.

I also volunteer to help you be of service. I realize that growth through practicing the eighth concept of service in my life not only applies to my own responsibilities but applies even more to helping you be of service. I don't need the glory of accomplishing my own jobs. I can accept the anonymity of helping you with your jobs.

A mighty change takes place when I turn from being a "loner" to being a "volunteer".

I need to volunteer before I am asked or before I can escape being asked. This is the test for me if I am really putting the eighth concept of service to action in my life. When I see that you need help, will I volunteer to help you without being asked? I think it is a good policy for me to say, "yes" first and pray about the implications later.

I need to become willing to raise my hand first at meetings where volunteers are asked for. When I am as willing to carry the message by volunteering to mop an A.A. floor, as I am to speak at an A.A. meeting, I am an example of the eighth concept of service in action!

The essential idea of this concept is my "willingness" to be responsible. Am I willing to accept the responsibilities that God delegates to me? Do I accept the responsibility to carry the message to the sick and suffering alcoholic?

When I was newly sober, I wasn't ready for very many responsibilities beyond emptying coffee cups and ashtrays and doing even that much seemed like a big concession on my part. As I developed in sobriety by working all of the steps, my responsibilities came to be greater. I was asked to go on twelve step calls. I was asked to lead meetings. I was asked to speak at meetings. I was asked to be a secretary at meetings. I started my own meeting. I wrote this book, and more men asked me to sponsor them.

My responsibilities kept getting progressively more demanding. This includes not only A.A., but all the other areas of life. In sobriety, I was given the responsibility of being a husband and a father. I had the responsibility of being a loving son, and I had the responsibility of running several corporations. I had the responsibility of developing my music talents as a conductor and composer. God simply keeps increasing the responsibilities the more that I do the steps, traditions, and concepts of service so that I can be more useful.

It is my attitude toward these responsibilities that dictates the relationship that I have with my sobriety and the relationship I have with God. The question is, "Do I accept my responsibilities enthusiastically or reluctantly? Do I see added responsibilities as a drain on me or as a challenge I can easily overcome through the power God supplies to me? Do I

believe that God does not add the challenge of new responsibilities to my life without also giving me the energy and capacity to meet them?"

The basis of this concept is that I am of service to others by following God's directions. He plans and administers my life and oversees all. He expects me to carry out my responsibilities in His grand design. He does the planning and managing and simply calls on me to execute his vision.

I will execute well if I have the right attitude. If I surrender reluctantly or through gritted teeth to a new responsibility, I won't do it well or easily. But if I have the visionary faith that I am capable of handling any assignment God gives me simply because the gift of responsibility is God's vote of confidence in me, I will do it successfully and effortlessly.

This concept forces me to review my old ideas about responsibility. Can I change from my old reaction of added responsibility being a burden or challenges leading to new satisfactions and greater joys in sobriety?

I am convinced that I was saved from an alcoholic death because God had a unique message in mind for me to carry in sobriety to the sick and suffering alcoholic, to my family, and to the world.

I am vital and important to God. He needs me! This is the source of my self-esteem. I am his eyes, ears, voice and body. He delegates to me the privilege and responsibility of carrying the message. He doesn't delegate this task to a committee. We carry the message face to face, one on one at a time. He gives me the authority of sobriety to be balanced with the responsibility for carrying the message.

Each one of us carries a special message because our experience and talents differ. It is worth our while to listen to each other for this special message. It might save our lives.

I cannot have the satisfaction and joy of a job well done unless I first accept the challenge or responsibility in my life, rather than run from it as I did when I drank.

I also need to be responsible for my moods and my thoughts. I need to be able to identify the voice of my alcoholism from the voice of my sobriety. I need to know the difference between insanity and sanity in what I think.

My definition of insanity is living in a state where I am trying to satisfy my character defects: pride, greed, lust, anger, gluttony, envy and sloth. There is only one word that describes what I seek when I am insane. That is, "more". There is not enough money to satisfy my greed or sex to satisfy my lust.

Sanity is when I seek the opposites of the character defects in my life: Humility instead of pride, generosity instead of greed, purity of intention instead of lust, love instead of anger, discipline instead of gluttony, gratitude instead of envy, and action instead of procrastination or sloth.

The voice of my alcoholism speaks to me in sobriety by being negative and trying to get me to give up meeting my responsibilities of life. It tries to tell me I can't stay sober so "What's the use?" It tries to tell me I will never have a good relationship with a soul mate in life so "What's the use?" It tries to tell me I will never get out of debt so "What's the use?"

The voice of alcoholism is cunning, baffling and powerful. It knows that if I quit trying to meet my responsibilities, and I think that fatal thought, "What's the use?" I will stop working a program based on the steps, traditions and concepts. If I do this, I will go back to drinking, for the only thing between me and the first drink is the program I work on a daily basis. This is perhaps why the deadliest defeat is that of procrastination or sloth. Frontal attacks to drink won't work on me now. The only way I can go back to drinking is to stop working a program of sobriety because I have decided to believe the voice of my insanity, my alcoholism, when it says to me, "What's the use?"

I need instead to hear the voice of sobriety within me and accept new responsibilities because the more service I give, the more I grow and the easier it is to stay sober. Responsibility and sobriety go hand in hand.

The reading about the eighth concept of service mentions the need to have a balanced idea about responsibility. When we accept responsibility, we don't become dictators or slough off our responsibilities. I avoid these extreme attitudes I had when I drank.

I don't shirk my responsibilities by delegating twelve step calls to others. When God calls, I go. Neither am I a dictator in carrying the message. I involve others on twelve step calls. I don't dictate to the suffering alcoholic. I take responsibility, and I share with others. I serve in a balanced manner.

Unlike my life when I drank, I am on the job ready to be used. One way I define my attitude toward responsibility today is: I will show up. I will no longer be intimidated by my alcoholic thinking that I am not capable. I will listen rather to the voice of sobriety within and "show up", for I know that God will give me the power to carry out his work at the proper time.

When I was a child and was sent to the store to buy some milk, I wasn't given the money two weeks ahead of time. I was given the money when I needed it before I left to buy the milk.

It is the same with the power God gives me that I need to carry out my responsibilities; I will be given the power to carry out any responsibility he gives me. I will be given the power to carry out his will when it is time to do it. I can safely say "yes" ahead of time to responsibilities knowing that God will show me what to do if I simply show up and pray.

God would not permit me to be asked to do something unless it was important to him. He simply does not permit anything unless it is important to him. One of my favorite thoughts is: God would not let this moment happen unless it was really important to him. This revelation has changed my attitude about whatever happens that I don't like during the day. God feels it is important, so I will do it.

I believe that God does not permit me to be taken beyond my capabilities. If I am asked to do something, that means I am capable of doing it, whether I think so or not. My alcoholic attitude is never to take a risk, since I might fail and look bad in others eyes. To me, being responsible now means that I say yes and think about it later. I no longer want to say, "I'm not sure" or "I'll think about it." That is the voice of my alcoholism talking. My alcoholism is saying, "Don't get enthusiastic right away since you might say yes. Hold off for a while so I can work on your negativity a little bit", and then you say "No" to any growth producing responsibility.

There are times, of course, when our prayer will lead us to say no to an improper request. But for this sober alcoholic, I need to say, "yes" far more to life than I need to say "no". I cannot experience growth unless I accept responsibility.

The purpose of a concept of service is to show us how to be of service in some area we had difficulty with in our lives. The eighth concept teaches me that I can't be of service unless I say, "yes" to new responsibilities. This is why we have the saying in A.A. that we don't say no to an A.A. request.

The eighth step taught me the principle of "willingness". The eighth tradition taught me to be "zealous in carrying the message. The eighth concept of service teaches me to be responsible, so I "volunteer".

The relationship of the eighth step, tradition and concept is this: I am to be willing, zealous and to volunteer to carry out responsibilities God assigns me. I carry the message joyfully, not reluctantly!

When I am zealous in performing my responsibilities, the most difficult challenge is easily accomplished. Hardly anything seems like an effort when zeal takes over. It is amazing how my problems in life straighten out when I get zealous in working the steps, traditions and concepts.

I also need to avoid saying "no" to responsibilities and to avoid running the show. I am responsible in a balanced manner. When I delegate to others, I do so in the way God delegates to me: I delegate authority along with responsibility and then surrender the outcome to God. I respect the freedom of others to make mistakes just as God respects my freedom to err and to learn.

The sixth concept of service concerned my responsibility in a different way. It laid the framework for the eighth concept of service. It defined who is in charge of what between God and me: God has the ultimate responsibility for what happens in my life while I have the active responsibility to do his will. God is in charge of the results while I am in charge of making the efforts.

The eighth concept now asks me if I am willing to be responsible to make the efforts God assigns to me.

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My eighth concept prayer is this: “Father, please help me to hear your voice throughout the day that I may not only give willing, zealous, and responsible service in carrying the message, but may I volunteer my service for the most demanding jobs with enthusiasm and visionary faith in your power to help me accomplish them!”

In our meditation period, I want to examine my attitude toward responsibility in sobriety. Do I welcome responsibility as a sign of God’s trust in me, or do I try to avoid it? What is my “volunteer” record like? Have I been saying “yes” to A.A. requests? Do I take the responsibility to practice the program as God presents it to me? Have I been trying to be helpful at home and at work without being asked? When was the last time I tried to relieve someone else’s responsibility burden?

In the meditation, I also want to thank God for taking responsibility for my sobriety. I want to thank Him for being daily responsible for lovingly directing my will and life. Even though I bumble through the efforts, God is responsible for giving me power to make efforts and for the results that happen after I make efforts. When I wanted sobriety, all I had to do was ask him, and he gave it to me. God is my model for giving responsible service. In the meditation, I also want to renew my commitment to be responsible with a zealous attitude and not a reluctant one. I want to tell him that I am willing to take on more responsibilities. I am willing to do whatever challenges He wants to give me, because I know he wouldn’t give them to me unless I could accomplish them. His power is unlimited, and it is mine for a prayer. I know that if I take more responsibility, I can be of more service. The more selfless service I give, the greater my joy! Let us stop and meditate.

(Pause for three minutes of meditation.)

Working a step, tradition, or concept to me means that I am willing to write inventory and allow it to surrender me. Let us examine the state of our willingness to volunteer to take responsibilities in A.A., in a love relationship, and at work.

HOMEWORK: WRITING INVENTORY – PART ONE
(Using My Talents)

1. God and A.A.: Am I responsible for the directions God give me through a sponsor? Am I responsible in working the steps, traditions, and concepts of service? Am I staying sober on the programs of others? Do I take spiritual responsibility for my moods and for my thoughts?

Inventory Example – (Try to condense to three sentences.)

- a) The Story: When I am not in a good mood, I blame others for it.
- b) What did I do wrong? When I am depress, I secretly blame God for not getting me something I wan or taking away something I have.
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? Pray for the willingness to get on my knees and make amends to God for not accepting life as he gives it to me.

2. HOME: Am I responsible in love relationships? Am I faithful? Am I loyal? Do I do the things I say I will do? Am I a responsible husband, father and son?

Inventory Example – (Try to condense to three sentences.)

- a) The Story: I promise to be helpful, but occasionally I procrastinate.
- b) What did I do wrong? My actions sometimes don't measure up to my promises
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? Pray for the power to do what needs to be done.

3. WORK AND OTHER TALENTS (arts, sports, etc.): Am I responsible in my job? Do I make commitments I can't keep? Do I exaggerate to get a sale?

Inventory Example – (Try to condense to three sentences.)

- a) The Story: Sometimes I am irresponsible to making exaggerated statements in our advertising.
- b) What did I do wrong? I don't stick to the truth
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? Pray to follow a spirit of truth in everything I do at work whether the world does or not.

HOMWORK: WRITING INVENTORY – PART TWO
(Helping You)

4. God and A.A.: Am I willing enough to volunteer to be responsible in A.A. even when I am not asked to volunteer? Can I overcome through prayer my initial reaction to be lazy or put my comfort first when a job needs to be done?

Inventory Example – (Try to condense to three sentences.)

- a) The Story: I am reluctant to raise my hand to clean up after meetings, especially at Ohio Street where I dislike mopping the floor.
 - b) What did I do wrong? Self-centered laziness.
 - b) What would God have me do instead next time? Pray to raise my hand first when volunteers are called on and think about it later.
5. HOME: Am I willing to help my soul mate with her responsibilities without being asked? Do I volunteer to help others be responsible rather than run from the opportunity to give service?

Inventory Example – (Try to condense to three sentences.)

- a) The Story: I don't always offer to help my wife when I have my own work to do.
 - b) What did I do wrong? I am self-centered.
 - c) What would God have me do instead next time? Pray for willingness to volunteer to help her whenever I see the opportunity to give service.
6. WORK AND OTHER TALENTS (arts, sports, etc.): When was the last time I volunteered to take care of an irksome task at work? Am I known as a "volunteer" at work or as a clock puncher?

Inventory Example – (Try to condense to three sentences.)

- a) The Story: I avoid volunteering for some jobs at work because of laziness.
- b) What did I do wrong? I don't think of service as a joy producer but as an inconvenience.
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? Pray for a spirit of selfless service to my customers, fellow workers, and owners.