

PREPARING FOR THE FIFTH CONCEPT OF SERVICE

(Read pp. 25-28 of the “Twelve Concepts for World Service”)

THE FIFTH CONCEPT OF SERVICE:

We serve the group by having the courage to state a minority opinion when needed and we respect this right in others.

Let us prepare for the study of the fifth concept of service by examining two areas of our lives:

1. When I have a personal grievance, do I have the courage to state it (in a loving manner) or am I still a doormat?
2. How do I treat those who have opinions that differ from mine? Do I carefully and calmly consider them?

“UNITY INSURES RECOVERY THROUGH SERVICE”
MEETING OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

THE FIFTH CONCEPT OF SERVICE:

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

The Fifth concept of service concerns the rights of “Appeal and Petition.”

This concept encourages me to take unpopular stands even though I am in the minority. I have the rights of “Appeal and Petition.” This concept also encourages me to be loving to those who disagree with me because I respect their right not to agree with me. I respect the rights of the minority.

Concept 5

Throughout our world service structure, a traditional “Right of Appeal” ought to prevail, thus assuring us that minority opinion will be heard and that petitions for the redress of personal grievances will be carefully considered.

In the light of principle of the “Right of Appeal,” all minorities – whether in our staffs, committees, or corporate boards or among the trustees – should be *encouraged* to file minority reports whenever they feel a majority to be in considerable error. And when a minority considers an issue to be such a grave one that a mistaken decision could seriously affect A.A. as a whole, it should then charge itself with the actual *duty* of presenting a minority report to the Conference.

In granting this traditional “Right of Appeal,” we recognize that minorities frequently can be right; that even when they are partly or wholly in error, they still perform a most valuable service when, by asserting their “Right of Appeal,” they compel a thorough and ongoing debate on important issues. The well-heard minority, therefore, is our chief protection against an uninformed, misinformed, hasty or angry majority.

The traditional “Right of Appeal” should also permit any person in our service structure, whether paid or unpaid, to petition for the redress of a personal grievance, carrying his complaint, if he so desires, directly to the General Service Board. He or she should also be able to do this without prejudice or fear of reprisal. Though in practice this will be a seldom-exercised right, its very existence will always tend to restrain those in authority from unjust uses of their power. Surely, our workers should cheerfully accept the necessary direction and disciplines that go with their jobs, but all of them should nevertheless feel that they need not silently endure unnecessary and unfair personal domination.

I need to ask myself in my relationship in A.A., home and work how I treat others when they disagree with me and I am in the majority. Do I lord it over others or am I gracious and hear the minority opinion out even though I disagree with it?

What about the reverse situation? When I am the minority do I get resentful and scheme to have my opinion heard or will I patiently and tactfully pursue my rights of “Appeal and Petition” when I feel the majority opinion is misinformed?

The Rights of “Appeal” and “Petition,” of course, aim at the total problem of protecting and making the best possible use of minority feeling and opinion. This has always been, and still is, a central problem of all free governments and democratic societies. In Alcoholic Anonymous, individual freedom is of enormous importance. For instance, any alcoholic is a member of A.A., the moment he says so; we cannot take away his right to belong. Neither can we force our members to believe anything or pay anything. Ours is indeed a large charter of minority privileges and liberties.

When we look at our world services, we find that here we have also gone to great lengths in our trust of minority groups. Under Tradition Two, the *group conscience* is the final authority for A.A. world service, and it will always remain so respecting all the larger issues that confront us. Nevertheless, the A.A. groups have recognized that for world service purposes the “group conscience of A.A.” as a *totality* has certain limitations. It cannot act directly in many service matters, because it cannot be sufficiently informed about the problems at hand. It is also true that during a time of great disturbance the group conscience is not always the best possible guide, because, temporarily such an upset may prevent it from functioning efficiently or wisely. When, therefore, the group conscience cannot or should not act directly, *who does act for it?*

The second part of Tradition Two provides us with the answer when it describes A.A. leaders as “trusted servants.” These servants must always be in readiness to do for the group what the groups obviously cannot or should not do for themselves. Consequently, the servants are bound to use their own information and judgment, sometimes to the point of disagreeing with uninformed or biased group opinion.

A.A. further protects the minority opinion by the “Third Legacy” method of voting:

By 1951, when the General Service Conference was put into experimental operation, these attitudes of trust already were an essential part of A.A. life. In drafting the Charter for our Conference, therefore, we naturally infused that document with provisions which would insure protection and respects for minorities. This is exemplified, for instance, in our “Third Legacy” method of selecting delegates. Unless the majority candidate can poll a two-thirds vote of his state or provincial assembly [now, of his or her area assembly], he must place his name in a hat with one or more of the choices of the assembly minority. By thus drawing lots, the minority candidates have an equal chance with the majority’s choice.

Bill’s fervent belief in living this concept is that A.A. shall never be subject to the tyranny of either the majority or the minority:

We believe that the spirit of democracy in our Fellowship and in our world service structure will always survive, despite the counterforce which will no doubt continue to beat upon us. Fortunately, we are not obliged to maintain a government that enforces conformity by inflicting punishments. We need to maintain only a structure of service that holds aloft our Traditions, that forms and executes our policies hereunder, and so steadily carries our message to those who suffer.

Hence, we believe that we shall never be subjected to the tyranny of either the majority or the minority, provided we carefully define the relations between them and forthwith tread the path of world service in the spirit of our Twelve Steps, our Twelve Traditions, and our Conference Charter - in which I trust that we shall one day inscribe these traditional Rights of “Appeal” and “Petition.”

End of Reading

COMMENTARY

This first aspect of this concept teaches me to have the courage to state a minority opinion.

In the reading on the fifth concept of service (“Twelve Concepts for World Service,” p. 25), Bill Wilson states the importance of the minority opinion:

In granting this traditional “Right of Appeal,” we recognize that minorities frequently can be right; that even when they are partly or wholly in error, they still perform a most valuable service when, by asserting their “Right of Appeal,” they compel a thorough on going debate on important issues. The well-heard minority, therefore, is our chief protection against an uninformed, misinformed, hasty or angry majority.

The traditional “Right of Appeal” should also permit any person in our service structure, whether paid or unpaid, to petition for the redress of a personal grievance, carrying his complaint, if he so desires, directly to the General Service Board. He or she should be able to do this without prejudice or fear of reprisal.

Now that I’m sober I have the courage to take positions that before I would never take. When I drank and disagreed with the majority, I wouldn’t say anything because I would be afraid of not getting the approval of other people. Out of my sick alcoholic need for approval, I would collude with situations that I knew I didn’t agree with and I would do things I really didn’t believe in.

Now that I’m sober, the way that I am of service to God in gratitude for my sobriety is to follow the revelations that he gives me and to have the courage to stand up for them and do them. Following this concept enables me to take tough stands no matter how many people disagree with me and no matter how different their actions and opinions are from mine.

Though many drink, I stay sober. Though others might pad their expense account, I don’t anymore. I know that my call to sobriety is more than a call not to take the first drink. It is a call to a way of life that demands rigorous honesty or I’m not going to be able to survive staying sober.

I must now take stands prompted by rigorous honesty that frequently put me into conflict with the majority in the world.

I not only have a right but a responsibility to exercise my “Right of Appeal” and my “Right of Petition,” to differ with the majority when my conscious contact with my Maker tells me to.

We are of service by being a light to those around us. We need to be an example not only by staying sober but how we live our lives. The quality of my sobriety is determined by the stands I take or am afraid to take in A.A., at home and at work.

The test that I used to apply to any situation was whether or not it would get your approval. The new test I try to use is, "What is God's will for me in this situation?"

I serve the group conscience not by taking positions in my inner life that I am led to take by my prayer. I check these stands out with my wife, my sponsor and other friends in order to get the view of the group conscience so I protect myself from going off on tangents as a result of any justified resentments that might blind me.

The most important time in my life that I used my "Right of Appeal" with God was when I was having my last drink.

I had about six drinks and was fairly drunk. All of the sudden in the middle of this busy bar, I had the vision of the way I was going to die. I was going to die with the very next drink I took, the next car I drove. The big reservation that I had in the back of my mind about me ever becoming a real alcoholic was removed. I thought that for me to be a real alcoholic, I had to be drinking on skid row. I thought I had about fifteen more years of drinking left before I would get near skid row. I now saw that I would never make it alive to skid row. I would die driving my car and might kill others.

I had never walked away from a drink in my life before. Because of this vision, this moment of clarity, this drunken spiritual experience, terrified me, I prayed as drunk as I was. For the first time in my life, I asked this mysterious God, if he existed, to make me sober. That was my last drink. I walked away from a drink without finishing it. A miracle! I had exercised my "Right of Appeal" to be relieved of my alcoholism and to be delivered to sobriety.

In early sobriety, I also exercised my "Right of Appeal" when I asked God to remove my addiction to smoking, coffee, white sugar, white flour, gambling, overeating, and lust. He removed these defects and today I have a choice concerning them rather than being addicted to them.

I exercised my "Right of Petition" when I asked God to send a soul mate into my life. He did when I was three years sober. My wife and I exercised our "Right of Petition" and prayed for a child. God sent me a son a year later. We frequently pray together for our needs and exercise our "Right of Petition" together since we know that God will hear two people who agree on their prayer and ask it in his name.

I used to drink over a work situation that would require me to sue my best customer if justice would be done. I refused to do this and take a stand against the majority because of the possible backlash and the threat to my pocketbook.

In sobriety I found I could not live with myself unless I faced this situation. I exercised my “Right of Appeal” in the courts. After doing this I was blessed with peace amidst turmoil because I was living by principles.

Surrender does not mean that I avoid confrontation. Surrender means that I confront my fear and fearlessly pursue God’s will for me despite the risk. I surrender to following God’s will, not my will. In sobriety, God’s will frequently means that I must take uncomfortable stands until I learn to make them comfortable stands by following the principles of the steps, traditions and concepts.

I was practicing the fifth concept before I knew what it was. Now, after having written inventory on the application of this concept to my life, I am able to more quickly recognize the principles I need to follow as challenges present themselves in my life.

The other aspect of the fifth concept of service is respecting the right of others to state a minority opinion. The one word that describes the attitude I need to adopt in practicing this aspect is the word, “tolerance.”

My reaction when I was drinking to people who differed from me was pretty quick. I might sit there and smile and nod my head but inside it was thumbs down to anybody that disagreed with me. This attitude carried over into early sobriety.

My distrustful attitude didn’t begin to change until I began to trust the group conscience until I was sober for a while and began to see that others in A.A. knew how to stay sober and I did not. You knew something I didn’t. When I began to trust the group conscience, I began to trust opinions that were different from mine. This concept of service carries with it the idea of respecting the ideas of others when they disagree with me.

I have the responsibility to be available to the minority when they reach out for help. The majority of alcoholics are out there drinking. The minority is in A.A. trying to stay sober. I need to offer my sobriety to be of service to the sick and suffering minority anywhere who reaches out for help for anything. When a person says, “I’m a few days sober and I need some help,” I need to hear this person’s “Right of Appeal” and answer it.

As a sponsor I need to respect the right of those I sponsor to disagree with me.

In my home life I need to respect the right of my wife, son, mother, and sister to take positions that differ from mine. I need to hear personal grievances with a loving ear and encourage others to state what they think especially if it is opposite to my own opinion or experience. I then need to let them work through to their own solutions.

An example at work is for me to try to get some feedback from my employees on the assignments that I give them so that I can tell whether or not they have different

opinions. If they do have different opinions, then I need to stop and consider them and perhaps reconsider my own opinions in the light of what they think.

So, I need to examine myself not only when I'm in the minority and need to take a stand, but also when I'm in the majority and need to listen. Sometimes I need to overrule the minority. But it can be done in a loving manner.

The secret to practicing this concept in life is to love those who disagree with me. Sometimes those who disagree with me also dislike me. Then I think of three words that help me to try to practice this demanding concept: "Love your enemies."

The main way Alcoholics Anonymous protects and respects the minority opinion is its "Third Legacy"¹ method of selecting delegates. If the majority candidate does not receive two-thirds of the vote, all of the candidates' names are placed in a hat. By drawing lots, the minority candidate has as much chance to be elected as the majority candidate.

This voting procedure describes the great care Bill Wilson took to see that the minority opinion was heard. I need to do the same in my A.A., home and work life in order to hear the voice of a loving God from the group conscience of the minority.

A.A. has gone to great lengths to try to protect the minority within the fellowship so that the group can continue to exist. The question is am I willing to go to the same lengths to respect your opinion when it differs from mine so that we may continue to exist in love and harmony. If I don't, you could have a valid opinion and I could have a different valid opinion and we could part as enemies. That's what would happen when I was drinking.

What I want to happen now is that you keep your opinion that differs from mine and I keep my opinion that differs from yours. Yet, we still stay loving friends. That's this concept at work. That's how I can be of service to people who disagree with me. I can carry the spirit of love into that disagreement. Instead of suspicion, hostility, and all the old alcoholic tricks that I used to use, I can practice loving you whether you love me or not.

The fifth step, tradition and concept of service are related. The fifth step taught me what the exact nature of my wrongs was: I thought I was in charge, I thought I was God. The fifth tradition taught me the exact nature of what is best about me: my primary purpose in life is to carry the message of my sobriety. The fifth concept of service tells me whom I carry this message to: I carry a loving message of sobriety to anybody who is sent to me and I respect his or her right to accept it or reject it.

¹ The "Third Legacy" is a term that is also applied to include the notion of service as exemplified in the "Twelve Concepts of Service." The first legacy would be the "Twelve Steps" (Recovery) and the second legacy would be the "Twelve Traditions" (Unity). Hence the threefold idea of the A.A. program is "Recovery, Unity, Service."

My fifth concept of service prayer is this: Father, may I be fearless in carrying a message of sobriety and practice patience, tolerance, understanding and love with those who disagree with me.

I carry out my primary purpose in life by carrying a loving message of sobriety to anybody who is sent to me.

As we prepare for our meditation period let us ask ourselves these questions: Is there any area in my life that I need to take a stand on that I have not been doing out of fear or lack of approval? Do I listen to those who disagree with me and hear their personal grievances? Am I as loving with you after you disagree with me as much as before? Is my mind made up before I listen to you? Do I inflict my will on other people without hearing them out?

Let us meditate on the one virtue that we need in our lives more than any other to improve our service to those who disagree with us, be it patience, tolerance, understanding or love. Let us exercise our "Right of Appeal" in prayer and ask God to help us carry a better message to those who disagree with me.

I also want to thank God for his tolerance of me and for continuing to love me and give me sobriety despite the insanity of some of my opinions. May I imitate his spirit in my service to others.

(Pause for three minutes of meditation.)

Working a step, tradition or concept to me means that I am willing to take inventory and allow it to surrender something within me.

The fifth concept of service suggests to me that I surrender my fearfulness in taking stands that do not get the approval of the majority. As a trusted servant, I am to take responsibility for the revelations that God gives me. I am no longer a doormat. I am not to silently collude with the opinions of the majority because of my old sick need for approval at the cost of my self respect.

Let us write inventory on any relationships in my A.A., home, or work where I need to exercise my "Right of Appeal" or my "Right of Petition."

HOMEWORK: WRITING INVENTORY – PART ONE
(My “Right of Appeal”)

1. GOD and AA: Do I appeal to the group conscience at meetings for direction in my life? Does my fear of not getting your approval keep me quiet?

INVENTORY EXAMPLE - (Try to condense to three sentences.)

- a) The Story: Sometimes the group conscience is the last place I think to go for help.
- b) What did I do wrong? Think I should be able to handle my own problems.
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? Pray to let go of my self-centered attitude and exercise my “Right of Appeal” to the group conscience for direction.

2. HOME: Do I collude with decisions that bother my conscience? Am I afraid to exercise my “Right of Petition” in my home life? Am I still a doormat or am I trying to express the truth as I understand it with love?

INVENTORY EXAMPLE - (Try to condense to three sentences.)

- a) The Story: Sometimes I agree with decisions at home that I do not believe in order to avoid a fight.
- b) What did I do wrong? I am not rigorously honest.
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? Pray for courage and words of love with which to state my “Right of Petition.”

3. WORK AND OTHER TALENTS (arts, sports, etc.): Am I part of the silent majority at work over beliefs I do not hold? Do I agree to things at work I used to drink over? Do I have the courage to state a minority opinion when needed?

INVENTORY EXAMPLE - (Try to condense to three sentences.)

- a) The Story: I was tempted to settle a law case because of pressure from an attorney when I knew that justice had not been done.
- b) What did I do wrong? I almost acted to receive the approval of the attorney rather than acting to please God.
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? Pray for strength to see God’s plan through and be fearless in my stand with the attorney.

HOMEWORK: WRITING INVENTORY – PART TWO
(Your “Right of Appeal”)

Let us write inventory on our attitude in respecting the “Rights of Appeal” of the minority opinion. Let us carefully consider the personal grievances of others in A.A., at home and at work.

4. GOD AND A.A.: How do I react to the minority when I am in the majority? Do I have time for whomever God sends to me to twelve step or console? Do I trust those who have opinions that differ from mine? Do I carefully and calmly consider them?

INVENTORY EXAMPLE - (Try to condense to three sentences.)

- a) The Story: Sometimes I get in a rush and don't want to listen patiently to someone who comes to me for help.
- b) What did I do wrong? I do not make God's schedule my schedule.
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? Pray for an “Easy Does It” attitude and practice patience with anybody God sends to me.

5. HOME: How do disagreements end up at home? Am I closer to others because of sharing or do confrontations end up in resentments? Can I be as loving with my wife after she disagrees with me as before?

INVENTORY EXAMPLE - (Try to condense to three sentences.)

- a) The Story: I am not very tolerant with attitudes directly opposed to my own.
- b) What did I do wrong? I egotistically think that I am right and others are wrong.
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? Pray for a tolerant attitude and realize we could both be right.

6. WORK AND OTHER TALENTS (arts, sports, etc.): Do I encourage minority opinions at work? Do I respect them or do I try to force my own opinion on others? Do I listen well to others when they exercise their “Rights of Appeal and Petition” to me?

INVENTORY EXAMPLE - (Try to condense to three sentences.)

- a) The Story: I sometimes inflict my will on people at work without asking for feedback.
- b) What did I do wrong? I don't try to hear the voice of the minority or see how I could serve it.
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? Seek to serve by respecting the right of others to disagree with me and then reexamine my position in light of our differences.