

## PREPARING FOR THE FOURTH CONCEPT OF SERVICE

(Read pp. 20-24 of the “Twelve Concepts for World Service”)

### **THE FOURTH CONCEPT OF SERVICE**

**We serve through our “Right of Participation” in life and we respect this right in others.<sup>1</sup>**

Let us prepare for the study of the fourth concept of service by asking ourselves the following questions:

1. Am I participating fully and fearlessly in life (AA, home, and work) or am I held back by my fearfulness?
2. Am I granting others the right to make their own mistakes or do I try to restrict their freedom and give advice based on fear?

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<sup>1</sup> The wording of “concepts” as given here is an interpretation by Dennis Fitzgerald.

“UNITY INSURES RECOVERY THROUGH SERVICE”  
MEETING OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

**THE FOURTH CONCEPT OF SERVICE**

**We serve through our “Right of Participation” in life and we respect this right in others.**

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

The principle behind the fourth concept of service is that we have a “Right to Participate” in life equal to our responsibilities. We are not agents of order-takers. There is no one class or person set in authority over another.

This is a concept I apply to the rest of my life. Now that I am sober I am not meant to be a doormat. I have a right to participate in relationships, in a job, and with my other talents.

In the reading Bill describes how the new principle of “Participation” has been built into the A.A. conference structure.

**Concept 4**

**Throughout our Conference structure, we ought to maintain at all responsible levels a traditional “Right of Participation,” taking care that each classification or group of our world servants shall be allowed a voting representation in reasonable proportion to the responsibility that each must discharge.**

The principle of “Participation” has been carefully built into our Conference structure. The Conference Charter specifically provides that the trustees and the directors of our service corporations (A.A. World Services, Inc. and The A.A. Grapevine, Inc.) together with their respective executive staffs, shall always be voting members of the General Service Conference itself.

The General Service Board, furthermore, rigorously abides by the principle of “Participation” whenever its chairman makes appointments to the board’s principal standing committees. Numbers of non-trustees and paid staff workers are customarily chosen for these important posts. As with the active service corporations, the same elements are nearly always present in these committees, viz., representatives of the General Service Board, non-trustee experts, and one or more staff members who must do most of the legwork. All can vote, and therefore all can truly “participate.” When the time comes to ballot, there are no superiors, no inferiors, and no advisors.

The preservation of the principle of “Participation” in our service structure is to those of us who already understand its application and benefits, a matter of the highest importance to our future. Experience suggests, however, that some of each new generation of delegates and trustees will inevitably try to weaken, modify, or toss out the principle corporate “Participation.” Every year, a few

delegates will question the “right” of the corporate directors, the staffs, and even the trustees to vote in Conference. New volunteer corporate directors will ask why any paid staff member should also be a director and thereby have a vote as good as their own. Every now and then, a move will be made to abolish A.A. World Services, Inc., and The A.A. Grapevine, Inc. It will be urged that these separate corporations ought to become departments or committees of The General Service Board, mainly managed by trustees. To my view, it is so vital that we preserve the traditional “Right of Participation” in the face of every tendency to whittle it down that we should here bring some of our pioneering experience to bear upon this problem.

Bill traces the early history of A.A. when A.A. was more dictatorial and less participative. He describes the problems that occurred when responsibility and authority were separated.

In a similar way, I need to respect your right to participate in sobriety. I am not a dictator with those I sponsor. I don't issue point-blank nonparticipating directives at work. I respect your “Right to Participate” in all matters that affect your life.

In its early days, the A.A. Headquarters was run on authoritarian and institutional lines. At that time, the trustees saw no reason to delegate their managerial powers or to work in voting participation with any others outside their own body. The result was often grievous trouble and misunderstanding, and it was out of this rough going that the principle of “Participation” finally emerged. This lesson was learned the hard way, but it was learned.

We have seen how Dr. Bob and I had placed our Board of Trustees in full legal possession of all of our service assets. This had included our book literature, our funds, our public relations, and our A.A. General Service Office. This is how our early trustees came to have all of the authority there was. But most of the actual responsibility for the conduct of A.A.'s Headquarters nevertheless fell on me, my assistant, and her staff. On the one hand, we had trustees who possessed complete authority, and on the other hand, there were founders and office managers who had great responsibility but practically no authority. It was a kind of schizophrenia, and it caused real trouble.

The point may be made that nowadays we drunks can “dish it out” or “take it” better than we used to. Even so, I would sure hate to see us ever go back to a nonparticipating setup. Now that we have more service people involved and more money to handle, I am afraid the result would be much the same and maybe worse...

Every time an absolute authority is created, it always invites this same tendency toward over domination respecting all things, great and small.

It was years before we saw that we could never put all authority in one group and virtually all responsibility in another and then expect efficiency of operation, let alone real harmony. Of course, no one is against the idea of final authority. We are only against its misapplication or misuse. “Participation” can usually stop this sort of demoralizing nonsense before it starts.

The final area that Bill examines is the blessing of equality and the sense of belonging that happens when we respect each other's right to participate spiritually

in life. God needs you and me to participate in sobriety. We need each other's talents. I am meant to live fearlessly, not fearfully, and so are you.

Let us look at another aspect of this participation problem. The final authority for services must lie in the A.A. groups, but suppose the groups, sensing their great power, should try to over exercise it by sending in delegates irrevocably instructed as to how to vote on most questions. Would the delegates feel that they were participants, trusted servants? No, they would feel like agents and order takers.

There is another good reason for "Participation," and this one has to do with our spiritual needs. All of us deeply desire to *belong*. We want an A.A. relation of brotherly partnership. It is our shining ideal that the "Spiritual corporation" of A.A. should never include any members who are regarded as "second class." Deep down, I think this is what we have been struggling to achieve in our world service structure. Here is perhaps the principal reason why we should continue to ensure "participation" at every important level. Just as there are no second-class A.A.'s, neither should there be any second-class world service workers.

The "Right of Participation" is therefore a corrective of ultimate authority because it migrates its harshness or misuse. It also encourages us who serve A.A. to accept the necessary disciplines that our several tasks require. We can do this when we are sure that we belong, when the fact of our "participation" assures us that they are truly the "trusted servants" described in A.A.'s Tradition Two.

*End of Reading*

## COMMENTARY

Through the fantastic gift of my sobriety I have been given the "Right to Participate" in life.

Through sobriety, I am equal to everyone else. There is no one who can dominate me. I am not an agent or order taker. I am a trusted servant!

I no longer feel inferior or less than in sobriety.

There are three words that sum up the new feeling of self worth that I now have because of my "Right to Participate" in life: "God needs me."

I have been given the responsibility of fulfilling the various talents he has given me. My most important talent is my alcoholism.

A fifth step will convert the past of my fourth step into experience. And it is this experience that I use in carrying the message.

God needs me because I am his mouth, ears, arms, and legs in carrying the message. If he didn't need me he would have sent someone else or dispensed with the freedom he gave me to choose his way or not. He could have used angels and dispensed with the selfish choices of us humans.

But he sent me and is transforming me through the steps that I may better carry his message. He needs me as a sponsor, as a writer, and as a listening ear and understanding heart.

I have other talents besides my alcoholic talents. I have a talent as a husband. God needs me as a husband. He needs me to love, to be concerned, and to be responsible. He needs me as a lover. God needs me as a father. He has given me a talent to be a father so he has given me children to father. God needs me in my work talent. There isn't anybody on earth who has the exact same combination of musical-business talents that I have in the work area. I have been prepared all my life to use this work talent so he has put me in my present position to serve him. He has given me a sports talent that I may have good health and fun in life, so I participate in tennis, jogging and other such activities. He has given me all these various talents. If he didn't need me, he wouldn't have given me these talents. These talents are avenues by which I participate in life.

Whenever my alcoholism says to me, "You know, Dennis, you are not needed. You are not valuable. You should just withdraw from life. It is safe that way. You won't fail then. You don't need to participate in this activity. You don't have anything valuable to offer. Why put yourself out and risk being foolish?" I can dismiss these sick thoughts with three words: "God needs me!"

The gift of the "Right to Participate" equally with everyone else carries with it the responsibility for me to carry my share of the load.

I took inventory on myself about this concept in order to find out why I did not like to participate in life when I was drinking and in early sobriety and I found out that it was because of one of two reasons: fear or laziness.

I withdrew from participating in life out of fear of rejection. I thought if I did participate in life I would look foolish because I didn't know the outcome of situations ahead of me.

I remember being afraid to raise my hand and talk in early sobriety at AA meetings. I was especially afraid to talk at stag meetings. I think the reason was that I knew I could not get away with anything at a stag meeting since all the men would identify with me and tell me the truth. This is the reason I think that I was more comfortable with the opposite sex in early sobriety. I thought that I could get a more sympathetic ear and could con myself through any difficulties. This can't be done at a stag meeting.

In sobriety, it is more often laziness that keeps me from participating in life fully. It is an effort to go to a meeting and to extend myself sometimes. It is an effort to do anything that gets me out of my shell. It is an effort to work the steps. It is an effort to take inventory.

It is easy to just continue to drift along and be passive about life. If someone or some event comes along and jars me out of my shell long enough to start me participating in something, then I will do it. Otherwise I won't. This pretty well describes my early attitude in sobriety. It is a very nonproductive attitude and a

backward looking attitude. By being passive about what's going on in my sobriety, by not taking responsibility for the step, tradition, or concept I am on, I simply withdraw further into my shell. I need to carry out my responsibilities of participation in life in order to enjoy my fulfillment in living.

When laziness or fear prevent me from being of service by participating in life it is only inventory that helps me recognize this so I can work the ensuing steps on this defect.

What a loss it is when self-centered fear keeps me from participating fully in sobriety in AA, my home life or work and other talents. I now have been given the right to participate in all these areas.

The one word that describes my attitude in working this concept is the word, "fearless."

I first became fearless about my life when I began searching and fearless about my own inventory. I can remain being fearless about meeting sobriety's challenges as long as I remain fearless about myself in nightly inventory.

I now have the conviction that nothing out there can defeat me within. My fear has been transformed into fearlessness through participating in life successfully by staying sober no matter what difficulties I encounter.

Faith comes from fear just as an appreciation of sobriety comes from drinking alcoholically. A person with great fears is a person with a great potential for faith.

Whenever I pray for it I am as secure in faith as I once felt I was the victim of impending doom. Faith, or a spirit of fearlessness, comes from simply praying for it. I do not earn it but I can develop it through use just as muscles develop through exercise. When I pray for faith after feeling faithful, God gives me a spirit of fearlessness with which to fully participate in life.

I begin by being fearless in my participation in three main areas of life: AA, home and work.

I can participate in AA meetings without fear of appearing foolish. I take the responsibility to speak at a meeting or at least to raise my hand to offer to participate. I no longer let my fear of not getting your approval keep me quiet. I risk by participating. I am not a second class member. I have as much right to participate in an AA meeting as anybody else.

When I was drinking, I would not participate at all in anything. I would do just the opposite. I would withdraw and be a loner. When I first got sober, it was a big hurdle for me to come out of my shell, stop being a loner, become part of a group, and to risk looking foolish by participating in life once more. This concept is

saying to me that I not only have a right to equally participate, I have a responsibility to equally participate because if I don't participate in AA, I'm not going to feel that I belong to it. I'm going to feel like a voyeur. I will feel that I come to meetings and take a little bit out of it that I need and then go off and feel I no longer belong because I'm not putting anything back into it of myself.

I also needed to learn to risk rejection in relationships. In early sobriety, this was a big problem. I would date the second string because I thought that they would be less likely to reject me than the first string. My motives were also sexually exploitative rather than giving of self.

It took a lot of inventory and a lot of progress in the steps for me to feel that I was equal to and not less than any girl I wanted to date in AA. My fear was keeping me from participating in life to the fullest in the dating area. The more I withdraw the less I can contribute.

God prepared me in the first three years of sobriety to be willing to risk rejection when I finally met and won my soul mate. If I remained passive and waited for her to ask me for a date I would not have met her. I prayed for an aggressive spirit to overcome my fear of rejection. It was important for me in the relationship area to live by the fourth concept: I have the right and responsibility to participate in life because if I don't I will retreat into my shell. I need to constantly check myself in my nightly inventories to see if I am withdrawing from confronting troublesome situations in life.

What has this had to do with staying sober? Drinking is a lonely business. My drinking was the opposite of participating in anything. My alcoholism would want me to withdraw more and more until finally I would just think about me and the bottle, me and suicide, because I felt so rejected.

The essence of the insanity of my alcoholism is the illusion of separateness. There is only participating in groups: God and I make up a group, my wife and I make up a group, I am 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.

Alcoholism gave me a non-participatory attitude towards life. And it's the same with my other compulsions, from compulsive gambling to being overweight. When I want to overeat I don't want to do it in public. I don't want other people to see me over-eating. Our defects make us loners. So how can I get out of withdrawing? I have to risk falling flat on my face. I got so sick and tired of being fearful that I knew the only way out was risking my participating in sobriety. I had to risk participating in life.

Applying the principle of equal participation at work was also a big lesson for me. I am an employer, so my tendency is to be a dictator. That's how I was when I drank. I thought if a person was really in charge you just tell everybody what to do. Then you will get an efficient operation. Treat everybody like a robot for the sake of efficiency.

But then I found out that life works just the opposite. You also alienate everybody, and people get so upset they don't get anything done when they are treated impersonally. You don't get an efficient operation. The principle of this concept extended to the work level is to invite employee participation equal to responsibility for their job. I needed to learn to invite other workers to contribute to their jobs so they could participate in their work.

If I don't like my job or I don't have a job, I need to get aggressive and pray for one in line with God's will for me. I need to sit down and take some inventory and see what kind of work my talents suit me for, and pray to God for direction and go out and apply for such a job. I'm not meant to be a passive pushover. I didn't get sober in order to get swept under the rug out of my fear or out of my laziness. That's not what this concept is about. This concept throws us right into the middle of life and says we need to take responsibility for those areas in which we are not participating gully.

I participate in all of life by seeing how I can be of service. I don't wait for someone to ask me to participate. I volunteer as opportunities arise. I need to have the same attitude I have at an AA meeting. I do not wait for you to stick out your hand at a meeting. I take responsibility for shaking your hand at a meeting by putting my hand out first. I participate fearlessly.

The other aspect of the fourth concept of service that I need to do is to respect the "Right to Participate" in other people.

I need to rid myself of any feeling of superiority in order to be of service. I need to treat others equally. I used to think I was superior by not participating and that you were the fool by participating in life. Now I see how wrong I was.

I can refuse to be the dictator I was when I was drunk. I can resist the alcoholic impulse to control and run everything in AA, at home and at work. I need to watch this defect in me as a sponsor, husband and father, and employer.

I need to imitate God in the way he relates to me in order to be of service. God respects my freedom to drink or be sober, to do his will or not.

I need to do the same with you. You have the freedom to participate in life as you understand it. I need to let go of trying to control anyone or any situation in my life.

If I fail to do this, I take control and try to be God in my own life. Once more I practice the defect that reinforced my drinking, the exact nature of my wrongs: try to be God.

I am not to treat others as robots or slaves. I am to encourage them to take responsibility for their "Right to Participate" in life. I let others make their own mistakes and learn from them in the same way that God permits me my errors.

We all want to belong. I do not need to be fearful that if I encourage others to participate that I will be diminished. This kind of selfish thinking made a loner out of me when I drank.

My now attitude is to participate fully in life and to encourage this attitude in others. I take risks and encourage others to take risks. I participate and do not withdraw from challenges.

I need to ask myself if I am acting superior and preventing others from participating in life? Am I being a growth inhibitor or am I being a growth producer? I want you to have the thrill of participating in life through your own initiative and with your own discoveries.

I not only have the "right" to participate, I have the responsibility to participate in life with all the gifts God has given me.

I believe that when I die I'm going to have to answer for what I did with the talents that were given to me in life. Did I participate with them or not? Did I risk using them? Was I fearless in facing life's challenges?

My main talent is my alcoholism. What I know about my alcoholism is what I've discovered in writing inventory. When I am searching and fearless about myself in inventory, I become one in my relationship with God, I become autonomous. By participating in this process I learn to participate fearlessly in life. I prepare myself to be of service to others by being searching and fearless about my relationship with God. I am of service by participating fearlessly in life and inviting others to participate fearlessly in sobriety too.

The more I successfully participate in life sober through the program the more I need to share my discoveries of the truth with you. I need to spread the answer not the problem.

I can be of service by carrying a message that life's challenges can be met successfully and fearlessly. If you need hope, I can try to strengthen your resolve to participate in life fearlessly too. I need to hear this message from you too that we inspire and strengthen each other through the fourth concept of service.

The relationship of the fourth step, tradition, and concept of service is this: I participate fully in life by being searching and fearless about my oneness with God through inventory! I serve others by encouraging and accepting their "Right to Participate" fully in sobriety!

My fourth concept of prayer is this: Father, I thank you for the right to participate in life as a sober alcoholic. May I meet all challenges fearlessly for you rescued me because you need me, you are relying on me!

As we prepare to meditate let us call to mind any areas in our life where fear or laziness is preventing us from fully participating in life with any of our talents. It might be in an area of AA work, a relationship, our job, an artistic talent, or a sports ability.

I also want to examine my attitude in meeting life's challenges. Am I fearful or fearless?

Let us also see if we are preventing anyone else from participating in life. Is there anyone that we need to encourage to risk participating fully in life in some way? Have I been inhibiting anybody's growth by trying to control them or some situation in my life: Do I give others the right to make their own mistakes? Have I been the growth producer in my relationships with others?

Let us now meditate with a thought of gratitude to God for rescuing us from the grave and giving us a second opportunity to participate in life through our sobriety!

(Pause for three minutes of meditation.)

Working a step, tradition, or concept to me means that I am willing to take written inventory and allow it to surrender something within me. The fourth concept of service suggests to me that I surrender any feelings of inferiority or superiority and participate fearlessly in life and encourage others to do the same.

Let us write inventory on any relationships in AA, home, or work where I have voided responsibility to participate equally out of fear or laziness.

## HOMWORK: WRITING INVENTORY – PART ONE (My “Right to Participate”)

1. GOD and A.A.: Am I participating in AA discussion meetings or do I stay in my shell out of fear when something is bothering me?

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

- a) The Story: Sometimes I go to a discussion meeting and don't raise my hand when something is bothering me.
- b) What did I do wrong? Fear of what others will say about me keeps me from sharing.
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? Pray to be open to the voice of a loving God in the group conscience, not a rejecting or ridiculing God.

2. HOME: Do I avoid responsibility at home out of laziness?

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

- a) The Story: I work much of the time and don't participate occasionally in my son's play time at the YMCA.
- b) What did I do wrong? I get wrapped up in one set of responsibilities to the exclusion of others because working is more immediately rewarding.
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? Pray to balance my time better and participate more with my wife in bringing up our son.

2. WORK AND OTHER TALENTS (arts, sports, etc.): Am I fearless in risking financial failure by doing the work God calls me to, or do I stick to work that is more financially than spiritually rewarding?

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

- a) The Story: I was doing unrewarding work.
- b) What did I do wrong? I was afraid to risk a change because of fear of financial insecurity.
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? Pray to be fearless in following God's will for me by exercising my right to participate in life fully!

**HOMEWORK: WRITING INVENTORY – PART TWO**  
(Your “Right to Participate”)

4. GOD and AA: Am I a dictator as a sponsor or do I invite those I sponsor to participate in discussing their programs with me? Am I authoritarian or a growth producer?

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

- a) The Story: Sometimes I think I know better than those I sponsor.
- b) What did I do wrong? I try to decide for others instead of just sharing my experience, strength and hope.
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? Pray to be more humble in helping others by having them participate in their own program as God directs them, not as I direct them.

5. HOME: Am I dictatorial at home or do I view others as equal to me? Am I authoritarian or a growth producer?

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

- a) The Story: I try to control situations in my life at home so that my will is done.
- b) What did I do wrong? I see participation of others in situations as a threat, not a blessing.
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? Pray for a surrendered spirit to situations at home so that others can grow through their right to participate.

6 WORK AND OTHER TALENTS (arts, sports, etc.): Do I give others at work the same right to participation in their work that I want in mine? Am I authoritarian or a growth producer?

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

- a) The Story: I tend to be authoritarian in giving out work assignments.
- b) What did I do wrong? I dominate with the excuse that it is more efficient than being loving.
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? I should take the extra time to invite participation of my employees in the work projects I give them.