

PREPARING FOR THE SIXTH CONCEPT OF SERVICE

(Please read pp 29-31 of the “Twelve Concepts for World Service”)

THE SIXTH CONCEPT OF SERVICE

God has the ultimate responsibility for our service while we have the active responsibility for carrying the message.¹

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

1. What is my relationship to God in carrying the message? Do I take active responsibility for all twelve step work that comes my way? Do I surrender to God’s ultimate authority the outcome of that twelve step work? Do I surrender the ultimate responsibility to God for finances and relationships in my life?
2. Let us further reflect on our relationships in A.A., our intimate home relationships and our relationships at work. Do I give others the freedom they need to exercise their active responsibility towards life in the same way that God grants me complete freedom to carry the message? Do I extend to others my God-given freedom of choice?

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 SIXTH CONCEPT OF SERVICE

God has the ultimate responsibility for our service while we have the active responsibility for carrying the message.

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

This is one of my favorite concepts of service because it relieves me of the need to worry. The sixth concept of service clearly delineates the lines of responsibility between my Maker and myself. I have the responsibility to carry the message and God has the ultimate responsibility for my service. God gets people sober; I don't.

It is the same principle in my home and work life. As long as I make the efforts to do what God places in front of me to do, I am fulfilling my relationship with God by taking active responsibility for my life a day at a time. I then release the results of these actions to God who has ultimate responsibility for all the assignments He gives me. I no longer need to worry about money or any concern as long as I give service in my job.

Just as A.A. delegates authority and responsibility through the Conference to the General Service Board, so does God delegate carrying the message to us. What one of us can't do, we all can do together so we help each other carry the message. Together he gives us all the experience, strength and hope that we need. We then release our efforts to His love for He alone is ultimately responsible for all sobriety.

I not only want to carry the message but part of the active responsibility I have in the sixth concept is to help you carry the message so we can do together what I can not do alone.

Concept 6

On behalf of A.A. as a whole, our General Service Conference has the principal responsibility for the maintenance of our world services, and it traditionally has the final decision respecting larger matters of general policy and finance. But the Conference also recognizes that the chief initiative and the active responsibility in most of these matters should be exercised primarily by the trustee members of the Conference when they act among themselves as the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Just as the A.A. groups find themselves unable to act decisively respecting world service affairs unless they delegate a great amount of active authority and responsibility to their Conferences, so must the Conference in turn delegate a liberal administrative authority to the General Service Board, in order that its trustees may act freely and effectively in the absence of a Conference itself.

Concept 6

This critical need for trustee liberty of action raises several important questions.² Next to the Conference, A.A.'s Board of Trustees should be the most influential group of world servants that we have, and therefore, we shall have to consider carefully the kind and degree of authority, responsibility, leadership, and legal status the trustees must possess in order to function at top effectiveness over the years to come. We shall need to review and perhaps amend somewhat our present methods of choosing trustees. We shall need to define clearly the several kinds of professional and financial skills that will always be required for a balanced trusteeship. Only by so doing can we permanently insure the board's capability of future leadership.

Why should our trustees be given this very wide latitude of judgment and action? The answer is that we A.A.'s are holding them mainly responsible for all our service activities: A.A. World Services, Inc. (Including A.A. publishing), and The A.A. Grapevine, Inc. These entities (as of 1960) have combined gross receipts approaching one-half million dollars annually (1979 – in excess of four million annually.) Our trustees are also responsible for A.A.'s worldwide public relations. They are expected to lead in the formulation of A.A. policy and must see to its proper execution. They are the active guardians of our Twelve Traditions. The trustees are A.A.'s bankers. They are entirely responsible for the investment and use of our substantial reserve funds. The very wide range of their activities will be still further seen under "Concept XI" wherein the work of their five (now twelve) standing committees is described.

When God gives me responsibility, he also gives me the authority or ability to carry out that responsibility. Just as I am not tempted beyond my prayer power, so I am not given burdens without the God-given resources to accomplish them.

Bill now describes how the corporate structure of A.A. is built on the same principle: authority must have equal responsibility. I need to follow this principle in my service relationships with others: I need to give authority to those I give assignments to accomplish if I am to permit them to be of service.

While the trustees must always operate under close observation, guidance and sometimes direction of the Conference, it is nevertheless true that nobody but the trustees and their wholly-owned service corporations could possibly pass judgment upon and handle the very large number of transactions now involved in our total world service operation. In view of this very large responsibility, they must therefore be given a correspondingly large grant of authority and leadership with which to discharge it. We should quite understand, too, that the conduct of our world services is primarily a matter of policies and business. Of course, our objective is always a spiritual one, but this service aim can be achieved only by means of an effective business operation. Our trustees must function almost exactly like the directors of any large business corporation. They must have ample authority to really manage and conduct A.A.'s business. This is the basic corporate concept on which our structure of world service rests. We have deliberately chosen the corporate form rather than the institutional or governmental model, because it is well known that the corporation is a far superior vehicle when it comes to the administration of policy and business.

From top to bottom, our whole service structure indeed resembles that of a large corporation. The A.A. groups are the stockholders; the delegates are their representatives or proxies at the "annual meeting"; our General Service Board trustees are actually the directors of a "holding company." And this holding company, the General Service Board, actually owns and controls the "subsidiaries" which carry on our active world services.

² See Concept VIII for a definition of the trustees' powers and activities.

Concept 6

This very real analogy makes it even more clear that, just like any other board of directors, our trustees must be given large powers if they are to effectively manage the principal world affairs of Alcoholics Anonymous.

End of Reading

COMMENTARY

Every time I think of the sixth concept of service, a smile comes over me as a sigh in relief. It is the one concept that takes care of my lifelong alcoholic preoccupation with worrying. This concept clearly delineates the lines of responsibility between my Maker and me. God has the ultimate responsibility for my life while I have the active responsibility for the service I give in carrying the message. This is a very simple principle that I have been searching for all my life.

If I really surrender worrying of any kind to God since he has the ultimate responsibility for my life, it gives me the opportunity to be happy. For this alcoholic, an opportunity to be happy is a difficult one to accept because I am more comfortable if I can worry about something, such as my bank account or a relationship. We are so accustomed to living with impending doom from our drinking years that when we get sober the idea of being happy is a strange new idea. Yet that is what this concept is saying.

Either God has the ultimate responsibility for me or he doesn't. If he doesn't, then I do. And if I have the ultimate responsibility for myself I can tell you right now that I'm not going to make it. That is why I find this concept of service so reassuring.

Since God has the ultimate responsibility for my life, I can let go and let God. I make the efforts, but the results are up to him. Al Anon teaches a similar idea when it teaches us to release our concerns to God with love.

Knowing that God has the ultimate responsibility for my service, I am relieved of another obsession that resulted from my trying to run everything: my preoccupation with details. I don't need to hang on to every detail of my business and home life like I used to when I thought I was in charge.

I was the kind of boss that looked over your shoulder constantly and trusted no one. I didn't have a Higher Power who was ultimately responsible, so I felt that I was. As a result I missed the enjoyment of working. I missed the enjoyment of doing things with others. I missed the enjoyment of life because I was hanging on to every little detail of living.

The implications of letting go of the ultimate responsibility for what goes on, extends to other people. If I don't have to hang on to every detail myself, I don't have to hang on to every detail for you either. I can extend to you the same freedom that God gives to me. You have the same right to be happy that I do. You have your own Higher Power, and He has the ultimate responsibility for your life.

When I sponsor somebody, I don't have to worry if they will make it or not since I am not ultimately responsible for anybody else's sobriety including my own. It is my Higher Power that is ultimately responsible.

This is a new way of thinking for me. Unless I let go I cannot be happy. The more I'm in control the less happy I am. The great obsession of this abnormal drinker in living is to try to control life so I can enjoy it. While I am enjoying life, I am not controlling it. This paradox not only applies to alcohol. It applies to living.

This same principle applies to having good relationships in my life. When I try to control my family, relationships deteriorate quickly. The better my relationships are, the more I have released control of others. This concept of service contains profound lessons for living a fulfilling life.

Instead of being a tyrant at work, I can release concern about my employees to the ultimate responsibility of God. I need to be more concerned about the responsibility I have for my own work than trying to control others.

I can delegate liberty of action to you because God is in charge. I can trust the group conscience for the skills and guidance we both need to live a balanced life. I can also let go of worries about my financial future. The details of my life, including my every need, are in the hands of a loving God who is ultimately responsible for me. I can tell now how much he loves because he saved me from an alcoholic death and gave me sobriety when I asked for it. The sixth concept allows me to be happy because I do not have the ultimate responsibility for anything! God has the ultimate responsibility for everything.

The other half of the sixth concept of service defines the limit of my responsibilities in life. I have the active responsibility for carrying the message and all this entails.

When somebody calls me on the phone and says, "Dennis, I'm having trouble staying sober today," I'm actively responsible to be available to that person. If I say no to such requests, I get very miserable very quickly because I begin to lose contact with my main talent in my life, which is carrying the message. I used to think my main talent was being president of my publishing company and conducting music. I thought that my main talent in life was to be a husband, father and son. Not so. My main talent is my experience, strength and hope that I've gotten from my ten years of drinking and my years of sobriety. I was given that experience, strength and hope so that I could be helpful to someone else. That is the source of my self worth which I can state in three words when I'm down on myself: God needs me. When I carry the message, I am his mouth, his legs, his arms and his hands. If he wanted to send a message of sobriety another way, he would have sent somebody else. But God needs me so he sends me. He sends each one of us because each one of us has a unique message to give that no one else can.

Because of my alcoholic talent I feel that I am actively responsible for carrying the message God gave me to carry. The stakes are life and death: yours and mine. I might be able to help someone to a life of sobriety rather than an alcoholic death; by carrying a message I am able to stay sober myself.

I believe that when I die, I will need to make an accounting for my stewardship over my talents. Chief among them will be my talent for sobriety because without sobriety I am no good as a husband, father, son, business executive or musician. I can stay alive if I stay sober by carrying the message. This is why I give priority to my alcoholism, my main talent in life. I approach God through my talents. My main connection with God is through my alcoholism. I spend my time where I place my values. Therefore I need to be actively responsible for using my main talent in life, carrying the message.

To carry an effective message, I need to be prepared to give good service. I H.A.L.T. if I am Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired. I eat properly. Since I am hypoglycemic I avoid white sugar, white flour, coffee and cigarettes. I eat moderately and three times a day. I want to be healthy enough to carry a message of the health that is possible for a sober alcoholic. I take active responsibility for my health. I used to have sugar induced hangovers and depressions in sobriety until I stopped using white sugar, caffeine and nicotine. Of course, alcohol is 100% sugar. Hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) is said to affect most alcoholics³ and has symptoms such as “confusion and the inability to think straight or to make up one’s mind.”⁴ Longer lasting symptoms are irritability, depression, withdrawal, and low self esteem.

If I am angry, I stop and take an inventory and pray for a loving spirit. If I am lonely, I pray for a closer relationship with God. I reach out on the phone or at a meeting. If I am tired, I take a regular nap in the middle of each day if possible. Active responsibility implies the necessity to rest. I do all I can to carry a responsible message of sobriety!

I do not say no to an A.A. request. If I feel I am not competent, I risk failure anyway and do what is asked. I think that God has the ultimate responsibility for me and I only have the active responsibility to show up wherever he tells me to. If I do say no, I pray for the courage to say yes the next time. I remember that there is a loving God in charge of me who is trying to teach me responsibility for carrying the message.

The message for the last half of this concept is simply for me to show up and ignore my fear and laziness. God is ultimately responsible for me after I show up. I am actively responsible for showing up.

I have noticed about my life that only when I’m involved in my active partnership of carrying the message do the rest of life’s situations pale into their proper perspective. If I’m not busy trying to help someone, the problems that I have with money escalate. The problems I have in relationships escalate. But as soon as I get involved in trying to be helpful to another alcoholic, all these outside problems decrease. When I’m not carrying the message, back up they go.

This teaches me that the more I am involved in my primary purpose and let God be in control of the results of my life, the better my life becomes. When problems assume monumental

³ “Hypoglycemia; the disease your doctor won’t treat,” by Jeraldine Saunders and Dr. Harvey M. Ross, (Los Angeles, Pinnacle Books, 1980), p. 139. See Chapter 13, the “Alcohol Addict”

⁴ Ibid. p. 38

importance to me, I have taken back control over my life because I'm not involved in my primary purpose.

My primary purpose in life is not to be in charge of my bank account. My primary purpose in life is not romantic involvement. My happiness is not contingent on how much money I have in the bank or don't have in the bank. My happiness is not dependent on my relationships. The happiness I have found is really based on how much I am willing to give of myself in carrying the message. The more I am actively responsible in carrying the message, the happier I permit myself to be.

The same principle applies to my service relationships with others. I need to encourage you to be actively responsible in carrying your message of sobriety in the same way God gives me freedom to carry my message of sobriety. I want to encourage you not to worry since we are not ultimately responsible, only God is. I want to give you the complete freedom to be actively responsible to your Maker that God gives to me.

What is the relationship of the sixth step, the sixth tradition and the sixth concept of service? When I try to control my defects of character, they multiply and get worse. I am as powerless over my defects as I am over alcohol. I need to release my defects to an ultimately responsible power.

The defects that keep me from being actively responsible for carrying the message are mentioned in the sixth tradition: worrying about problems of money, property and prestige. The more I become involved with these problems, the less I am able to carry out my primary purpose in life of carrying the message to the alcoholic who still suffers. I need an ultimately responsible Higher Power to take care of my concerns about money, property and prestige.

When I am actively responsible for carrying the message by practicing the sixth concept in my service, I am not at all concerned about money, property and prestige. The sixth concept action completes the sixth tradition promise of unity: I can carry the message if I become actively responsible for my service and let God be ultimately responsible for the results of my efforts.

In other words, I don't get the newcomer sober or drunk. God has the ultimate responsibility for sobriety. But I do have active responsibility for carrying a message of sobriety and not one of money, property and prestige.

I understand the relationship of the sixth step, tradition and concept of service in these words: I ask God, who is ultimately responsible for me, to remove my attachment to my defects of character: pursuing money, property and prestige that I may be free to pursue my primary purpose in life: the active responsibility for carrying the message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

My sixth concept of prayer is this: *Father, may I let go of my obsessions with worrying about the outcome of relationships, finances, and details of my life and, instead simply take active responsibility for carrying a message of sobriety, a day at a time, as you direct me.*

Concept 6

As we prepare to meditate let us examine ourselves to see if we are trying to take on God's ultimate responsibility for any areas in our lives. Have we taken control? Are we worrying about the mortgage? Do we think God has forgotten about us in the relationship area?

If I am into ultimate responsibility, I can tell by the presence of fear and worry. I am trying to handle situations too big for my shoulders. I want to transfer these ultimate responsibilities to God in my meditation. Let us release every detail of our lives into God's loving care and keeping.

It is also good to take a look at active responsibility. Have I been active in the fellowship, have I been attending meetings, have I made myself available to help someone else, have I been sharing? How am I doing in the active responsibility area?

Finally, what I want to do is to thank God in the meditation for being ultimately responsible for me. I want to thank him for always looking out for me and for saving me despite my poor judgment and the mistakes that I make. He presented me with opportunities to get sober that I didn't dream of. He rescued me from an alcoholic death.

So I know that God is ultimately responsible for me. He is ultimately looking out for me. In the meditation I want to thank Him for it. The least that I can do in my gratitude is to be actively responsible for carrying the message. Let us meditate.

(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 sixth concept of service suggests to me that I surrender all of my concern about worrying about the ultimate outcome of anything. I no longer project disaster. Let us write inventory.

Homework: Writing Inventory – Part One
(God’s “Ultimate Responsibility”)

1. GOD AND AA: Do I worry about the outcome of my twelve step work? Do I feel guilty when someone I work with drinks again? Am I afraid that I won’t stay sober even though I work the program?

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

- a) The Story: In early sobriety I was afraid I couldn’t stay sober even though I worked the program.
- b) What did I do wrong? I thought my sobriety was a direct result of my efforts.
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? Pray to trust him to continue to give me the gift of sobriety as long as I’m actively responsible for working the steps, traditions and concepts of service.

2. HOME: Do I feel that God has forgotten about me in the relationship area? Do I feel I must take matters into my own hands? Do I feel that my prayers are unanswered?

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

- a) The Story: Before I met my soul mate I thought God had forgotten me.
- b) What did I do wrong? Relied on myself instead of trusting God. (“Delay is not denial.”)
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? Pray to totally trust him to be ultimately responsible for my love life and have the humility to admit that I was not ready for a relationship as soon as I thought I was.

3. WORK AND OTHER TALENTS (arts, sports, etc.): Do I worry about money? Do I try to hoard it out of my fear? Do I fear that my work will have disastrous financial results for my family?

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

- a) The Story: Sometimes I get fearful about the financial outcome of my life.
- b) What did I do wrong? I get occupied with God’s business – ultimate responsibility.
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? Pray to take active responsibility for working but leave the results in God’s loving hands.

HOMWORK: WRITING INVENTORY – PART TWO (My active responsibility)

4. GOD AND AA: Have I been negligent or saying, “No” to opportunities to carry the message? Has “creeping complacency” overcome me?

Inventory Example

(Try to condense to three sentences)

- a) The Story: Sometimes I am slow to let go of what I am doing when I am called for twelve step work on the phone.
- b) What did I do wrong? I don't become actively responsible as quickly as I should.
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? Pray to accept the realization that any interruption is God calling and to welcome it as an opportunity to fulfill my primary purpose in life.

5. HOME: Am I actively responsible for carrying a message of love and patience at home or am I irresponsible? Do I expect others to love me while I take little effort toward contributing a spirit of service in my relationship with others?

Inventory Example

(Try to condense to three sentences)

- a) The Story: Sometimes I do not give my wife the same freedoms God gives to me.
- b) What did I do wrong? I expect her to be perfect but excuse myself.
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? Pray to look only at my active responsibility for our relationship and release her service to the ultimate responsibility of her Maker.

6. WORK AND OTHER TALENTS (arts, sports, etc.): Has my message at work become one of money, property and prestige? Am I acting like I'm ultimately responsible for my work instead of only having active responsibility to execute what is put in front of me today?

Inventory Example

(Try to condense to three sentences)

- a) The Story: Sometimes I am tempted to be paralyzed when I need to take action in my business.
- b) What did I do wrong? I permit the size of my problems to overcome me.
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? Pray for a spirit of service by taking action about business challenges realizing that God has the ultimate responsibility for overcoming them.