

Preparing for the Seventh Concept of Service

(Please read pp. 32 – 35 of the “Twelve Concepts for World Service”)

THE SEVENTH CONCEPT OF SERVICE: We are empowered to give service and we are responsive to the group conscience concerning our service.

Let us prepare for the study of the seventh concept of service by examining the talents we are using to be of service in AA, at home and at work.

1. Are we serving to our full capabilities?
2. Have I resisted being accountable to others for my service?
3. Do I improve my service when the group conscience tells me I need to change?
4. If I am lonely and I do not have good relationships, is the group conscience telling me I need to give love rather than seek it?
5. When I am not being of service with my work talents, the group conscience speaks to me by not paying me. If my financial situation presents a problem, what is my attitude and motive in giving service? Do I seek to serve or seek to be rewarded?

“UNITY INSURES RECOVERY THROUGH SERVICE”
MEETING OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

THE SEVENTH CONCEPT OF SERVICE

We are empowered to give service and we are responsive to the group conscience concerning our service.¹

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

CONCEPT 7:

The seventh concept of service assures me that God gives me the power I need to be of service. Lack of power is no longer my dilemma. I now have the knowledge of His will for me and the power to carry that out, through my daily eleventh step.

I can be of service with this power to carry the message by being accountable to the group conscience for it. I can now be corrected without being argumentative or defensive.

I can begin to develop an ear for the voice of the group conscience when my service is lacking. If several people independently tell me the same things about my service, I can confirm where I need to grow in sobriety by consulting the group conscience even further.

I need to apply the same principle in my home and work life. If I have a poor loving relationship, I can be responsive to the group conscience and change where indicated. If I don't work, I don't get paid. The group conscience speaks by not paying me for the work not done.

Concept 7

The Conference recognizes that the Charter and the Bylaws of the General Service Board are legal instruments: that the trustees are thereby fully empowered to manage and conduct all the world affairs of Alcoholics Anonymous. It is further understood that the Conference Charter itself is not a legal document: that it relies instead upon the force of tradition and the power of the A.A. purse for its final effectiveness.

This concept may appear to be contradictory: it may look like the collision of an irresistible force with an immovable object, On the one hand, we see a Board of Trustees which is invested with complete legal power over A.A.'s funds and services, while, on the other hand, we find that A.A.'s General Service Conference is clothed with such great traditional influence and financial power that, if necessary, it could overcome the legal rights of the Board of Trustees. It can therefore give the trustees directives and secure compliance with them – practically speaking.

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

Concept 7

This means that the practical power of the Conference will nearly always be superior to the legal power of the trustees. This superior power in the Conference flows from the powerful traditional influence of the Charter itself. It derives from the large majority of group-chosen delegates in the Conference. And finally, in any great extremity, it would rest upon the undoubted ability of the delegates to deny the General Service Board the monies with which to operate- viz., the voluntary contributions of the A.A. groups themselves. Theoretically, the Conference is an advisory body only; but practically speaking, it has all of the ultimate rights and powers that it may ever need.

When we reflect that our trustees have no salaried financial interest in their posts, we can be quite sure that such a board would never think of legally contesting the clear and sustained will of the Conference delegates and the A.A. areas they represent. If someday the chips were really down, there would be little chance of a stalemate. The Conference would find itself in complete control of the situation. As the conscience of A.A., the delegates would find themselves in ultimate authority over our General Service Board and also its corporate arms of active world service.

The history of the development is interesting and important. When, in 1950, the Conference Charter was drawn, this question of where the final authority ought to rest was a very moot matter. Would the Conference have the last word, or would the trustees? By then, we knew for sure that complete and final authority over our funds and services should never continue to reside in an isolated Board of Trustees who had an unqualified right to appoint their own successors. This would be to leave A.A. world services in the hands of a paternalistic group, something entirely contradictory to the "group conscience" concept of Tradition Two. If the trustees were to be our permanent service administrators and the guardians of A.A.'s Twelve Traditions, it was evident that they must somehow be placed in a position where they would necessarily have to conform to our Traditions, and to the desires of our Fellowship.

Through this concept I willingly become accountable for lack of service since I can improve by being responsive to the group conscience rather than hostile and withdrawn. This concept gives me the ability to grow to the extent I am willing to respond to the group conscience.

I also help you to be responsive by being an honest and loving friend whenever you ask me for a group conscience reading. I am able to bolster your confidence in the service you have to give since I know through the seventh concept that God has given you all the powers and talents needed to be of service.

Bill comments in the need for trustees to be responsible "trusted servants" by exercising their leadership "freely and adequately." In the same way I want to be responsible the group conscience by taking leadership in meeting the assignments that are given me.

It thus became obvious that new trustee choices – subject to Conference approval – would still have to be left pretty much to the trustees themselves. Only they would be capable of understanding what the board needed. Except in a time of reorganization, this method of selection would have to continue – certainly as to the larger part of the board's membership. Otherwise, the board could not be held accountable for management results. We might wind up with no effective management at all. For these reasons, the Conference was given the right to reject, but not to elect, new trustee candidates. (Trustee elections are now held during Conference Charter week.)

It was out of these considerations that our present Conference Charter was developed, a structure which clearly gives the Conference a final and ultimate authority, but which nevertheless legally preserves the right of the trustees to function freely and adequately, just as any business board of directors must. This arrangement is in strict conformity with the "trusted servant" provision of Tradition two, which contemplates that our servants, within the scope of their duties, should be trusted to use their own experience and judgment. Trusted servants at all A.A. levels are expected to exercise leadership, and leadership is not simply a matter of submissive housekeeping. Of course, leadership cannot function if it is constantly subjected to a barrage of harassing directives.

In learning to be accountable to the group conscience, I need to learn to seek advice from others. I need to resist the temptation of a hasty “yes” or “no” simply to get rid of a vexing problem. Being accountable now means to take the trouble to ask questions before making decisions. Bill speaks of the sparing use of authority in making decisions in order that “harmonious cooperation” might result.

Now we come to another interesting question often raised by new General Service Board trustees. They say, “We trustees have certain rights and duties which are legally established by our Charter. Are we not violating this Charter when we accept a Conference opinion or directive? We should have perfect legal right to say ‘no’ to anything and everything that the Conference wants.”

Our trustees certainly do have this absolute legal authority, but there is nothing in their Charter that *compels* them to use *all* of their authority *all* of the time. They are quite at liberty to accept advice or even direction from anyone at all. They can simply refrain from using their absolute legal right to say “no” when it would be much wiser, all things considered, to say “yes.” Just as the Conference should avoid the overuse of its traditional authority, so should the trustees avoid the overuse of their legal rights. The President of the U.S., for example, has an absolute legal right to veto congressional legislation. Yet ninety-nine percent of the time he does not do it, because (a) he likes a piece of legislation or (b) he does not like the legislation, but believes a veto would nevertheless be unwise or impossible of success. Whether or not he will exercise his veto is determined by circumstances. It is just like that with A.A.’s Board of Trustees.

If, therefore, in the years ahead, the Conference will always bear in mind the actual rights, duties, responsibilities, and legal status of the General Service Board, and if the trustees in their deliberations will constantly realize that the Conference is the real seat of ultimate service authority, we may be sure that neither will be seriously tempted to make a rubber stamp out of the other. We may expect that in this way grave issues will always be resolved and harmonious cooperation will be the general rule.

End of Reading

COMMENTARY

My understanding of the seventh concept of service is dependent on my understanding of the relationship of the seventh step to the seventh tradition.

My major shortcoming is relying upon money, property and prestige as the barometer of my happiness instead of total reliance upon God.

The more I depend upon God, the more independent I become. Developing faith is the spiritual purpose of financial lack in my life. When God wants my undivided attention, He gives me financial problems, relationship problems, or places me flat on my back in a hospital bed. The answer is always the same: when will I begin relying on him instead of money, property, prestige and people, places and things?

I become spiritually self-supporting when I place God first in my life. If spiritual growth is my primary purpose, I won’t want to take the first drink. But if I place money, property, prestige, or lust first in my life, they become my gods for I can only serve one master.

If driving a Rolls Royce is the aim of my sobriety, I am in big trouble. The discussion of the seventh tradition in the “12 & 12” (p. 165) makes it clear that a spirit of poverty is the correct approach to money, property and prestige:

“Then our trustees wrote a bright page of A.A. history. They declared for the principle that A.A. must always stay poor. Bare running expenses plus a prudent reserve would henceforth be the Foundation’s financial policy. Difficult as it was, they officially declined that ten thousand dollars, and adopted a formal, airtight resolution that all such future gifts would be similarly declined. At that moment, we believe, the principle of corporate poverty was firmly and finally embedded in A.A. tradition.”

I interpret this passage to also be my ideal in my relations with money at home and at work as well as in A.A. “Bare running expenses plus a prudent reserve (*2) would henceforth be (my) financial policy... the principle of (a spirit of personal) poverty was firmly and finally embedded in (living in my life the seventh) A.A. Tradition.”

The example given on p.67 of the “Twelve Concepts for World Service” concerning the second warranty of the Twelfth Concept shows that a prudent reserve is one year’s worth of operating expenses.

If a spirit of poverty is important for the fellowship of A.A. to stay in existence, then I need the same principle to stay sober and close to God. It does not mean that I might not be entrusted with large amounts of money with which to give service. It does mean that I must see that God stays primary in my life and not the pursuit of money, property and prestige.

My understanding of the relationship of the seventh step and tradition is this: I am spiritually self-supporting if I place God first in my life and not my shortcomings of choosing money, property and prestige over God as I did in my drinking days. My primary purpose then was greed, not carrying the message.

The first half of the seventh concept of service, “We are empowered to give service” flows from the seventh step and tradition. When I give up my shortcoming of seeking money instead of God, my Maker reveals to me my talents for giving service and gives me the power I need to use these talents in His service.

Just as the trustees are “fully empowered to manage and conduct all of the world service affairs of Alcoholics Anonymous” (“Twelve Concepts for World Service,” p.32), I am empowered with the gift of sobriety to serve others. I am also given the talents and the power to use them to be financially self-supporting as well as spiritually self-supporting.

Because I am empowered to be self-supporting, I don’t have to be worried about my ability to stay sober a day at a time as long as I work a program, Likewise, I am empowered to be financially self-supporting. I don’t need to be afraid anymore of my ability to financially support my family and myself. The first half of the seventh concept guarantees me this.

I can be fearless about the appearance of money in my life as long as I am working the principles of the steps, traditions and concepts of service in my life a day at a time.

All I have to do is to be of service with the work God places in front of me a day at a time and I will not only be spiritually self-supporting but financially self-supporting. “We found that we could not place money first. For us, material well being always followed spiritual progress; it never proceeded. (“Big Book,” p.127)

My response in using this power that He is giving me is to try to encourage other people; not to be a wet blanket, but to try to encourage others to use their power to be self-supporting, especially the person who is newly sober. I don't collude with negativity in others but I try to encourage what is positive.

Lack of power is no longer my dilemma because once I got sober and began to work the steps, traditions and concepts, God gives me all the power that I need to accomplish any of the jobs I am assigned. I have the feeling about myself that there is nothing out there that can defeat me, nothing. His power is mine as long as I am sober through working the steps, traditions and concepts, a day at a time. I have all the power that I need to be self-supporting in my life and to do the things that God wants me to do. This is what the first half of this seventh concept of service is saying to me.

God gives me this power because He loves me. He even gave me the power of my talents when I was drinking. God has not made me to be a rubber stamp; He respects my freedom. He gives me my power and He wants me to use it. Even if I don't want to use it the way He wants me to, He still respects my freedom and lets me go my own way. He lets me say “yes”, or cast a veto on His great plans for me.

When I drank and misused my talents, He let me, because He knew that I would come back to Him and want to use them in the right way.

This is what the concepts of service are: a guide about how to use our gifts in the right way, how to express our love through service!

We are no longer powerless people!

The second half of the seventh concept of service is my guide to seeing that I use the power of my talents correctly in sobriety: “we are responsive to the group conscience concerning our service.”

No person can see his or her own shadow. I cannot correct myself as easily as others can. If I as to give good service, I need to be able to improve it. I cannot improve unless I become accountable to the group conscience.

The group conscience most often speaks to me through my sponsor and my friends. Sometimes when I am hard of hearing, the group conscience has to get my attention more dramatically.

For example, if I am not doing a good job at work, I might get fired. If I am not working a program, I will want to drink. If I am unloving, I won't have a soul mate or many close

friends. If I don't live a life of attraction, few will ask me to sponsor them or pitch at meetings. These are all ways the group conscience seeks to give me feedback.

Loneliness means that I am not giving love. If I seek rewards rather than giving service, I will be disappointed. I need to give away what it is that I seek. If I only use part of my work talents because I am afraid to risk using my major work talents out of fear of financial insecurity, I will not feel fulfilled. The group conscience of the world holds my purse strings and speaks to me quite effectively when I don't put out in life.

Just as the Conference holds the power of the purse over the trustees if they get out of line, the group speaks to me if I do not serve to my full capability with each of my talents.

When I drank, I would never be accountable to anyone out of pride. I set myself up as my own false God in life. This is the exact nature of my wrongs; I thought I was in charge so I wasn't accountable to anyone.

I believe that on that last day, I will be called to be accountable to God for the use of all my talents, particularly my main talent, which is the gift of my sobriety.

The last half of the seventh concept is preparing me to be able to give a good report of myself by learning to correct myself now by listening to the group conscience.

I have always resisted the group conscience. I have never had a trusting attitude toward it. I regarded the group as a threat to my liberty. I see now though, that I was wrong.

When I drank and the group conscience didn't reward me financially, I thought that the world didn't appreciate the genius that I really was. I arrogantly thought, "Why bother to explain anything to others anyway, since they weren't capable of understanding me."

When I was a child, I acted like a child toward the group conscience. I thought God was punishing me, by denying me financial and relationship rewards! I see now though, that He was only correcting me so I would recognize proper direction on my life in sobriety and appreciate the applause of the group conscience.

The group conscience is God's loving way of talking to me. The reason that it corrects me if my service is lacking is so it may reward me when I give good service.

We can all think of rewarding times when the group conscience has applauded us with its love. The group conscience loves us when it applauds us as we receive an A.A. Birthday cake. How nice that feels. The applause caresses us when we share something helpful at a meeting or give a good pitch. How good we feel when we give that first birthday cake to someone we sponsor. The group conscience is telling us we did a good job. When we give a nice gift and others "ooh" and "aah" over it, we feel the appreciation of the group conscience. When we go out of our way to do something nice for someone, his or her gratitude is an expression of love from the group conscience.

These are examples of the positive feedback of the group conscience. Some of us went to extremes in this regard and only sought the approval of others.

In sobriety I learn that I must accept correction if I am to be applauded later. Therefore, I welcome correction because it might mean the difference between drinking or staying sober, between life and death!

In fact, when I am unsure of the course I should take, I seek out the opinion of several people in order to hear the voice of the group conscience. I now regard the group conscience as my ally, not my enemy.

Losing my fear of being responsive to the group conscience is the challenge the last half of the seventh concept of service presents to my sobriety.

If I do not improve my service when the group conscience tells me to change, I will have difficulties that won't end in my life until I pray for an open mind to hear the voice of the group conscience.

The one word that tells me that I am not hearing the voice of the group conscience in my life is when I perceive everything as a "struggle." Am I "struggling" in my sobriety? Am I "struggling" to maintain a soul mate relationship? Am I "struggling" to earn a living?

If I am "struggling" rather than making efforts and practicing acceptance, I am in trouble.

I "struggle" when I do not rely on other people to help me be effective in giving service. I "struggle" when I try to do everything by myself. I "struggle" when I don't pray before attempting anything.

I can do a much better job on a twelve step all if two of us go. When there are two of us giving service there is no longer a "struggle".

Reflect on the way we got sober. It took two of us to get sober, not one of us.

I "struggle" when I refuse to accept the voice of the group conscience. I "struggle" until I surrender "my" way for "our" way.

The rewards of being responsive to the group conscience by being teachable are enormous: a seemingly effortless sobriety in A.A., oneness with a soul mate and family, peace of mind in my work.

One of the greatest blessings of accepting correction so I can give better service by being one with the group conscience, is the power of the group conscience at prayer: *"If two of you agree on something and pray for it in my name, it will be done for you by my Father in Heaven."* (Mt. 18:19)

In summary, the relationship of the seventh step, tradition and concept of service for me is this: I can devote myself to my primary purpose in life, of carrying the message to the alcoholic who still suffers, if I accept the corrections of the group conscience to my service which result when I place money, property, or prestige first in my life, rather than God.

If I hide from the voice of the group conscience like I did when I drank, I will stay in my “loner” shell and deprive myself of the rewards that come for being fearlessly accountable. The guilty fear exposure. I no longer have anything to be guilty about.

Outgoing happy people in A.A. were once loners like me. Not fearing correction from the group conscience is a sign of maturity in sobriety.

My seventh concept of service is this: Father, I thank you for giving me unlimited power to be of service. I pray for enough humility that I will be spiritually responsible and accept the corrections of the group conscience to my service. May I not be overly sensitive and react out of hurt feelings. May I be refined in the fire of your correcting love. May I hear your loving voice in the group conscience calling me to even greater service!”

The questions I want to ask myself are there as we prepare for meditation on the seventh concept of service. Do I feel that I have no special abilities in life? Am I lonely? Am I hurting financially? Is everything a “struggle”?

If so, am I willing to ask the group conscience for a “reading” on my problem? Will I be responsive to the group conscience and trust it to help me?

Will I risk failure by using my talents to help others? Will I love when I feel lonely? Will I seek to give service rather than seek financial rewards?

Have I put my love or financial needs ahead of my relationship with God? Is God first in my life?

I want to thank God for giving me the power to serve Him and for giving me the comfort and the support of the group conscience. I am particularly grateful for the love the group conscience has shown me at A.A. meetings. May I in turn be part of the loving voice of the group conscience in my relationships with others. Let us meditate.

(Pause for three minutes of meditation.)

Working a step, tradition or concept means that I am willing to take written inventory and allow it to surrender me. The seventh concept of service suggests to me that I use the talents God has given me to be of service and that I learn how to better use them from the corrections I get from the group conscience.

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

1. GOD and AA: Is my sobriety uncomfortable? Do I work the steps daily and keep God and sobriety first in my life? Do I help others give service?

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

- a) The Story: I could be more helpful to others in AA who get discouraged.
 - b) What did I do wrong? Think of what I need rather than what others might need.
 - c) What would God have me do instead next time? Pray to be helpful to others by pointing out that we can share the power we have been given to be sober with others.
2. HOME: Am I lonely? Do I place human relationships ahead of my relationship with God? Do I give love, or just seek it?

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

- a) The Story: Sometimes I expect my wife to be more loving to me.
 - b) What did I do wrong? Think of what I want rather than giving away what I want.
 - c) What would God have me do instead next time? Pray to be loving rather than seeking love.
3. WORK AND OTHER TALENTS (arts, sports, etc.): Am I struggling financially? Have I made a false God out of pursuing financial success rather than pursuing a relationship with my Maker? Am I serving to my full capabilities?

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

- a) The Story: I was fearful of my financial situation and was afraid to use my main work talents because I thought they weren't financially popular with others.
- b) What did I do wrong? I let fear paralyze me rather than trusting God and risking failure.
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? The more I am of service in A.A., the more my seemingly unrelated financial problems straighten out as I concentrate on service and not fear.

HOMWORK: WRITING INVENTORY – PART TWO (Being Accountable)

4. GOD and A.A.: Will I change when the group conscience of A.A. tells me my program is stagnant? Do I resent or welcome the group conscience in A.A.? Do I hear a loving or condemning voice of the group conscience?

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

- a) The Story: It took me nine months of going to A.A. meetings before I liked to go.
- b) What did I do wrong? I preferred being a loner to exposing myself to the group conscience.
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? Pray to risk sharing myself at discussion meetings (especially stag meetings) so that I stay comfortable with the group conscience.

5. HOME: Do I struggle in my relationships? Are frequent arguments at home a sign of my lack of unity with others? What works when I have good relationships?

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

- a) The Story: I think others are wrong when I can't get along with them.
- b) What did I do wrong? I don't listen to the voice of the group conscience to see if I need to change.
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? Pray for an open mind to be responsive to the state of my love relationships with others.

6. WORK & OTHER TALENT (arts, sports, etc.): Do I see my job satisfaction as a result of the quality of my service? Where do I need to change if I am not financially self supporting?

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

- a) The Story: Sometimes I feel uncomfortable with my job.
- b) What did I do wrong? I don't do toughest assignments first but try to put them off.
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? Pray for a greater sensitivity to the requirements of the group conscience at work for me to do my best work.