

We've Made a Decision--Don't Confuse Us With the Facts!

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If that sounds like your group, you may want to work toward a better-informed group conscience

I HATE SPEAKERS who begin their talks with a definition, because I feel I must be an idiot if they have to define a word for me. However, the Random House College Dictionary defines the word "inform" as follows: "to train or instruct; to supply knowledge or enlightenment." The opposite of inform is conceal.

It is probably close to the truth to say that most AA problems come right back to the *uninformed* group conscience. For instance: not supporting district, area, or GSO; not participating in district or area affairs; having group bosses instead of group servants; not permitting God to express himself in our group conscience, by failing to have a group conscience meeting.

Painful as it may be, the place to start in achieving an informed group conscience is with myself. I remember when I was new and judgmental. I told an old-timer that the group was crazy--and he told me to go over in the corner and count myself. That has not always been an easy task for me. My first sponsor took me to a group conscience meeting in my home group and later to district and area meetings, where I found the group conscience again at work. He introduced me to our AA literature, especially *AA Comes of Age*, as well as our AA Guidelines and *The AA Service Manual*.

So through the years, it has been the sum total of all my AA experiences that I take with me to the group conscience meeting. And still I find my home group voting to do the exact opposite of what I talked them into last month. We have a little sign hanging on the wall of our meeting room that fits me pretty well. It says: "It is what you learn after you know it all that counts." I suspect that this process of becoming informed may be never-ending.

I believe that for a group conscience to be well informed, we must become knowledgeable about many things. First, we must be knowledgeable about our Twelve Traditions. The future of our entire Fellowship depends on it. All we have to do is look back to the first half of the last century to see what happened to the Washingtonians. It's no exaggeration to say that the Washington Society might be flourishing today had it had our Traditions.

Second, for the group conscience to be informed, someone in the group had better know something about service and our service structure. How often we have heard a member, not necessarily a new member, dismiss service with the comment "That's all politics--let's talk about recovery." I wonder how we could talk about recovery if there hadn't been service first. If there hadn't been service, how would that newcomer ever have heard about AA? I've been raised in AA to believe that service is giving it away in order to keep it. I don't know how to separate service from recovery. As one old-timer said, "Before, we were irresponsible; now, we try to be responsible."

I'm not sure that it's possible for a group to isolate itself totally from AA as a whole, not if that group buys AA literature from the General Service Office. But the uninvolved group can get every bit as sick as the

individual member who says, "To hell with the group." A group that doesn't become a part of district or area affairs is practicing a very dangerous game of big-shotism. It is saying in effect, "We don't need those guys." It is like me as a newcomer, saying that the group was crazy and I knew best. This kind of reasoning results in the group's failing to exercise any responsibility in carrying the AA message into prisons or taking action to help get the AA message into the home of the drunk who lives only five blocks from the meeting place. I firmly believe that such groups deny true spiritual recovery to their own members. For unity, the need to be an active part of a larger, broader perspective, is directly opposed to the sick and lonely self-centeredness that was my drinking life.

I want to share with you an example of what can be achieved by ensuring that the group conscience is informed. Two years ago in New Mexico, only slightly more than half of our groups contributed to GSO. In late 1982, I talked it over with my sponsor, a past delegate, and wrote a letter to each group that hadn't contributed. The letter was intended to clear up a lack of understanding about why we need to contribute to GSO. The price of literature, it explained, is set to meet the costs of services that we demand from GSO--those expenses not met through group contributions. So even if a group contributes to GSO, it must pay higher literature prices because of groups that do not contribute.

The results of this letter were amazing. By the end of 1982, 72.9% of our groups in New Mexico had contributed to GSO. That ended up being the fifth highest percentage among the seventy-six delegate areas in the United States. It all seems to come down to being able to explain why.

Then, I wonder how often we go on to share our experiences with newcomers regarding the Higher Power-God as we understand him, as he has chosen to express himself in our group conscience. In the group I belong to, the blindest of us can look back over the past years and see the hand of a Higher Power in our group conscience decisions. How often in AA elections has a name been pulled from the hat when we couldn't get the two-thirds majority necessary in balloting, and later on it is clear that there could not have been any other choice. To me, this is a perfect illustration of doing our part and letting God do his.

I have learned, too, that I can be bad for my group. I can pursue my own egotistical needs, or I can give myself over to the group with a willingness to serve. But a group can be bad for me, too. A sponsor once told me, "If your group allows you to be a big shot, it is the wrong group for you." He was exactly right.

In summary, if we are to truly achieve an informed group conscience, we will as individuals ensure that we are knowledgeable about our AA way of life. We will read our literature and be willing to share that with newcomers. We will understand and participate in our service structure. We will ensure that we truly have group conscience meetings. Dealing with the group conscience has always involved, for me, reliance on the Serenity Prayer. The elements of serenity, courage, and wisdom have been essential. However, it is a tremendous comfort to me to know that our Higher Power, God as I choose to call him, does express himself in our group conscience.

I want AA to survive for myself, for my son, and for the as yet unborn members of the future. And that requires that I become responsible. God will indeed take care of us, but only if we do our part.