

"Medallions, on the other hand, are not universally considered an embodiment of the Fellowship as such. Many stories are told about the role that the coins play in an individual's continuing sobriety: the coins act as symbolic recognition of the length of sobriety. They are not the sobriety itself and any attempt to make medallions more than a symbol may lead perilously towards ego-inflation, self-glorification, rather than ego-deflation (see Tradition Twelve).

"The committee felt that the desire to protect the unique meaning of AA's symbol is at the foundation of litigation, as well as the fear of the trivialization of the mark. But despite the vehemence with which we feel 'ownership' of the symbol, we suspect that the belief that we (or anyone) can 'possess' the symbol is a fallacy.

"It actually works against the foundation of the Steps that lead us to sobriety. Ownership necessarily involves control and to argue over that control through litigation takes the focus away from the fact that we are ultimately powerless. We can own the meaning of the symbol, and if someone uses the graphic, our meaning will not be diminished, as long as we keep the principles it represents in sight.

"The committee finally questioned the goals of litigation, what would actually be gained from a lawsuit. We suspect that the harm done internally as a result of litigation would be far worse than the harm others could do to our 'property' from the outside. At the base of this approach is the trust that is the foundation of AA. It is our trust that AA principles will work to protect our name, just as our trust in God is the foundation of our program and of our lives. Warranty Five says that we can ". . . confidently trust AA opinion, public opinion, and God Himself to take care of Alcoholics Anonymous. . . ."

"Concept Seven states [The Conference] Charter itself is not a legal document. . . it relies instead upon the force of tradition . . . for its final effectiveness."

"To us, the fear that the incorporation of the symbol by others outside the Fellowship would somehow detract from the significance of the symbol is really unfounded. No one outside the Fellowship can detract from AA's strength if we stick to the Steps, Traditions and Concepts, which unite us.

"The registered trademarks, service marks and logos are symbols of our spiritual Fellowship, Alcoholics Anonymous, and should be treated as such.

"The General Service Conference is a living entity. From the group conscience will eventually emerge an expression of the will of a loving Power greater than ourselves proven to be firmly linked to the Traditions and Warranties, keeping us safe for as long as we are needed."

The ad hoc committee report was debated on Tuesday and Thursday of Conference week, and the subject of chips and medallions came up again during a final sharing session on Friday. The chairperson of the AAWS Board made the following statement at that time: "The AAWS Board will immediately begin a thorough review of its policies regarding our marks, will do everything possible to avoid initiating litigation, and will prepare a revised policy statement to be ready for next year's Conference."

Immediately after the Conference, the General Service Board accepted AAWS's recommendation to discontinue protecting the circle and triangle symbol as one of AA's registered marks. And by early June, the trustees reached substantial unanimity in support of AAWS's statement that, to avoid the suggestion of association or affiliation with outside goods and services, AA World Services, Inc. would phase out the "official" or "legal" use of the circle and triangle.

If you're wondering how to identify Conference-approved literature in the future, it will carry the words "This is AA General Service Conference-approved literature." As pieces of literature are due for reprinting, the symbol will be deleted; and new materials will carry only the Conference-approved wording.

Like the Serenity Prayer and the slogans, which have never had official recognition, the circle and triangle will most likely continue to be used widely for many AA purposes. The difference from earlier practice is that its official use to denote Alcoholics Anonymous materials will be phased out.

(This material is adapted from the August-September issue of the GSO newsletter Box 4-5-9; portions of the ad hoc committee report are taken from the Final Report of the 1993 General Service Conference.)