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# On Anonymity

*by Dr. Leonard V. Strong, Jr.*

THE anonymity of Alcoholics Anonymous is a relative term. You are not anonymous to your associates, to your family or to your fellows. You travel incognito if you choose and largely to the extent you choose. The press often times, at some expense to themselves, have been most courteous in honoring the spirit of anonymity whether or not they sensed at the time the value it held for those yet unrecovered, or could fully comprehend the role it played in recovery.

Intermittently and for what appeared at the time, good reason, individuals have laid aside its cloak and represented themselves as participants of Alcoholics Anon-

ymous. But to the knowledge of this writer, none has ever betrayed the confidence of his conferees in either regard to anonymity or to the confessions that have been made to him in private. Each category is equally sacred and is held as privileged communications.

The disclosure of one's business affairs, state of health, social, political, or religious affiliations is reserved to that person's discretion, when he alone is involved. A doctor or priest may not divulge, and in most instances is estopped by law from divulging, even on the witness stand, information received in the course of carrying out his professional duties.

The anonymity in Alcoholics Anonymous is a means of carrying out the intent of privileged communications imposed ethically and legally on physicians and clergymen. It is at once your strength and your bulwark. It should not be lightly laid aside and never taken from another without his authorization. And finally if anonymity is sacrificed, the perpetrator is ipso facto no longer AA.

Conflicting opinions arise largely out of a lack of precision in speech and come to represent a contradiction in terms. Devices assume the proportions of principles which in turn are confused with policies.

The principles of Alcoholics Anonymous are contained in the title and in the Twelve Steps plus the negative but important one of avoiding controversy which generates resentments.

The policy of Alcoholics Anonymous is consistent with the principles. Anonymity besides being a spiritual principle is a policy in that it averts both stigma and aggrandizement. Communal poverty is a policy in that wealth is a source of controversy. It is policy not to participate in political or sectarian issues for the same reason. To have a minimum of organization avoids the temptation of internal politics and conflict. The policy of attraction rather than promotion is a buttress to the other policies as well as a source of spirit-

ual strength. Simplicity of the qualifications for membership is a policy. The request to the press to respect anonymity is a policy. It is a policy for speakers and writers to mention that the ideas expressed are their own and do not necessarily reflect those of Alcoholics' Anonymous as a whole. It is a policy not to conduct hospitals, retreats, research, education, rehabilitation. It is a policy to make this way of life available to those who seek it.

For these purposes various devices have arisen. The congregation of adherents have formed groups and have employed persons to act as liaison between the recovered and the unrecovered. Intergroup committees have arisen and serve as clearing houses to abet hospitalization and public relations locally. Sectional conferences have developed for a wider discussion of common problems. The Works Publishing Company was formed to print a book which would help some not otherwise approachable.

The Alcoholic Foundation is a device by which individuals and groups are related through an office maintained for correspondence and which by its ability to muster group pressure can censor transgressors and those who seek personal profit or to use the good name of Alcoholics Anonymous for purpose not in keeping with its stated policy. Since it is a medium implementing

the Twelfth Step on an international plane and is supported by the groups or members it must be responsive as well as responsible. If it can only earn their support, not alone financially but more especially in consolidating sentiment, by some form of participation on their part then that participation must be welcomed. This is axiomatic and there are two other coequal axioms. One is: that the services of the central office must be continued if many alcoholics are not to die prematurely or to go insane (only a small fraction have been permitted the opportunity of Alcoholics Anonymous) and the other is: that any person or persons acting to bring the name of

Alcoholics Anonymous into disrepute either by proselyting, commercializing, by violation of anonymity or by any other means must be curbed or the effects will condemn many to insanity or death. Such a curb, if it is to be effectual and not create factions must be exercised with the full confidence and cooperation of all. This confidence is now mediated through the founders. How is it to be perpetuated if not by some form of participation.

Yet another device is available and that is the Grapevine. It serves to reflect current thought and activities and can serve to keep principles and policies alive by reiteration.

