

The eleventh of a series
of articles explaining
The Twelve Traditions

by
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TRADITION ELEVEN

*"OUR PUBLIC RELATIONS POLICY IS BASED ON ATTRACTION
RATHER THAN PROMOTION; WE NEED ALWAYS
MAINTAIN PERSONAL ANONYMITY AT THE
LEVEL OF PRESS, RADIO AND FILMS."*

WITHOUT its legions of well-wishers, AA could never have grown as it has. Throughout the world, immense and favorable publicity of every description has been the principal means of bringing alcoholics into our fellowship. In AA offices, clubs, and homes telephones ring constantly. One voice says, "I read a piece in the newspapers . . .", another, "We heard a radio program . . .", and still another, "We saw a moving picture . . .", or, "We saw something about AA on television . . ." It is no exaggeration to say that half of AA's membership has been led to us through channels like these.

The inquiring voices are not all alcoholics or their families. Doctors read medical papers about Alcoholics Anonymous and call for more information. Clergymen see articles in their church journals, and also make inquiries. Employers learn that great corporations have set their approval upon us, and wish to discover what can be done about alcoholism in their own firms.

Therefore a great responsibility fell upon us to develop the best possible public relations policy for Alcoholics Anonymous. Through many painful membership has been led to us through at what that policy ought to be. It is

the opposite in many ways of usual promotional practice. We found that we had to rely upon the principle of *attraction* rather than of *promotion*.

Let's see how these two contrasting ideas—attraction and promotion—work out. A political party wishes to win an election, so it advertises the virtues of its leadership to draw votes. A worthy charity wants to raise money; forthwith its letterhead shows the name of every distinguished person whose support can be obtained. Much of the political, economic, and religious life of the world is dependent upon publicized leadership. People who symbolize causes and ideas fill a deep human need. We of AA do not question that. But we do have to soberly face the fact that being in the public eye is hazardous, especially for us. By temperament, nearly every one of us had been an irrepressible promoter, and the prospect of a society composed almost entirely of promoters was frightening. Considering this explosive factor, we knew we had to exercise self-restraint.

The way this restraint paid off was startling. It resulted in more favorable publicity of Alcoholics Anonymous than could possibly have been obtained through all the arts and abilities of AA's best press agents. Obviously, AA had to be publicized somehow, so we resorted to the idea that it would be far better to let our friends do this for us. Precisely that has happened, to an unbelievable extent. Veteran newsmen, trained

doubters that they are, have gone all out to carry AA's message. To them, we are something more than the source of good stories. On almost every news-front, the men and women of the press have attached themselves to us as friends.

In the beginning, the press could not understand our refusal of all personal publicity. They were genuinely baffled by our insistence upon anonymity. Then they got the point. Here was something rare in the world . . . a society which said it wished to publicize its principles and its work, but not its individual members. The press was delighted with this attitude. Ever since, these friends have reported AA with an enthusiasm which the most ardent members would find hard to match.

There was actually a time when the press of America thought the anonymity of AA was better for us than some of our own members did. At one point, about a hundred of our society were breaking anonymity at the public level. With perfectly good intent, these folks declared that the principle of anonymity was horse-and-buggy stuff, something appropriate to AA's pioneering days. They were sure that AA could go faster and farther if it availed itself of modern publicity methods. AA, they pointed out, included many persons of local, national, or international fame. Provided they were willing—and many were—why shouldn't their membership be publicized, thereby encouraging others to join us? These were plausible argu-

ments, but happily our friends of the writing profession disagreed.

The Alcoholic Foundation wrote letters to practically every news outlet in North America, setting forth our public relations policy of attraction rather than promotion, and emphasizing personal anonymity as AA's greatest protection. Since that time, editors and rewrite men have repeatedly deleted names and pictures from AA copy; frequently they have reminded ambitious individuals of AA's anonymity policy. They have even sacrificed good stories to this end. The force

of their cooperation has certainly helped. Only a few AA members are left who deliberately break anonymity at the public level.

This in brief is the process by which AA's Tradition Eleven was constructed. To us, however, it represents far more than a sound public relations policy. It is more than a denial of self-seeking. This tradition is a constant and practical reminder that personal ambition has no place in AA. In it each member becomes an active guardian of our fellowship.

