

January 1966

*Trustees Program for Structuring the
General Service Board*

Q and A

Here are some typical questions asked by AA members about the Trustees' Program which has appeared on the preceding pages, with answers prepared by Dr. Norris, Chairman of the Board

Does the "Trustees' Program" for re-structuring the Board as presented at the 1965 Conference represent a reversal of the actions of the 1962 Board and 1962 Conference?

In 1962 the Board by a 10 to 4 vote expressed its view that a change of ratio was inadvisable at that time. The Conference supported the Board's recommendations. A brief analysis of the Board's vote may prove useful. Most of the Trustees had not been opposed to the principles involved but had felt strongly that the timing was wrong. They felt that the issue had become so emotionally charged that a calm, dispassionate appraisal of the factors was not possible. They felt that the matter had better be decided in favor of "no change" for the time being. The basic views of these Trustees have not changed in the intervening years and now, conscious of the needs of the Board that growth of the movement and the passing of time are creating, we feel that some changes should be started.

The terms of some of the AA Trustees who were opposed to change have expired. Some of the AA Trustees supported change then and still do. New AA Trustees on the Board at Conference time favor the present proposal. The nonalcoholic Trustees agreed to the proposal before it was presented to the AA Trustees.

The result was the 16 to 1 decision to present a "Trustees' Program" to the Conference for action in 1966.

In 1962 the Board unanimously approved the addition of two U.S. Regional Trustees to the Board and the Conference supported the Board's

recommendations. The 1965 "Trustees' Program" recommends the addition of another U.S. and another Canadian Regional Trustee — an extension of the 1962 restructuring plan.

Are these changes needed because it is getting more difficult to get highly qualified nonalcoholic Trustees?

So far we have been most fortunate in getting highly qualified people in business and professional life to give great blocks of their time to AA affairs. We will undoubtedly continue to have the same good fortune. But each year as the scope of our general services gets broader, we are asking more of the non's, so that we are now asking a great deal of our nonalcoholic friends. It seems only fair that more of the demands for specialized experience should now be shared by these additional AA Trustees (both Regional and General Service).

Was the Board placed under "pressure" to present their recommendations to the 1965 Conference?

Time itself is the "pressure." Many of us on the Board are conscious of the fact that some of these days we should be thinking about retiring (remember, two new Class A Trustees this year, and three others talking about retiring) and we would rather not leave structural changes as unfinished business. We felt that if discussion of changes was started now, even under the most favorable conditions, it would be 1967 before they could be completed.

The matter of time influences Bill, too, who is in complete agreement with the Trustees' program and who would dearly like to see the changes made while he still is active in general service affairs.

Are more AA Trustees needed?

The answer to this lies in the growth of the Fellowship. Originally all Trustees came from the New York area (except for the co-founder, Dr. Bob). As the movement grew and experience accumulated outside New York, the need for voices from other states and provinces grew, too. When in 1962 the Board and Conference voted to add two more U.S. Regional Trustees, it was with the realization that our sources of experience today cover all of Canada and the United States.

The two additional Regional (Class B) Trustees helped but still left Canada with only one. It also left each of the six U.S. Regions with a two-year gap between Trustee terms. The further addition of two Class B's (one for the U.S. and one for Canada) will, the majority of the Board believes, prove extremely helpful in terms of continuity and coverage.

The addition of three General Service Trustees from outside New York is in further recognition of the broad base of AA experience which the Fellowship needs today. The new General Service Trustees would bring special business and professional skills from other parts of the country — just as the four General Service Trustees from New York have made very special contributions to the General Service Office over the years. (The special skills which they have brought to bear have included publishing, finance, communications, law, administration and research.)

How do the nonalcoholic (Class A) Trustees feel about the change in their representation?

Significantly, the skeleton of the "Trustees' Program" was put together by the nonalcoholic Trustees before it was discussed with the AA Trustees. Of course, the change (which would not be completed until 1967 at the earliest) will in no way affect nonalcoholic Trustees now on the Board. Their places will be taken only when they are vacated through retirement or death.

Generally, we nonalcoholic Trustees feel that the so-called "level headedness" which we are supposed to bring to the Board can be served as well by seven of us as by ten. There never has been any division in Board voting along lines of Class A and Class B, and I seriously doubt that there ever would be this sort of division.

What about the benefits of rotation? Will 3-3-3 year terms make it more or less difficult to attract highly qualified nonalcoholic (Class A) Trustees?

The procedure was borrowed from other nonprofit organizations who have found that it made the job of getting highly qualified Board members easier. The three successive terms give a busy Trustee an opportunity to drop out gracefully, should he find the duties more taxing than he expected or more than he can fit into a tightened business or professional schedule. At the same time the provision for three consecutive terms makes for continuity and the accumulation of useful policy-making experience.

What will be the cost of the structural changes recommended?

The exact amount of additional cost will depend on the distances that new AA Trustees must travel. Like all activities involving AA growth, this change, too, will cost money — probably an average \$4,000.00 annually. It will be justified as it results in an improved Conference and Board structure and stronger linkage between G.S.O, and Groups in the U.S. and Canada. With stronger linkage, the problem of adequate support of general services can be solved.

Does this program of structural changes mean that we are "grown up"? How can that be reconciled with the fact that all AAs are only "one drink away from a drunk"?

It is doubtful that any of us feel that these changes are necessary simply because we would like to say that we are "grown up." While the Fellowship has grown in size and service needs, the problems and solutions of the individual alcoholic remain unchanged. But it is in the complexity of our general services today that the need for an improved Board structure lies. AA experience has accumulated rapidly over the past thirty years — and is accumulating today at an even greater rate. It needs the help of more AA Trustees to interpret it and put it to work. The problem and its solution would seem to be outside the question of our being "grown up." (I personally hope that AA never completely "grows up.")

Would the adoption of the Trustees' Program "freeze" these structural changes far into the future?

The Trustees feel that the structure of the Board (and the Conference) should keep pace with a growing Fellowship. This would indicate the need for occasional reviews of structure — perhaps at five-year intervals. Any Board and any Conference can further amend — or can reverse — whatever actions may be taken today.