

April 1972

Bill W.'s Twelve Concepts for World Service

The Sixth Concept

On behalf of AA as a whole, our General Service Conference has the principal responsibility for the maintenance of our world services, and it traditionally has the final decision respecting large matters of general policy and finance. But the Conference also recognizes that the chief initiative and the active responsibility in most of these matters should be exercised primarily by the Trustee members of the Conference when they act among themselves as the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous.

JUST AS the AA groups find themselves unable to act decisively respecting world service affairs unless they delegate a great amount of active authority and responsibility to their Conference, so must the Conference in turn delegate a liberal administrative authority to the General Service Board, in order that its Trustees may act freely and effectively in the absence of the Conference itself.

This critical need for Trustee liberty of action raises several important questions. ["Concept VIII" will define the Trustees' powers and activities.] Next to the Conference, AA's Board of Trustees should be the most influential group of world

servants that we have, and therefore we shall have to consider carefully the kind and degree of authority, responsibility, leadership, and legal status the Trustees must possess in order to function at top effectiveness over the years to come. We shall need to review and perhaps amend somewhat our present methods of choosing Trustees. We shall need to define clearly the several kinds of professional and financial skills that will always be required for a balanced trusteeship. Only by so doing can we permanently insure the Board's capability of future leadership.

In order to avoid continuous confusion, it will also be necessary to

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show precisely how the Trustees ought to be related to the Conference and just how they in turn should relate themselves to their active service corporations, AA World Services, Inc. (including AA publishing), and the AA Grapevine, Inc., our monthly magazine. In a general way, these relations already are indicated in our Conference Charter, and to some extent they have been discussed [under preceding Concepts]. Nevertheless, there still remains a real need to interpret and spell them out in detail. Of course, there is no desire to freeze these relations into a rigid pattern. However satisfactory and right our present arrangements seem, the future may

reveal flaws that we do not yet envision. New conditions may require refinements or even considerable alterations. *For* this reason, our service Charter is capable in most respects of being readily amended by the Conference itself.

It ought to be recalled, however, that all of our present arrangements, including the status of AA's Trustees, are based on a great amount of experience, which it is the purpose of these writings to describe and make clear. When this is done, we shall not be hampered later on by such a lack of understanding that we could be tempted into hasty or unwise amendments. Even if we do some day make changes that happen to work out poorly, then the experience of the past will not have been lost. These articles can then be relied upon as a point of safe return.

Let us therefore make a more specific examination of the need of a wide latitude of administrative free-

dom for the Trustees of the General Service Board.

As we have seen, the Conference Charter (and also the Charter of the General Service Board, and its By-laws) has already staked out a large area of freedom of action for our Trustees. And we have reinforced these Charter provisions by granting to all world service bodies, including of course our Trustees, the traditional Rights of "Decision," "Participation," and "Appeal." A careful review of these legal and traditional rights can leave little doubt what the actual administrative responsibilities of the Trustees are; nor can there be any question that their authority in this area is large indeed.

Why should our Trustees be given this very wide latitude of judgment and action? The answer is that we AAs are holding them mainly responsible for all our service activities: AA World Services, Inc. (including

AA publishing), and the AA Grapevine, Inc. These entities (as of 1960) have combined gross receipts approaching one-half million dollars annually. Our Trustees are also responsible for AA's worldwide public relations. They are expected to lead in the formulation of AA policy and must see to its proper execution. They are the active guardians of our Twelve Traditions. The Trustees are AA's bankers. They are entirely responsible for the investment and use of our substantial reserve funds. The very wide range of their activities will be still further seen under "Concept XI," wherein the work of their five [now seven] standing committees is described.

While the Trustees must always operate under the close observation, guidance, and sometimes direction of the Conference, it is nevertheless true that nobody but the Trustees and their wholly-owned service corpora-

tions could possibly pass judgment upon and handle the very large number of transactions now involved in our total world service operation. In view of this very large responsibility, they must therefore be given a correspondingly large grant of authority and leadership with which to discharge it. We should quite understand, too, that the conduct of our world services is primarily a matter of policy and business. Of course, our objective is always a spiritual one, but this service aim can be achieved only by means of an effective business operation. Our Trustees must function almost exactly like the directors of any large business corporation. They must have ample authority to really manage and conduct AA's business.

This is the basic corporate concept on which our structure of world service rests. We have deliberately chosen the corporate form rather

than the institutional or governmental model, because it is well known that the corporation is a far superior vehicle when it comes to the administration of policy and business.

From top to bottom, our whole service structure indeed resembles that of a large corporation. The AA groups are the stockholders; the Delegates are their representatives or proxies at the "annual meeting"; our General Service Board Trustees are actually the directors of a "holding company." And this holding company, the General Service Board, actually owns and controls the "subsidiaries" which carry on our active world services.

This very real analogy makes it even more clear that, just like any other board of directors, our Trustees must be given large powers if they are to effectively manage the principal world affairs of Alcoholics Anonymous.