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The Book Is Born

By Bill

In recent *Grapevine* attention has been drawn to the fact that A.A. is still in the process of forming a public relations policy, that failure to crystallize a sound policy could seriously cripple us.

During the first three years of A.A. no one gave a thought to public relations. It was a time of "flying blind," when we feverishly sought the principles upon which we might stay sober and assist the few alcoholics who came around wanting to do likewise. We were entirely preoccupied with the life and death question of personal recovery. It was strictly a man to man affair. We hadn't even agreed upon a name for our movement. There was no literature.

By the fall of 1937 we could count what looked like 40 recovered members. One of us had been sober for three years, another two and a half, and a fair number had a year or more behind them. As all of us had been hopeless cases, this amount of time elapsed began to be significant. The realization that we "had found something" began to take hold of us. No longer were we a dubious experiment. *Alcoholics could stay sober. Great numbers perhaps!* While some of us had always clung to this possibility, the dream now had real substance. If 40 alcoholics could recover, why not four hundred, four thousand - even forty thousand?

Once this spectacular notion gripped us, our thinking underwent a sudden change. Our alcoholic imaginations certainly had a field day. By temperament most of us are salesmen, promoters. So we began talking very big. Mere boxcar numbers wouldn't do. We went astronomical. Undoubtedly, we said, this was the beginning of one of the greatest medical, religious and social developments of all time. We would show the medical profession and the sky pilots where they got off! A million alcoholics in America; more millions all over the world! Why, we only had to sober up all these boys and girls (and sell them God) whereupon they would revolutionize society. A brand new world with ex-drunks running it. Just think of that, folks!

Publicity? Why of course! Millions of words! Money? Sure! It would take millions, naturally! The matter of money and publicity would be a cinch - just a campaign of high powered selling directed at our American tycoon and editors would quickly settle that question. How could they resist when they saw what we had? Just watch us drunks. Actually a few of us were pretty nearly as bad as that! No circus barker was ever so enthusiastic or extravagant in his cries as were some of us in the fall of 1937. In fact, I can recall having done a great deal of the barking myself!

Now suppose the promoters of those pioneering days had not been slowed down. Suppose that our public relations policy had been left fully in their hands. Suppose they had been able to raise millions, to flood the country with A.A. propaganda and wild claims. Where would we be now? Nowhere, obviously. We would not only have fallen out with our best friends, religion and medicine; we would surely have been discredited among the very people we wished most to reach - alcoholic men and women. Much money would have meant a large staff of professional A.A. therapists or "do gooders," and promoters plus money would surely have meant ballyhoo on every subject under the sun from prohibition to Communist Russia. Internally, if we still existed at all, we would have been torn apart by political controversy, religious dissension. It happened to the Washingtonians. Who, then, has saved us thus far?

The people who did the saving job then, and who have continued to save us much trouble since, are a class of individuals with whom most A.A.s are impatient. *These people are the conservatives.* They are the "go slow," "think it over," "let's not do that" type. Not many of them are to be found among us alcoholics but it's certainly providential that we have always had a few such

around. Often accused of being a drag on progress (as they sometimes are) they bring nevertheless a priceless asset. They bring the rest of us down out of the clouds; they make us face the realities of experience; they foresee dangers which most of us would blithely ignore. Sometimes their conservatism is overdone; they needlessly "view with alarm for the good of the movement." Knowing that mere change is not necessarily progress they instinctively resist change. They never wish to take an irrevocable step; they often shrink from those final decisions from which there is no retreat. They keep out of trouble by making sure never to get into it.

The first discussion of our public relations in 1937 at Akron will always live in my memory. The promoters could think of nothing but getting the glad news of our recoveries to a million alcoholics, overnight if possible. If this were done, God would do the rest, they said. But the conservatives did not think God did business that way.

The conservatives then proceeded, with terrific impact, to make the point that The Man of Galilee had no press agent, no newspapers, no pamphlets, no books - nothing but word of mouth to carry the spirit from person to person, from group to group. Why would we deviate from His example? Were we about to substitute ballyhoo for personal demonstration? Were we to favour personal glorification in public in place of quietness, humility and anonymity?

These were good questions; they made us promoters stop and think. Though obliged to concede much to the conservatives on principle, we still felt their counsel was that of perfection. It wasn't practical. The conservatives retorted that while promoters had built many a successful enterprise they almost always bankrupt what they had built if they were left long enough in charge. We promoters (and I was one of them) came back to this: How, we inquired, could the "go slow boys" sleep nights when they reflected but three small groups; that America had a million alcoholics dying like flies; that within gunshot of where we sat there were perhaps hundreds who could get well if they only knew what we knew? And did alcoholics in California have to wait for relief to get there by word of mouth only? And wasn't there grave danger of our successful methods being badly distorted unless reduced to writing and put in book form? And if we made no written record of what we had found, might not columnists get funny and start deadly ridicule? Caution, we agreed, ought to be observed by all means, but still didn't we need a book of our own, some publicity?

Such was the gist of the discussion out of which came the discussion to publish the book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*. This led to publicity, to the establishment of our Board of Trustees (The Alcoholic Foundation), and to the creation of the Central Office at New York where alcoholics and their families can write for literature and direct help.

Our rapid and seemingly healthy growth the past few years has pretty well demonstrated the wisdom of these early decision.

The point is obvious. If these vital matters had been left entirely to the promoters like me, we would surly have gone hog wild and spoiled everything. Had these affairs been left exclusively to the conservatives it is probable that few of our present membership would yet have heard of A.A. Thousands would have remained miserable. Many would have been dead.

So it seems clear that sound policy can only be made by rubbing the conservatives and the promoters together. Their discussions, if free from personal ambitions and resentment, can be depended upon to produce the right answers. For us, there is no other way.

Having now shown how our first step in public was taken, I would like, in forthcoming pieces, to tell more of our recent experiences in this field, with emphasis on the desirability of continued modesty, anonymity, and fidelity to one objective only: That of carrying A.A. to the alcoholic who wishes to recover.