

Panel 2 - 2:00 p.m. Friday - An Informed Group Conscience: The Voice of A.A.: leading by attraction rather than promotion.

Good afternoon. My name is Sharon G. and I am an alcoholic. My sobriety date is January 15, 1992, my home group is the Sunset/Sunrise Group in North Hollywood, California and I currently have the privilege of serving as Central California Area 93, Panel 61, Alternate Delegate. I would like to thank Vernon G. and the PRAASA committee for giving me this opportunity to participate at PRAASA. It is truly humbling and a little overwhelming. I have been asked to speak today on the topic: An Informed Group Conscience: The Voice of A.A.: leading by attraction rather than promotion.

Our leaders are but trusted servants, they do not govern. How often do we hear Tradition Two read in meetings. How do trusted servants lead? Bill himself discusses this beautifully in his essay on Tradition Two where, when talking about the difference between “bleeding deacons” and “elder statesmen,” he describes elder statesmen as “the real and permanent leadership of A.A. Theirs is the quiet opinion, the sure knowledge and humble example that resolve a crisis. When sorely perplexed, the group inevitably turns to them for advice. They become the voice of the group conscience; in fact, these are the true voice of Alcoholics Anonymous.

They do not drive by mandate: they lead by example.” Bill goes on to say in Concept Nine that “A leader in A.A. service is therefore a man (or woman) who can personally put principles, plans and policies into such dedicated and effective action that the rest of us want to back him up and help him with his job.”

So what is the difference between leading by attraction and leading by promotion? Most of us have had experience with the “promotion” type of leadership and it isn’t very attractive. I have recently experienced some examples of this that drove the point home. We had an issue come up that riled up a few of our longtimers. In one of the meetings I regularly attend our GSR asked for a group conscience on the subject and when it became obvious we were about to approve the issue, one longtimer very heatedly assured us that if we voted in favor of the proposal “we would be destroying AA and killing alcoholics.” That was pretty much the sum total of his input. The discussion that ensued quickly devolved to a point where principles were trampled by personalities. Other longtimers chimed in with their own forceful opinions, younger members tuned out, and newcomers looked bewildered. The issue seemed to get lost in the shuffle.

A few days later at a different meeting another longtimer just as heatedly assured us

that if we didn't vote to approve the issue we would be "killing alcoholics." For those of us who attended both meetings it was apparent that according to those two, we were going to be "killing alcoholics" no matter what we did. Here we had two completely opposed points of view from two longtimers, both of whom I know deeply love Alcoholics Anonymous, have a passion for the fellowship and only want what is best for our future. But by promoting their opinions angrily how effective were they? Not very. In fact, they had pretty much the opposite effect. Once personalities override principles, any possibility of true leadership disappears.

So, in practical experience how do we make our leadership attractive? In my own experience, it means if my group has a decision to make, I do my best to see that they have all the information they need to make an informed group conscience. I try to present the information in a straightforward way. I give my opinion based on the available information but try to never make it appear that I believe my opinion is the only valid opinion. Listening with an open mind is as important to attractive leadership as having an opinion. I treat other members points of view with respect even if they completely disagree with me. I try to convey by my words and body language that their input is just as valuable as anything I might have to say. Mutual respect is the key to attractive leadership. I find I get treated with just about as

much respect as I give. If I am condescending and critical, I lose my effectiveness. If I think I have all the answers, I shut out any possibility of hearing what the other members have to say and might miss the real answer. If I give my group a reason to believe that I am a “know-it-all,” chances are I will have destroyed my effectiveness as a “leader.” Bill said that sometimes the good is the enemy of the best. My opinion might be a really good, valid opinion, but still not be the answer that is the best for the situation. And when, as it sometimes happens, my home group listens to me and then votes the other way, I accept my defeat as gracefully as I can. To do otherwise would severely limit my usefulness in the future and besides, as I have found out time and time again, I could be completely wrong.

Over the years I have come more and more to realize that there is a divine guiding presence who knows much better than I do what is good for A.A. I have learned to trust the process enough to let it go if my opinion doesn't sway my group to see things my way. I pray for guidance and trust that I'm getting it. Mostly, when I feel strongly about something I stop and ask myself if my opinion is based in the principles and traditions and the best way for my group to carry the message of Alcoholics Anonymous or, is it just my ego needing one more time to be right. If the answer comes back “ego” I pray again for guidance and trust that what is

needed will come from the group conscience guided by the loving power that presides over it. If I successfully convey this attitude to my home group, they in turn trust me, ask for my opinion and will consider it with the sure knowledge that it is given in the spirit of what is best for the fellowship, and will at least listen to what I have to say before they vote. I believe by truly weighing my opinions and actions against the test of “ego” vs. “good for the group” I can be an effective and yes, even attractive, trusted servant.

I would like to close with a few words from the long form of Tradition Nine that sum up perfectly what it means to lead by attraction rather than promotion:

“All such representatives are to be guided in the spirit of service, for true leaders in A.A. are but trusted and experienced servants of the whole. They derive no real authority from their titles; they do not govern. Universal respect is the key to their usefulness.”

To be given the opportunity to live a life of usefulness as a trusted servant of our fellowship has been one of the greatest blessings of my sobriety. I thank you for it and thank you for letting me share.