

District 6 Inventory November 9, 2013

District 6 inventory on November 9, 2013 was facilitated by an Area 15 Past Delegate. The format selected for use was a variation of "The A.A. Group" pamphlet's suggested questions for a group inventory.

Observations

During the course of the inventory I observed the following:

Concerns

- Lack of participation
- Communication in general
 - Group communication
 - Service Sponsorship
 - Confusion in District meeting
 - Communication strain in District meeting (bickering, feeling of condescension)
 - Personalities before Principles
- Need for GSR Education
- Weak Leadership from Long Timers

Below are my notes taken during the inventory on the comments from the participants along with a few suggestions for each inventory question *in italics* and I embedded a few hyperlinks to make it easier to find certain information or email trusted servants. I hope that you find them useful as a starting point for actions that your District may decide to take in response to the challenges expressed during the inventory.

1. What is the purpose of District 6 and are we fulfilling that purpose?
Serve District 6 people first. First tradition aa unity but primary purpose is to let the people in district 6 know that they have a voice and can participation. We're not putting out the attraction message too well.
To carry the AA message.
Surprised at the level of organization at the district meeting. Yes help the suffering alcoholic but keeping organization about.
District 6 is support to be the guardian of the traditions and concepts.
People who aren't in district don't have any idea about the committees, the quarterlies, the GSRs. We need to bring info back to the AA groups.
By-Laws describe the purpose of the District in the first paragraph.
Go-between of the groups to the Area. Some groups don't have GSRs. DCM participating in the district meetings has to provide a conduit of information.

Suggestions:

Refer members to 'The A.A. Group' pamphlet and 'The A.A. Service Manual' Chapter 3 (The District and The D.C.M.) for more information on the purpose and functions of a District.

2. Are we attracting new people and are new members sticking with us?

I was taught service is vital... I was encouraged to get involved in service – been back about 16 months.

I have been involved in district 6 many years. Used to be standing room only but now it is much sparser. If people don't have a sponsor to help them understand the district service they don't come back. If they have someone to explain it to them they stay more often.

New to the 'upper echelon' of AA and I have joined corrections. Somebody has to carry it on. I will go to any length to keep it going.

I think we are still attracting people but they are not sticking with us. They fail to listen to what is suggested and they don't get a service sponsor. They get confused... district meetings are confusing and new people see a lot of bickering and arguing and they don't come back.

I was suffering from bleeding deacon-itis in my home group. I did the same thing by inviting individuals to a district meeting and signing them up as alternate GSRs. A lot of the elders here have been involved with AA a long time. I have been involved in several groups and now I see District people present at meetings as a result of being involved in District. It's not really the DCMs and GSRs educating the groups. It's a lack of groups being informed. How can we make it more FUN for people to get involved? Names... like the Ice Cream Social... it's stale.

We ask new GSRs to choose a committee. I would like to see us give them an exit route for them to leave that committee. I am looking for a way to help people be committed. You're not married to it, you can change committees.

It is important that I understand that when I serve as GSR I am taking a step down... my group is the important entity and I need to keep them in mind as I serve. It is interesting to me that people don't want to be involved. I have seen many people involved in District that are enthusiastic about doing their service.

Sponsor people into service... I think we are doing this.

I look at my GSR service as a privilege, giving back to A.A.

Suggestions:

District Chair - set expectations at the beginning of the District meetings such that crosstalk and multiple conversations are not permitted during the business. Lead firmly, allowing each person to speak individually without regard to who the person is and without interference or repercussions from other members during the meeting. This practice will lead to a principled, productive, and shorter District meeting, making it more attractive to those who want to participate. Consider a monthly or quarterly meeting with just the District Officers and Committee Chairs to share challenges and concerns, and to understand how the District leadership can be more effective for everyone.

3. Are we reaching enough people? Do the Groups know what the District is and what it does?

In my home group we can't even get anyone to make coffee. When I got the coffee job I had to be there... otherwise, my sponsor let me have it (judgment day). Apathy nowadays. Young people come in they listen at the meetings and then leave. You aren't going to get anybody to sweep the floor or make the coffee. AA is changing. The Groups are changing. The groups aren't putting the group together. The group isn't taking care of the group.

The Groups ARE getting watered down. We just don't know what the reaction would be today if we told the newcomer to take the cotton out of their ears and put it in their mouths. But we have to provide the leadership to the new members in the groups. The older-timers DO bear a lot of responsibility. The Traditions keep the group alive and we are not using the Traditions. New members are not being provided with leadership by the Old Timers.

The Groups DON'T know because they aren't being told. The generational gaps have changed although the message hasn't. The curriculum is the same but nobody is educating the groups. Unless we are told we won't take care of ourselves (groups). We need a GSR class to create interest.

I personally try to get over my fear and share the message of service. If we say 'we're having a GSR class' a lot of people aren't going to show up. I just share at any opportunity.

Part of my friction on this question is that as a DCM I don't have time to get to all my groups. I feel very ineffective because I am so pressed for time. Some meetings with a certain tone... I don't want to be beaten up by the Traditions by the District and told what to do. As a DCM I am here to be helpful. They don't know me so they don't know that I have their best interest at heart. I need to help the GSRs know how to talk to their groups (insider vs outsider DCM).

If AA ever gets destroyed it will be from the inside out – people think they are doing the right thing but they're not... We're being too nice to people by having 'good intentions'.

Suggestions:

DCMs: Check online at <http://aa.org/lang/en/subpage.cfm?page=175> to see many DCM tools available to you. Some helpful items there are the pamphlet *Your D.C.M.*, "How to Conduct a Sharing Session" service material, and Chapter 3 of *The A.A. Service Manual* related to D.C.M. duties. The "List of resources for D.C.M.s" provides access to and names of many publications available to assist the D.C.M. in their responsibilities to the A.A. Groups. For example, review the pamphlet *G.S.R. General Service Rep* with your new G.S.R.s to help them understand their responsibilities. Offer to attend their group's business meeting to support them in sharing a summary of the District's business and activities. To access the D.C.M. material through menu options, go to www.aa.org. Select "FOR GROUPS AND MEMBERS" at the top of the page and a left side menu appears. In the left menu list select "GETTING INVOLVED IN GENERAL SERVICE" and then select "District Committee Member D.C.M.".

District Chair: You will find the D.C.M. links and material useful as well.

Make the G.S.R. sessions enjoyable AND informative by fully involving the G.S.R.s in the presentations and discussions. Call on them for their input, encourage them to ask questions, and help them to find answers to group issues through shared experience and A.A. literature.

4. Are the District 6 officers fulfilling their purpose and are we choosing them with care? How can they be more effective?

More effective – at my group we read the announcements. Emphasize that certain events are to benefit the District. It starts with sponsorship.

We choose by... if you stand for the position it's your position. In choosing officers there seems to be a progression in service positions. **We don't always take into consideration their qualifications.**

Regardless of whether it is Area or District there is usually one every panel. AA is changing because we are allowing it to change.

It is a good thing to have someone coming into a position when they have had experience in a previous position on that board, in the District or Area.

Officers move up the line because no one else will stand.

The idea that you move up in rank ... it has been that way for a while. It discourages people when they do stand out of order that they get no votes or few. More reasonable expectation of what the outgoing officer in that position might be doing. When taking a new position the person may not help the person who stepped into their previous position because they are too busy learning their new job or because they know everything and can't understand why you don't understand. **Our District officers are condescending and 'not nice' to one another on the District dais.** That makes me not want to be at the meeting. No wonder no one wants to stand for those positions. A person shouldn't be excluded from skipping a position that they don't feel they are qualified for.

Some positions have no application to each other. It doesn't matter if one served as Secretary in order to be a good Treasurer.

Officers are fulfilling their purpose and we are choosing them wisely. Tradition 2 – we trust our trusted servants. The more service you have the more I have trust in you. The GSRs are the guardians of the Traditions. Most GSRs don't understand the Traditions when they are first GSRs. **GSRs need help learning the Traditions and Concepts – the District should have a responsibility in that.**

I would feel very intimidated by the thought of standing for an officer position. I wouldn't want to stand today.

Suggestions:

Refer to the [A.A. Grapevine Traditions Checklist](#) for a review of the questions on Tradition 9 as applicable to elected trusted servants and to your own service commitment. Encourage members whom you have observed to be enthusiastic, willing, responsive, and committed to their A.A. responsibilities to make themselves available to serve in upcoming elected positions. One-on-one encouragement can provide the little push a person needs to offer their services. Having a choice of qualified candidates better serves A.A. than having just one person volunteer who may not be the best qualified or who may not honor commitments. Service Sponsorship can be a huge value in this endeavor.

Consult Concept 9 regarding leadership. Every trusted servant – officers, DCMs, committee chairs, and GSRs - are ALL in leadership positions.

- Lead with enthusiasm and willingness to hear everyone's viewpoint as each one is valid. As a leader, avoid being the 'authority', always mindful that the group conscience is the ultimate authority (**consult Concept 1**).
- DCMs, committee chairs, and officers - show your willingness to help a new GSR by contacting them within a day or two of the District meeting with an offer to help them with summarizing a GSR report for their home group or pick out a few points and ask them what they think of those things. One-on-one communication goes a long way toward providing an easy pathway for a GSR to ask for help.
- DCMs and ACMs – visit your groups and provide a brief announcement if the group allows you to do so. You may want to share that you are the elected DCM and as such you are available to provide information to the group and to answer questions they may have about District activities. You may want to provide a few copies of the pamphlet Circles of Love and Service and perhaps a local publication about what services the District DCM provides. As a DCM, you are always there to serve, never to 'tell' or 'direct' (remember to refer back to **Concept 9**).
- DCMs and GSRs – consider sharing the Service Material piece from www.aa.org (dropdown A.A. Literature and then select Service Material) called "Is Your Group Linked to A.A. as a Whole?" to help the members of the group make the connection between the local meetings and all of A.A. outside the meetings. You can find the material at http://www.aa.org/en_pdfs/smf-104_en.pdf.
- GSRs – mentor another member of your home group and encourage them to attend District meetings with you and/or to stand for the Alternate GSR position in your group. Share with each other on the high points of the District meeting.

5. Are the Standing Committees fulfilling their purpose? How can they be more effective? I feel that I haven't fulfilled a lot this first year. I have a few committee members now. When we tell GSRs to pick a committee we tell them just to listen to the committee report. Do we have service fairs to let people know what the committees do? Do we have time to go over what the committees do? We need to give more information. There is a **lack of participation**. A committee chair is not a committee by himself or herself. We need to have some kind of commitment to the committee. It's a lot to ask for anybody to make the commitment. There was a service fair here in this room and 4 or 5 people showed up. We have to make it attractive. This is the first time I have been to this type of meeting and it's good. I can **bring the information back to my group**. How can we promote this type of thing? Some of the committees don't fulfill their purposes... lack of participation. When you get to the District meeting you are then told that you HAVE TO be on a committee. Suggest that committees add the basic purpose of their committee in their report. We do have a GSR service tool that is given to all the GSRs that has all the committees and their purpose.

District Committee Chairs – First, be enthusiastic! Enthusiasm is very attractive. When a member has a question about how your committee operates or what you do, take that opportunity to provide the person with a task that will get them involved right away, even if in a very small way. Secondly, honor your commitment! Hold regular committee meetings, provide information and leadership to your committee members, and be absolutely certain they can reach you at a current email and phone number – make it easy for them to be active in the committee’s services. Ensure that the committee meeting day and time are visible on District committee lists in both written and electronic format. Return phone calls and email correspondence for the health of the committee and service to suffering alcoholics. Provide clear direction and the written A.A. Guidelines to those serving on the committee. A.A. Guidelines can be purchased from G.S.O. or downloaded directly from www.aa.org by selecting A.A. Literature dropdown, then A.A. Guidelines, where you can select the Guideline that you want.

District Chair or Secretary – provide copies of the committee list with committee scope and activity summary at least to each GSR so that the GSR can share it with their group. Make sure that the committee chairs’ contact numbers or email addresses are on the summary list. Committee involvement is NOT limited to only GSRs.

GSRs – Encourage your group members and meeting attendees to get involved in committee activities (a.k.a. “work” or “service”) so that they can further help the suffering alcoholic and enhance their own recovery. Provide a copy of the committee summary sheet to the meeting attendees.

6. Do you feel the District utilizes an informed group conscience in decision making? Is the minority opinion heard?

The more I hear the better I can make an informed decision. We don’t have enough time for that. The clock ticks and even though I want to hear it I don’t want to spend the time. How can our time be used more effectively? I would like to see us streamline our business meeting so that we never stop our members from sharing their opinions. A more informed opinion is too often related to arguing. It needs to be demonstrated that it’s about sharing points of view for the sake of understanding. The minority opinion is definitely being heard. Not everyone does get a chance to talk but people don’t have to say the same thing over and over. Nobody wants to stay late at night to hear the same thing over and over. Not everyone feels like they have an opportunity to express their opinion at a District meeting.

Suggestions: Refer to the first and second Traditions and the [A.A. Grapevine Traditions Checklist](#) first and second Tradition questions.

District Chair: As mentioned earlier, set expectations at the beginning of the District meeting that every A.A. member in attendance will have an opportunity to share but make sure to set overall time restrictions as necessary to curtail lengthy sharing by any individual member (e.g., 3 minutes per comment and no double dipping with comments until all others have shared on the topic at hand). Remind the members that everyone there is there because they want to help A.A. and the suffering alcoholic in need of our program. Negative and back-biting remarks disrupt the meeting and are not in

the spirit of our first Tradition of A.A. unity or in the spirit of love and tolerance. Give equal sharing time to each member, regardless of their personality, to ensure equality and respect for each person in attendance and to move the meeting along expeditiously.

7. What topics would you like to see the District discuss?

Service Sponsors – Maybe we could ask at the end of the meeting for people to raise their hands if they are willing to be a Service Sponsor?

Roberts Rules – I would like to hear more about that and how the meetings are run using that format?

No forum for discussion of ideas except before the District business. Our meeting doesn't start until 7:30. I have to bring it out in a motion in the business meeting rather than having a form for just discussion. Then with a motion people pick sides and go at it. We do do that at 7 p.m. – 7:30 p.m. Many people aren't there and then you have to talk about it at the business meeting, but it is at the end of the agenda. And again there aren't that many people left.

Suggestions:

Educate the District body on “hot” topics such as Service Sponsorship and Roberts Rules using a workshop forum. Select a presenter other than an officer – i.e., a GSR, committee member, or DCM – involvement creates enthusiasm and ownership.

Consider revising the District agenda organization to allow sharing of ideas on topics of concern. This type of informal forum can help air concerns and ideas for solutions without the formality of a motion. In turn, an informal initial discussion could help expedite the business meeting when and if a motion comes up.

Contact other Area 15 Districts about their format and agenda to see what is working for them and what isn't.

8. Is the District 6 Website effective in fulfilling its purpose?

I found the District website before I even came here. It helped to find meetings and gave me event information.

Less than half of the people in the room have visited the District 6 website.

<http://www.District6aa.org> is the website address.

Website committee and Web Servant: Be responsive to requested changes to the website. You have fairly unique skills that many cannot replicate. There are fewer people to step up to provide website services and updates so the District is depending on you for those skills and alcoholics are depending on the information on that website. This is perhaps one of the most critical tools that we have to provide fearful, drinking alcoholics a way to look for help without having to face another person right away. Familiarize yourself with the pamphlet Understanding Anonymity and with A.A.'s 11th Tradition on personal anonymity at the public level.

Educate the District members and the groups by stating and restating the District 6 website address both in the District meeting and in writing on the District agenda, the District meeting minutes, and other District material such as the District's Committees List. Post the District website information on group meeting room bulletin boards with a summary of services available.

9. Do our GSRs fully understand the importance of 'The Group Inventory'?
- Ask the one person... No. It was announced at my home group that District 6 was having an inventory and the question had to be asked did anyone know what an inventory is. Now that I'm aware that my home group doesn't have a GSR, though there are a bunch of old timers, and they don't even know what a group inventory is, I **will have to find a way to inform, not tell, them what an inventory is.**
- Should we have guidelines to say we have a District 6 inventory every Panel (every two years)?

Suggestions:

Find attached a presentation on 'How to Conduct a Group Inventory'. The presentation starts out with what a group inventory is and why the group would want to have one.

10. Do we encourage service sponsorship and participation in our Standing Committees?
- Service Sponsorship is announced every month. Get a service sponsor. **GSRs are required to serve on a committee. But they won't commit.**
- They aren't really capable of being responsible yet.
- It should be a voluntary commitment. If you're going to tell me I have to do something I'm not going to like it or do it.**
- You can tell an alcoholic but you can't tell 'em much. We have a responsibility individually to talk about service wherever we are. If there is an opportunity to fill up the car and bring them to a service meeting then I do it. There is a big difference in going to an individual and asking them if they want to do something with me and making an announcement. Individual invitations are much more effective.
- When I was a new GSR I was actively seeking to be told what to do. **When I was assigned to a committee the committee chairman didn't know I had been assigned to the committee.** There is no written information about how to be a part of committee or be a GSR.
- Service Manual workshop is available.
- A lot of people think they can't be involved in the committee because they aren't at General Service.

Suggestions:

See suggestions for Committee Chairs under question 5.

District Chair: *Seek input from the district leaders – officers, DCMs, Committee Chairs – to decide on a different approach for attracting committee membership.*

11. Do we encourage GSRs to share their experience after attending the Area Assembly?

No

Suggestions:

Have a round robin sharing (not raising hands, but move from one to the next or use the 'red ball' system for some fun) at the District sharing session or early in the business meeting from the GSRs who attended the Area Assembly. Ask what their impression was, what was most surprising, most helpful, or most enlightening to them, and how might they carry that information to their group.

12. Are we keeping principles above personalities in all District 6 business?

No. It causes an uncomfortable feeling in the meetings. I get very emotional at times and am certain that I have offended people.

Very uncomfortable.

I have participated in passionate discussions. Being reminded about putting principles above personalities helps me to conduct myself accordingly.

We are trusted servants, we are not governing. We forget the second Tradition sometimes.

We go to District meetings with passion and there does end up being outbursts.

Reminder at the beginning of the meeting about principles first.

When the outbursts happen I am reminded of my own shortcomings. I have seen our chairperson stand up and say this has been repeated, let's move on. I have seen people interrupted by others. I too lean to newer members and say that it's not always like this and encourage them.

I am guilty of that myself and sometimes I get upset when people who don't agree with me. I am a believer in the group conscience though. But I let my personality get in the way.

I am as guilty as others are. I don't like quoting the quote if we're not going to put it into practice. We sometimes explode when we shouldn't explode. I am guilty too.

Suggestions:

District Chair: Reference District Chair suggestions on question 6. Reference Traditions 1 and 2.

13. How can we increase our effectiveness in serving groups and still suffering alcoholics of District 6?

I know when I am feeling passionate about something, my goal is to be helpful and do the right thing for AA. Even when we do get into disunity we are still trying to be helpful. We have to individually guard against ourselves.

The District purpose isn't about enacting motions about how we conduct meetings. It takes away from our purpose to be 'too organized'. What is our mission statement for District 6? The majority of our time should be to organize ourselves to best help the suffering alcoholic.

Suggestions:

Refer members to 'The A.A. Group' pamphlet and 'The A.A. Service Manual' Chapter 3 (The District and The D.C.M.) for more information on the purpose and functions of a District.

Consider having a quarterly meeting with just D.C.M.s and officers to brainstorm (i.e., a sharing session) about what is working and what isn't working for Group communication and education.

Where there are subdistricts without a D.C.M. or A.C.M., encourage any GSRs from those subdistricts to join in discussions with neighboring subdistrict G.S.R.s and D.C.M. Even if D.C.M.s don't have time to physically attend all of their groups, phone calls work wonders. A simple phone call to each group contact a few days before each District meeting just to remind them that the District meeting is coming up and that you would love to see them there at [the start time of the sharing] does generally result in increased attendance overall. In between District meetings, email to your G.S.R.s and group contacts any correspondence you receive related to District, Area, G.S.O., or A.A. Grapevine business. This flow of information will help to keep their mind on General Service activities.

14. How effective is the District at practicing the Seventh Tradition?

We send a lot of money off. We need to use more funds effectively in this District. We argue over \$100 when we are sending thousands away. We should be taking care of the alcoholics here in our district.

We have 60 or 70 members in our home group and they don't care about where the money is going. WE can't get people in the business meeting. Sponsorship is the biggest obstacle we face in service. Most of the people who sponsor don't do service. Sponsors without service experience tell their sponsees not to do service work... it's unimportant.

Core issue... that the education level (about service) of a sponsor is lacking. The group was not running as a functional group. We have a good sponsorship base. Like pulling teeth to get anyone to make coffee. We are somehow lacking the 'formal' education on how to sponsor. Somehow that has to happen. Service sponsorship... there should be a class. GSR think tank is a great idea. Every day is a new day. Lack of participation in the committees... the qualification lack and the process of 'going through the ranks'... Some people I know don't have enough time in the program are not able to stand for a committee chair. (Note Committees are autonomous to choose their own chair within the guidelines of the District). We need to find another way of dealing with the disruptive nature of things that happen in AA. For example, people shipped in from treatment centers don't know how to behave in an AA meeting (no money in the basket, talking). How to educate those rehab centers before they get to AA... tell them how we operate, etc. (Reference CPC and Treatment committees).

When you brush your ego aside and start listening and remember that we are starting our meeting with the Serenity prayer, maybe that would help us. I totally agree that it boils down to sponsorship. At District, this is where we need unity.

When it comes to money it is a heavy conversation. Almost every business meeting is attended by every member of my home group. We voted to fund the GSR to Quarterlies but because we have other expenses, we had to budget, take into account prudent reserve, other service entities. We made a decision that as members we have to pay

our own way... not rely on visitors to the meeting. It takes each member showing up every time and putting \$5 in the basket. It was a very big controversy because some people thought we were not observing the Tradition. But it seems like the people who decided to leave the group were the ones who forgot their wallet every meeting. Those who stayed are very involved.

So, how do you get people to come? Bring them. **I sponsor people into service; require my sponsees to attend at least three service events in the first year.**

In case any of you don't know, you are supposed to send your GSR to service events before you contribute to GSO according to the Service Manual.

If you talk to a lot of old timers they say they have already done their service work and no they don't have to. You have all these people trying to have a meeting for one class of people. **I take my sponsees through the Traditions.**

When I've talked service to people they say one of three things... I hate it, I don't know anything about it, I think I'll try it.

Suggestions:

Consult Tradition 1 to help build unity in the District. Perhaps use the District sharing session as a forum for talking through the Traditions Checklist on Tradition 1.

Utilize your CPC Committee resources to help educate the local treatment center personnel on the expected behavior from the treatment center clients at an A.A. meeting. **The Treatment Committee** members can educate the clients (i.e., the alcoholics in the treatment center) on appropriate A.A. meeting behavior.

Refer to the pamphlet "Self-Support: Where Money and Spirituality Mix" and the A.A. Guidelines on Finance. **Utilize** the flyers available at www.aa.org (select Financial Information in the left hand column, then Flyers on Self-Support). The flyer entitled Self-Support Talking Points is a new publication (number F-19G) that can be especially useful as a tool for explaining the necessity and importance of group and individual contributions to A.A.

Consider holding a Sponsorship Workshop at a local venue one Saturday. 'Bring in' at least one 'out of town' speaker and one or two 'well known' A.A. members to present various sponsorship topics, including service sponsorship. Fill out the program with local members who are seasoned sponsors in both the Steps and Service. Include topics such as

- Sponsorship in Recovery
- Sponsorship in Service
- Sponsorship and Spirituality
- Sponsoring Newcomers
- Sponsoring Middle Timers and Long Timers
- Sponsorship Panel (Q&A)

Borrow from past Sponsorship Workshop agendas (e.g., the Sponsorship Weekend in Sarasota or the one held in Ft Myers several years back). Perhaps have a final speaker meeting at the end of the day/evening to share their story (select a speaker with sponsorship experience and service background so that they can share that experience in their story).

Effective Group Inventory

What is a Group Inventory?

“The AA Group” pamphlet page 13 defines Group Inventories as:

...meetings at which members work toward understanding how well the group is fulfilling its primary purpose.

That may lead us to wonder what is a group’s primary purpose? We can’t fulfill it unless we know what it is.

Tradition Five (Long Form) provides us with the answer: *Each Alcoholics Anonymous group ought to be a spiritual entity having but one primary purpose – that of carrying its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.*

“The A.A. Group” pamphlet reminds us that the group’s primary purpose is *to help alcoholics recover through A.A.’s suggested Twelve Steps of recovery.*

Taking each of these precepts into account, the Group Inventory, then, is a meeting at which members work toward understanding how well the group is carrying its message of A.A.’s suggested Twelve Steps to help alcoholics recover.

Why do a Group Inventory?

Group members may believe that they are doing a good job of fulfilling the group’s primary purpose and therefore see no need for a group inventory. However, let’s take a look at some of Bill W.’s letters to the A.A. Grapevine, written well after A.A. had matured by taking responsibility for itself through the General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous.

The Language of the Heart, page 322 (1960):

Let us continue to take our inventory as a Fellowship, searching out our flaws and confessing them freely. Let us devote ourselves to the repair of all faulty relations that may exist, whether within or without.

And above all, let us remember that great legion who still suffer from alcoholism and who are still without hope. Let us, at any cost or sacrifice, so improve our communication with all these that they may find what we have found – a new life of freedom under God.

Do we really want to take a chance that our group is perfectly fulfilling that primary purpose? Do we really want to hold on to that pride that tells us that our group has no faults and therefore we have no need to look at our group’s behaviors? Do we want to take a chance that we are not communicating with those alcoholics who are still without hope and thereby failing to help them find freedom?

The Language of the Heart, page 347 (1963):

Let us always remember that any society of men and women that cannot freely correct its own faults must surely fall into decay if not into collapse. Such is the universal penalty for the failure to go on growing. Just as each AA must continue to take his moral inventory and act upon it, so must our whole Society do if we are to survive and if we are to serve usefully and well. –Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age

If our whole Society needs to continue growing, and the Group is the foundation of our whole Society, doesn’t it follow that the Group needs to continue growing in order to survive?

How to conduct an effective Group Inventory

There are easily three possible sources of questions to use when conducting a group inventory.

- “The A.A. Group” pamphlet explains that some groups take inventory by examining our Twelve Traditions, one at a time, to determine how well they are living up to these Principles. It also provides a list of questions, compiled from A.A. shared experience that can be useful in arriving at an informed group conscience.
- Groups may develop additional questions of their own as well. In so doing, group members take full ownership of the goals that are embodied in those questions.
- The “Traditions Checklist” provides a list of questions associated with each of our Twelve Traditions that can be useful in soliciting responses and ideas from group members regarding group behavior.

Whichever of these inventory question formats you choose, you will generally want to ask a person outside of your home group to conduct your inventory. The person you choose should have a very good understanding of the Twelve Traditions and be willing to remain impartial when conducting the inventory process. For example, you may want to select a District Committee Member (DCM), an Area officer, a Delegate, or Past Delegate to facilitate the inventory. It is best if the facilitator or another impartial A.A. member takes detailed notes of the inventory discussion. The facilitator may want to record the session and use it for developing a report of the inventory for your group. Regardless of how it is accomplished, you will always want to have a summary of the discussion and feedback from the facilitator. A helpful summary will include:

- The facilitator’s observations of issues or challenges that were revealed during the inventory discussion
- Suggestions on which Traditions, Concepts, or A.A. literature could be used to address the issue and provide direction for the group

Schedule a solid two hours for the inventory, sometimes more if there are additional questions you want to cover. It is best to hold the inventory at a time other than a regular meeting time. Announce the inventory to the group members well in advance, at least two weeks - sooner if possible. Provide the format of the inventory to the members in advance so that they can think about some of the topics they want to discuss during the inventory.

Frequently, inventory discussions begin with sharing on how everything is quite wonderful in the group. After a while members begin to share small things that are on their minds. Later in the process the core issues are likely to emerge. You want to make sure that you have a facilitator that will keep the discussion moving and help everyone feel that it is a safe place to share. Everyone must have a chance to speak their mind without recrimination or cross talk. Make sure that you have allotted enough time so that you won’t have to cut off discussion during this critical last phase of sharing.

When you receive the inventory summary and suggestions from your inventory facilitator, share the information with all group members and make a plan to review the information as a group. Then set out on a course of action so that your group can become closer to fulfilling its primary purpose – to help the still suffering alcoholic to recover from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body.

May God bless us as we trudge the road of happy destiny together.

Author: Area 15 past delegate