

Concept Twelve

The spiritual foundation for Al-Anon's world services is contained in the General Warranties of the Conference, Article 12 of the Charter.

THE GENERAL WARRANTIES OF THE CONFERENCE:

IN ALL proceedings the World Service Conference of Al-Anon shall observe the spirit of the Traditions:

1. that only sufficient operating funds, including an ample reserve, be its prudent financial principle;
2. that no Conference member shall be placed in unqualified authority over other members;
3. that all decisions be reached by discussion vote and whenever possible by unanimity;
4. that no Conference action ever be personally punitive or an incitement to public controversy;
5. that though the Conference serves Al-Anon it shall never perform any act of government; and that like the fellowship of Al-Anon Family Groups which it serves, it shall always remain democratic in thought and action.

We may have thought the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts were overwhelming and/or confusing at first glance. Now we have Warranties to consider in Concept Twelve. Their close examination, one by one, reveals the wisdom to be found here. The Warranties reinforce the principles set forth in our Traditions and Concepts, offering final guidance for the application of our Legacies. They remind us of the importance of our fellowship as a whole, both financially and in service leadership.

Examining the Warranties one at a time, Warranty One states, “that only sufficient operating funds, including an ample reserve, be its prudent financial principle.” It is difficult to discuss finances in a spiritual light: “There is no romance in paying the landlord” (*Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual*). Money is necessary for Al-Anon to survive and grow. Our groups pay rent, purchase literature, support a Group Representative; our service meetings incur travel, meeting, and printing expenses; our World Service Office (WSO) and some Information Services have occupancy costs, sal-

aries, printing, telephone, and other expenses. Being prudent with our finances means we are conservative and thoughtful in our planning. We maintain an ample reserve to cover our future needs, yet we don't accumulate a significant excess. Our available funds serve Al-Anon. We will continue to thrive with the continued support of our many members. Warranty One reminds us to take care of ourselves financially without excessive spending or stockpiling.

Warranty Two states, "that no Conference member shall be placed in unqualified authority over other members." Our Concepts detail the ultimate and delegated responsibilities of our service arms.

In Al-Anon, absolute authority is never in the hands of one individual, but is in our group conscience as guided by the God of our understanding. Those among us who have positions of "authority" in Al-Anon find that leading by example is preferable to leading by force. Service practiced with humility and enthusiasm is easy to follow. Warranty Two guides us away from seeking prestige and power over others and instead reminds us that the spiritual power of our fellowship is found in our group conscience process, not in any one individual.

Warranty Three states, "that all decisions be reached by discussion vote and whenever possible by unanimity." Concept Four provides us with the principle of participation, and Concept Five protects minorities and assures that they will be heard in any discussion. Warranty Three reinforces these principles. Whenever possible, issues are discussed until there is certainty that all minorities have been heard and most people can support the decision. While unanimity implies agreement by all, experience shows that such full agreement is often not realistic. Hence our pioneers embraced the term "substantial unanimity." There will be less room for criticism of a decision when all have fully participated and most are in favor of it. "Substantial unanimity" is decided by the group

or groups involved; two-thirds is a common figure. When the World Service Conference convenes each April, a vote is taken to establish the ratio needed for substantial unanimity for that year.

Al-Anon has always recognized the value of seeking consensus rather than settling for a bare majority. There are times, however, when a decision must be made, despite the lack of substantial unanimity. In these cases, the group conscience can decide whether a simple majority will decide the question or if further discussion is warranted. As long as the principles laid down in our Traditions and Concepts have been followed, Warranty Three is satisfied. Warranty Three guides us to consider all viewpoints carefully in the group conscience process, and to strive for substantial unanimity.

Warranty Four states, “that no Conference action ever be personally punitive or an incitement to public controversy.” In Al-Anon we uphold the individual liberties of our members. As individuals and groups, we willingly follow unenforceable principles and guidelines. We don’t make rules and punish those who break them. We know that when we do not follow our Traditions, it is we who suffer. Growth halts or declines; our groups sometimes fold. Should Al-Anon ever be unjustly attacked, we most likely would not respond, because defending ourselves could incite further attack and lead to controversy. We avoid public quarreling, which might give Al-Anon an unfavorable public image. When we keep our focus on our spiritual principles, even in the face of strong controversy, we discover our protection is in God’s hands.

Warranty Four guides us to maintain “principles above personalities” in our service work. We have no doctrine to maintain, no prestige to defend, no power, pride, or property worth fighting over. We protect our fellowship and its principles, but not through revenge or punishment of individuals. If their criticisms are well-founded, we are best served if we thank them

and take our own inventory. Peace is our goal, and we believe the best defense is to set a good example.

Warranty Five states, “that though the Conference serves Al-Anon it shall never perform any act of government; and that like the fellowship of Al-Anon Family Groups which it serves, it shall always remain democratic in thought and action.” Warranty Five encourages democracy among us, reminding us to strive for mutual respect, consensus, and equality of rights, opportunity, and treatment for all.

Being democratic in thought means keeping an open mind, granting the same dignity to others’ ideas as we do to our own. Democracy in action requires us always to remember the greatest good—what will be best for Al-Anon as a whole. Democratic actions incorporate prudent financial management, keeping principles before personalities, and welcoming and creating a place for all who wish to belong to our fellowship. We act with firmness and kindness, without anger, haste, recklessness, or control. We ask our trusted servants in the Conference to model these highest democratic ideals rather than to rule through use of their authority, and then we willingly give them our trust because they have earned it.

The full text of the Al-Anon World Service Conference Charter can be found in the *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual*. The first 11 articles detail the purpose and composition of the Conference, its relationship to Al-Anon and to the WSO, the purpose and composition of Area Assemblies, recommendations on elections and terms of offices, meeting schedules, scope of the Board of Trustees, and Conference procedures. These sections are a working document which the Conference can amend as needed. Article 12, the General Warranties of the Conference, is protected just as our Steps and Traditions are. Written consent of three quarters of all registered Al-Anon groups would be required to make a change to these Warranties. Some people say the Warranties are

Al-Anon's bill of rights, which assures a prudent and responsible balance of power in our organization. As guardian of our Traditions, the Conference is expected to observe the spirit of our Traditions and to lead all of us by their principles.

Al-Anon's five Warranties give our Conference guidelines to prevent problems of money, property, power, or prestige from diverting us from our primary spiritual aim. These Warranties insure that our Conference limits its own power in the spirit of the Traditions. Our Conference operates with humility, maintaining a healthy balance in matters of finance, personal authority, and decision-making. It refrains from personal punishment or public controversy and remains ever democratic in thought and action. We find that we can follow similar paths in our personal, family, and work lives by holding before us these five ideals that form the spiritual foundation of Al-Anon's world services.

Al-Anon has guiding principles, not musts. These principles represent a healthy balance each of us can practice daily in all our affairs. We do not strive for perfection; but to the best of our ability, we will walk the path of these principles because we receive the greatest benefits when we do.

Members Share Experience, Strength, and Hope

I NEVER really thought of using the Concepts in my personal life until I joined a Concepts Study Group. Concept 12 and the General Warranties proved to be great principles for guiding family life. For a point of reference, the four members in our family include a father, stepmother, teenage son who lives with us, and daughter who lives with her mom. Here's how I am trying to incorporate the Concepts.

IT IS ALSO
OUR
RESPONSI-
BILITY

1. *Sufficient operating funds and reserve.* Applying myself to my profession will provide about half the operating funds for our family. My husband supplies the rest. It is my responsibility to save money for emergency repairs, vacations, and retirement. The more I am able to save and properly invest now, the more comfortable I will be later. It is also mine and my husband's responsibility to teach our children by being a good role model, explaining our financial decisions, and guiding them with their own financial decisions.

2. *Unqualified authority.* This Warranty reminds me that all members of my family are human beings with feelings, that hierarchy leads to rebellion, and that communication within the family is vital. This is not always easy with stepchildren. I am forever grateful that we each have programs to work and Sponsors to work with us, and that my husband has an excellent rapport with his children. I have had to face many of my childhood issues with my own parents, which has not been easy and has impacted how I interact with our teens. This Warranty reminds me that there is one unqualified authority, our Higher Power, and He works with and for each of us.

3. *Decisions.* Our teenagers are reaching the age of wanting to do their own thing. This Warranty helps us remember to take their plans into consideration. A major decision—moving across the country—was

discussed among us all before we decided it was not right for us. Individual needs are discussed, prioritized and accomplished as soon as funds are available.

4. *Personally punitive/public controversy.* This speaks to me of respect and trust. The building blocks for respect and trust are courtesy, consideration, and following through on commitments. I have found that the disease of alcoholism destroys respect and trust for both the parents and children, and that it takes a long time to rebuild, or in my case build, respect and trust. I have to work on not taking comments and actions, or lack of actions, personally. It is not a reflection on me. It is a reflection on that person and their sickness and self-esteem. This lesson helps me not to hold a grudge and not to punish the child. The saying “don’t sweat the small stuff” is finally making sense! It leaves me much more room to relax and enjoy our life together rather than to be upset because some chore was not done.

5. *Democratic in thought and action.* This is the result of working the Four Warranties above. It’s the natural flow. With the help of the program, we as parents can be more stable. We can be grateful that our son and daughter do not drink or use drugs and that our son is happy in Alateen and school, even though studying is hard. Instead of unrealistic consequences for missed commitments, we can have reasonable consequences that are known in advance and allow the children to make informed decisions.

Although I may not be able to practice this with every situation, this Al-Anon guidance has been invaluable to me. The majority of time, I do not react with verbal or silent anger and I can grow through each new experience.

ALL OF the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts have helped me to have a yardstick as a guide for better living, but it is the five Warranties of Concept Twelve which have had the greatest impact on my life. They are the entire program wrapped up in just a few words.

I AM ABLE
TO LIVE IT

“Only sufficient operating funds” helps me to understand that wealth is not a necessary goal in my life. Although it may be what I think I want, it is not what I need. What I need is enough to survive, to keep a roof over my head (not a palace), to have food for nourishment, and have heat, water and light. Swimming pools, stables, and tennis courts are wonderful dreams, but in and of themselves, they will not improve my life.

“An ample reserve” means saving enough to cover an emergency if it should arise. A reserve is a way of helping me not to overextend while still relying on a Power greater than myself to resolve any problems. I do the footwork, make the plans, and then leave it in His hands without planning the results.

This Warranty has helped me to eliminate waste and to conserve energy. The word prudent, for me, is wisdom with balance. I do not have to go overboard with either saving or spending. This is true with finances and also with my physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Taking things one at a time with some order of importance is being prudent. Conserving my energy when I am hungry, angry, lonely, or tired is prudent. Good physical exercise in accordance with my age and ability is prudent. Time for rest and leisure is prudent. An excess of any of these things is not only unwise but is also wasteful.

No “unqualified authority” by any one individual means that I can be free when I also allow others to be free. I let others live their lives as they are comfortable so that I may live my life as I am comfortable. I am less judgmental. What freedom this gives to me and others. No one except my Higher Power has the right, authority, or need to take control of me, and I turn

others over to their Higher Power. Mother may know best—but usually only for Mother. However, I must also realize that sharing my experience, strength, and hope may help another, and listening to them may help me. I also need to remember that authority does not always mean a title or a job description, although both may be necessary to avoid confusion. Today the true authority in all my affairs is a power greater than myself as He speaks to me through others. This Warranty brings balance into my life.

“Decisions reached by discussion vote and unanimity” is a rough one for me. I am grateful that this Warranty comes after Warranty Two, which gives me some practice in freedom, authority, and fairness. A spirit of unanimity does not mean that we have no differences, but that we discuss our differences and hopefully arrive at a solution that leads to what is best for the majority. This helps me to hear what others have said, gives me permission to disagree, and allows me to abide by a vote that is contrary to my personal wishes. Unanimity does not mean that I may not share a dissenting opinion or contrary point of view. I may share my personal feelings, ideas, experiences, strengths, and hope, but once I have shared, I am not free to insist that others agree, adhere, or even listen. Today my family most often discusses decisions to be made, rather than each of us running off in our own direction and thereby creating confusion and chaos.

By giving myself permission to disagree, I am learning to accept the disagreements of others without feeling that I am being put down, insulted or called a fool.

“Unqualified authority” and unanimity are opposite ends of my pendulum. As prudence provides balance in Warranty One, so does a balance of authority and unanimity in Warranties Two and Three provide prudence.

Warranty Four is my think-principle. In order for my actions not to be “personally punitive” to myself

or others, either in public or in private, I must think before I speak or act. I need to put my brain in gear before I step on the gas or run the engine. Again, balance is the word which seems to come alive in this Warranty. The risk of “an incitement to public controversy” at any level has helped to make me less demanding, more accepting, and no longer disagreeable just to be different or to get attention. Today I need knowledge, experience, and facts before I take an action, make a decision or even a statement. I am also finding that I listen to others much more closely when what they are sharing is more informational and less emotional. I know that when I am emotional, I frequently cannot say what it is that I really need to express, and so now I try to give others (as well as myself) time to calm down before having a discussion or making a decision.

The democracy of Warranty Five is, for me, the Al-Anon program in action in my life. Through democracy, I become a better trusted servant without being a rubber stamp. I am able to let others do a job with their ability and not mine, and I am less critical of results that are different than what I anticipated. Being “democratic in...action” means not being forced to do the bidding of others or forcing them to do mine. Today I can accept that I am not your Higher Power and that no one else is mine. With true democracy comes freedom, acceptance, and unity.

As I keep each of these Warranties in mind, I become aware that they are a balance of principles, not musts. This has given me a goal to aim for rather than a prison in which I must live. When I hear that there are no musts in Al-Anon, but a lot of “you betters,” I realize that what is really being said is to use the Warranties in all my affairs. These truly are the spiritual principles on which not just the Traditions but my whole life is based. I practice each Al-Anon principle (whether Steps, Traditions, or Concepts) until I am able to work it. I work it until I am able to

use it. Now with the Warranties, I am able to apply each of them to my life.

WE WANTED
TO DEMAND

WHILE ALL the Steps and Traditions have helped me in different ways and at different times, Concept Twelve has definitely changed my perspective and understanding. Warranty Five of Concept Twelve was a real eye-opener.

We were having countless complaints about a group in our district. Several of us Al-Anon “experts” decided to march right into that meeting and show them the error of their ways. We wanted to demand that they follow Traditions (control), and if they refused (we were projecting), we would (unknown to them, of course) stop inviting them to district meetings and sending them district information (why waste time and postage on a rebellious group?), take them off our meeting directory, tell the local information service they disbanded (who would want newcomers to go to such a bad meeting), and maybe even tell our Area and WSO they disbanded. That would show them!

Warranty Five taught me that no penalties are to be inflicted for nonconformity to Al-Anon principles. It also taught me to abstain from any act of authoritative government that would curtail others’ freedoms to act with mutual love and respect: to take no action in anger, haste or recklessness; to take no punitive action, and to guard against tyrannies (after all, that was how we were acting).

We now continue gently and lovingly to service every group in our district—even those who fail to follow the Traditions and policies. We never know when a member may decide to take an interest and become Group Representative (GR). We need to keep the door open. This also is helpful in personal areas of our lives. We are not the authority on the right way of doing things and need to be loving and supportive of others even when our feelings and methods differ.