

Tradition Nine

Our groups, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.

TRADITION NINE states that our fellowship, made up of groups of families and friends of alcoholics who gather together in meetings to share their experience, strength, and hope, is not organized. In our fellowship, the Al-Anon group members are equals and no one member is viewed as an executive or in charge. In Al-Anon we have suggested guidelines, but no rules for conducting meetings and our service activities. The *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* is written to further guide us in our service activities. Each member knows that their recovery is theirs and theirs alone and that Al-Anon does not have any rules or rulers.

“Wait a minute,” some of us said. “Does this mean Al-Anon is supposed to be disorganized?” If we have total freedom, won’t we become irresponsible, leaving our group rent unpaid, ignoring calls for help, and not being there for the newcomer? Fortunately, in the history of Al-Anon, common sense, experience, and a loving Higher Power usually have managed to guide us back to Al-Anon principles before we did ourselves too much harm.

We do have a common structure and the groups, as such, are left to decide exactly what organization means to them. The experiences of other groups in our districts and Areas can provide helpful suggestions. Keeping the structure simple and rotating leadership are the goals.

In each group, the members decide how much organization is wanted. If what they decide doesn’t work, they can change it. Most groups hold regular service or business meetings in which all members are encouraged to participate. At business meetings, group policies are established and members are informed of group, district, Area, and worldwide Al-Anon news. Such discussions help to maintain Al-Anon unity. Topics to be discussed are announced at the regular Al-Anon meeting so that all interested parties have the opportunity to attend the business meeting. Some groups use their business meetings to

discuss recommendations and hold the group conscience vote at their regular meeting. This is a matter of group autonomy.

We all have voice and vote in Al-Anon. This is how the fellowship functions. If there is dissension, a Group Representative may take it to the district for discussion. If an issue is not resolved at a district level, it can be taken to the Area trusted servants for discussion at an Area World Service Committee meeting or Assembly. Some ultimately choose to write to their Regional Trustee or the World Service Office (WSO) for recommendations. A usual response is not a directive or advice. Instead it may state, “our experience suggests,” followed by examples of how a Tradition or Concept might be useful in creating an informed group conscience.

The second part of the Tradition says “we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.” Isn’t that a contradiction? Don’t be organized, yet organize service boards and committees.

Common sense tells us that if we want to accomplish something, like putting on a workshop or anniversary meeting, someone needs to find a place, rent it, set the dates, and call people to speak. So we organize a committee to do it. To spread the Al-Anon message to the public or to plan a convention, we organize Public Information and convention committees. These become our service boards and committees. They serve us well through planning and organization but final authority still rests with the groups.

How, then, can a huge number of loosely organized groups govern these boards? The answer is in the committees and in the democratic voice of our elected representatives. For example, the groups choose a group conscience to speak for them at the district meetings and Area Assemblies. Districts choose representatives to speak for them at the Area committee meetings. Areas choose Delegates to take their voice and vote

to the World Service Conference (WSC), where policy decisions are made and the Trustees are elected. Between Conferences, the Trustees oversee the operations at the WSO, which has executives and directors, who are Al-Anon members, to oversee day-to-day operations. At all levels—Group Representatives, District Representatives, Delegates, Trustees, or employees—we are all trusted servants with responsibilities and the right to use our best judgment after consulting a Power greater than ourselves.

Because one of our chief defects is a tendency to control in order to be safe, Tradition Nine is excellent counsel. Applying it allows us to trust our groups to a Higher Power and trust each other with a minimum of constraints and no ability to force compliance. We find that Tradition Nine is a wonderful way to expand our faith which began in Step Two when we “Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.” Working Tradition Nine also helps us as a group to practice Step Three by deciding to turn our will and our lives over to the care of a God of our understanding who gently guides us without dictating our actions.

Although not organized in the usual sense of the word, Al-Anon does have a service structure. Our groups delegate responsibility to trusted servants who are responsible for their minimal obligations. Members of the groups are responsible to assure rotation in service and the trusted servants answer to the groups. Al-Anon works with a minimum of services, united in a growing worldwide fellowship.

Members Share Experience, Strength, and Hope

TRADITION NINE is very meaningful to me. From personal experience I have found that a group can't survive unless it follows the Traditions. My home group is a good example.

WE HAVE
SURVIVED

Gradually, our group had become organized. Monthly business meetings convened a half hour before the regular meeting. Members at the business meetings made decisions without the benefit of a full group conscience. The meetings produced minutes and kept names of those who attended. Five or six newer members seemed to take control of the group. Old-timers tried to be understanding because they realized the newcomers hadn't had time to develop a strong program. Eventually the old-timers had to put aside their desire to be understanding. They had to address the real concern for our whole group.

Old-timers who wanted to give the newer members the benefit of the doubt sought the advice of someone who had a very strong program, our Delegate to the WSC. After an in-depth discussion, she gave her opinion that we indeed had a problem within the group. She made several suggestions. Among the suggestions was a study of Tradition Nine. When we did this, it became clear to us that our group's rigid organization adversely affected the group as a whole. We took a group conscience and decided to change our business meetings. Instead of holding a separate business meeting, we decided to have a brief period for business during the regular meeting. That way we could take a full group conscience on business matters. The members who did not like this decision left our group and started a new one. We have survived on our own, although we miss them. We feel very strongly that the Twelve Traditions are essential to the unity of our Al-Anon Family Group.

WE ARE a fellowship, not an organization. All of the members of our fellowship are equals. Organization implies that some members have power or authority over others. In Al-Anon, each member is equal and everyone serves the group as a trusted servant. One reason that rotation of duties is so important is that it gives everyone an equal opportunity for responsibility. Rotation also helps to prevent a person from taking authority for a job. In rotation, each person will do the same job differently. In a group the various members can be responsible for those things necessary to make the group function. If one person does a task too long, others can come to expect this person to do the job and take him or her for granted.

As we grow in the program, we get more involved and get into more structured parts of the program. However, no matter how deeply we become involved in the program, Tradition Two still suggests that we have no bosses, that those who serve are our trusted servants.

In any group that we attend we need to do our part. How did the room get set up? Who set out the literature and put it away? It is not good for any one person to monopolize one or more responsibilities. In service we begin to learn to delegate responsibility to others. This is important because it helps us to get over our characteristic of feeling that “only I can do everything.” By allowing everyone to help set out and put away the literature, more people become familiar with it. It is important that the Treasurer be permitted to give a report of the group funds. A group can become active in many ways, such as doing Public Information work, and can form committees to do these things.

A group can have an active secretary who makes all the announcements. The more people involved in each meeting, the better the meeting. A group that is busy and involved is more enthusiastic. Each person needs to know how to chair, how to find the lit-

erature, how to set up the room, how to clean up the room after the meeting, how to greet the newcomers, and how to perform all the other functions. Then if someone is absent, the meeting doesn't fall apart. We never know when our Higher Power is going to put us in a position of responsibility.

I find that this Tradition is very helpful at home. At first I thought that things should be structured and that we always do specific jobs, but I learned that this isn't true.

I also learned that I am not in charge of determining what jobs others have. I may want my husband to be in charge of washing the dishes, but he may decide to run the sweeper. I had to learn that he lives here too, and that we are equals. I can ask another person if he or she would take a certain responsibility but that doesn't mean that they must do it.

Tradition Nine helps me learn to balance responsibility, to define my own and others' responsibilities, and to follow up on my part in any task.

Working Tradition Nine

Our groups, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.

- * How often does my group rotate our leadership positions? Is everyone encouraged to participate?
- * Does our group have unnecessary extra rules for its servants or members?
- * Do I try to control my group by organizing it? Why?
- * How flexible am I? How flexible is my group? How might we encourage flexibility at our meetings without creating chaos?
- * How do I resist suggestions for changes in structure? Why?
- * How does my group support our service boards and committees (Literature Distribution Center, Information Service, Public Information, etc.)?
- * How do I support our service boards and committees? Do I donate money? Do I volunteer?
- * How can I benefit from being a trusted servant?
- * How have I gained any patience or humility by serving the group?
- * How do I treat those who serve us? Do I appreciate them and support them, or criticize and second guess them?
- * How do I acknowledge my trusted servants' need to report back to my group and support them?
- * Has my group invited any district or Area trusted servants to our meeting to share their experiences?

- When my service term is over, have I encouraged new servants by passing on my records and experiences? Have I ever tried to interfere with a trusted servant's way of doing things, or do I practice "Let Go and Let God"?
- Has my group discussed our role in the entire Al-Anon structure? Do we tend to think that the only thing that matters is our home group?
- What can we do to connect with the worldwide fellowship that will enhance our own recovery?
- Have I ever considered that service rotation keeps me humble?
- How am I taking on my share of responsibilities?
- How am I taking responsibility for my own actions?
- Do I speak up when others' actions are unacceptable, or am I so fearful of confrontation that I am willing to have peace at any price—even the loss of my own serenity?
- How am I putting my abilities to their best use?
- Am I taking on more than I can handle?
- Do I understand Al-Anon's service structure?
- Have I ever considered being a Service Sponsor?