

SECRETARY HANDBOOK

Draft Copy

Congratulations on being elected to the meeting secretary service position for Recovery Central Fellowship. This handbook is designed to answer questions you may have about your responsibilities as a meeting secretary and about AA guidelines in general. Never hesitate to ask for help from other meeting secretaries or experienced AA members. A meeting secretary must have at least 6 months of continuous sobriety, and is voted in during our semi-annual service positions election. If a member relapses, another member should immediately take the service position on a temporary basis, and inform the General Secretary of the change. Then at the next available business meeting, the member holding that position will be voted in by the group conscious.

In the spirit of rotation, all outgoing secretaries should help the next secretary transition into that service position. This includes: **how to make coffee (# of scoops), work the thermostat, log onto Zoom, the location of books (for meetings and those for sale), cleaning supplies, paper products, and additional forms and documents (attendance sheets, phone lists).**

We encourage you to become knowledgeable about the different Service Committees that are the structure of Alcoholics Anonymous - Delta Intergroup, the Area Assembly (CNIA07), and our District 37. We think it is appropriate to recognize these committees as service opportunities within A.A.

GROUP SECRETARY:

It is suggested that a group Secretary have at least six months of continuous sobriety; be free to attend meetings during the term of office. The Secretary may perform some, if not all, of the following:

- May be responsible for opening the meeting facility and setting up for the meeting.
- Start and close all meetings on schedule.
- Welcome newcomers and visitors.
- Select members to read "Preamble", "How It Works", "Traditions" and other group approved readings. (ex. "More about Alcoholism")
- Make A.A. related announcements.
- Pass the 7th Tradition baskets and manage the contributions.
- Make sure the group's information is current with the Central Office, Area Assembly and the General Service Office.

AA meetings start and close on time.

A chairperson is invited, if appropriate at your group, to share their experience, strength, and hope with the group. It is suggested that the chairperson be invited at least a week or more in advance. The recommended length of sobriety for a chairperson is at least six months. Inviting A.A. members from outside your own group is vital for a fresh viewpoint.

Inform your chairperson about the length of the meeting and the recommended time they should share their story with the group (usually 10-15 minutes for a discussion meeting, 30 - 45 minutes for a speaker meeting – whatever is appropriate with the format established by the conscience of your group). If your group is a step, traditions, concepts, or book study, advise the chairperson if they are to speak specifically to a reading.

Depending on the group conscience, it may be included in your meeting's format that members should "share briefly," "only once," "raise your hand to be acknowledged," etc.

No individual, drunk or sober, should be permitted to interrupt repeatedly or otherwise disturb an A.A. meeting. Anyone who tends to monopolize the discussion should be tactfully discouraged, perhaps by interrupting gently and saying "Thank you - to allow everyone a chance

to speak, does someone else also want to share?" or "It sounds as if it would be helpful if you stayed after the meeting to meet and talk with some of the men/women in our group", and going on to the next person. If the Chairperson seems unable to do this, it is the responsibility of the Group Secretary to shoulder this (albeit uncomfortable) responsibility. This also applies if someone, especially a newcomer, seems to be disclosing information that may not be appropriate at group level.

Meeting Format

The meeting format is the Secretary's guide for conducting the A.A. meeting for a Group. It is a set of directions on how to conduct the meeting that has been adopted by the group. Every group should have a written format for the Secretary to follow.

There are no set rules on how a group should conduct its meetings (each group is autonomous). Group formats are as individual and as different as the people who attend A.A. meetings. Changes to meeting formats are discussed and approved by a group conscience. No single member should take it upon themselves to change a meeting format.

In this area, groups frequently read "How It Works" and the "Twelve Traditions" from the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous. Some groups may also choose to read "The Promises from pages 83 and 84 of the Big Book, the first two pages of Chapter Three from the Big Book, etc.) Readings are NOT required as a part of any group's meeting format. Each group is autonomous.

The format lets the Group Secretary know when readings take place, when the group has chosen to have the basket passed for the Seventh Tradition (i.e., beginning of the meeting, during group announcements, at the end, after the break, etc.), when to ask for newcomers, visitors, A.A. birthdays, etc.

The meeting format should be reviewed by the Group Conscience from time to time (annual group inventory?) to assure that the format is

up-to-date and continues to meet the group's needs. Via the group conscience, the format can be modified as necessary.

On the following pages is an example of a meeting format. Each group is encouraged to adopt a format that suits those who regularly attend that group.

The meeting format establishes when the seventh tradition basket(s) are passed (i.e., beginning of the meeting, after the chairperson's share, at the end, with announcements, etc.). Many groups in this area choose to make announcements during the seventh tradition so that the baskets are not passed while members are sharing. The pink H&I can should be passed separately from the seventh tradition baskets (i.e., in a different direction, delayed from the basket(s), etc.)

Group Conscience

We hear the phrase "Group Conscience" often in A.A. This concept is fundamental and vital to the operation and functioning of AA at all levels. It flows out of our 2nd Tradition, "but one ultimate authority". An issue is brought before the Group. It is a practice in AA that we try to have substantial unanimity, but we also listen to the minority opinion. An example of when the Group Conscience can be used during a meeting is if there is a request to change the format from speaker meeting to bookstudy.

OTHER IDEAS ON MEETING FORMAT

Each group is autonomous. Through the group conscience each group decides on the meeting format for their meeting. Whatever your group conscience decides, it is suggested that a meeting format be followed to maintain a good meeting environment. Here is a list of other meeting formats:

- Reading just the 12 steps (rather than all of "How It Works")
- Reading the long form of the 12 traditions (sometimes just once a month, or the long form of the tradition for the month)

- Reading the 9th step promises on pages 83 and 84 of the Big Book (or other promises from the Big Book (i.e., 5th Step promises on page 75, etc.)
- Reading promises other than the 9th step promises
- Reading the first two pages of Chapter 3 if a newcomer is present
- Reading the first three paragraphs of Chapter 11
- Reading the last four paragraphs of Chapter 11
- Reading the “Spiritual Experience”(Appendix II in the back of the Big Book)
- Reading a short story from the Grapevine
- Reading a short portion of any other A.A. approved literature

Closing the meeting: In this area most meetings choose to close meetings with The Lord’s Prayer, The Serenity Prayer, or “I am Responsible” statement. Your group may choose to close however the group conscience decides. Some other ideas are closing with the 3rd step prayer, 7th step prayer, or the 11th step prayer – or no prayer.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is an A.A. Group?

(From the pamphlet A.A. Group - Revised) The long form of Tradition Three states, "Our membership ought to include all who suffer from alcoholism. Hence we may refuse none who wish to recover. Nor ought A.A. membership ever depend upon money or conformity. Any two or three alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an A.A. group, provided that as a group, they have no other affiliation."

What is the difference between “Open” and “Closed” A.A. meetings?

(From the pamphlet A.A. Group - Revised) The purpose of all A.A. meetings, as the Preamble states, is for A.A. members to “share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.” Toward this end, A.A. groups have both open and closed meetings.

Closed meetings are for A.A. members only, or for those who have a drinking problem and “have a desire to stop drinking.”

Open meetings are available to anyone interested in Alcoholics Anonymous’ program of recovery from alcoholism. Nonalcoholics may attend open meetings as observers only.

At both open and closed meetings, the A.A. chairperson may request that participants confine their discussion to matters pertaining to recovery from alcoholism. Whether open or closed, A.A. group meetings are conducted by A.A. members who determine the format of their meeting.

What is a Home Group?

When members are new to Alcoholics Anonymous, they are shown many different meetings in a variety of different formats. The meetings are filled with a blur of different faces. In the beginning, this is okay, but most of us reach the point where we find it necessary to identify with one place and one group of people on a regular basis, the Home Group. A Home Group is a place where we let people get to know us and we begin to feel comfortable with our new way of life. The faces are no longer a blur; they belong to real people.

Time passes, and before you know it, you find yourself at a business meeting. A member begins to experience the unorganized organization of Alcoholics Anonymous. It becomes apparent that the members of your Home Group are willing to be responsible for the happenings of their group. Almost immediately, new members may find themselves with service commitments as a coffee maker or greeter. It can happen so fast and it is at this moment that most of us began to realize that the group has put faith and trust in us and is willing to give us a chance. The first chance many of us have had in awhile. As we make a commitment to our Home Group we find that we are now able to begin to reach out to help others.

The Home Group reinforces the fact that A.A. is not just about stopping drinking and attending meetings. It fosters sharing and identifies the needed steps and traditions. The Home Group introduces service and the service structure to its' members and shows us a new pathway to walk. It is in our Home Group that we vote on matters concerning A.A. as a whole. (Also see the Home Group on page 18 in the pamphlet A.A. Group - Revised and the book, published by the Grapevine, "Home Group: The Heartbeat of A.A.")

What is a Business Meeting?

In this area "Business Meeting" and "Group Conscience" are often two different things, but in other areas the terms are sometimes synonymous.

A business meeting (or Steering Committee meeting) is where the group's business gets accomplished. Reports from the group Treasurer, Intergroup Reps, GSRs, H&I Reps, NCCAA delegates, Grapevine, Coffee person, etc. are usually made at the Group business meeting. In addition to reports, any issues, problems, ideas, etc. are discussed at business meetings. A sense of humor, cooling-off periods, patience, courtesy, willingness to listen and wait, a sense of fairness, and trust in a Power greater than ourselves has been found to be more useful than legalistic arguments or personal accusations.

Business meetings are generally attended by A.A. members that consider the Group their "home group," or that regularly attend the meeting and have a vested interest in how the Group and its meetings are run.

Many groups have found that they can apply some of the ideas in Bill W.'s "Twelve Concepts for World Service" in their group conscience.

It is recommended that A.A. groups hold a business meeting on a regular, established basis. Recovery Central has our Business Meeting on the Third Friday of every month. It is an open meeting, and anyone can attend. Secretaries and Trusted Servants are encouraged to attend.

See "Informed Group Conscience" below. For more information, refer to the A.A. World Services publication "The A.A. Service Manual combined with Twelve Concepts for World Service". Your GSR will be a good resource for this book. (Also, see Group Problems on page 37 of the pamphlet "A.A. Group - Revised".)

What is an "informed group conscience"?

Decisions made in a group conscience are more than arithmetic, or a "yes" and "no" count. It is not just a vote. A.A. is a spiritual movement, and so the "ultimate authority" is the spiritual concept of the "group conscience".

The voice of the group is heard when all points of view of an item of discussion are heard, including the minority opinion. All available information on a given subject is presented, and all ideas, including those of the minority, get thoughtful attention. The group conscience should express a comfortable majority, as opposed to a "simple majority" opinion within the group, so that most of the group's members support the final decision.

Each member who wishes to do so should be given the opportunity to express an opinion. Gifted speakers can sometimes sway others, so the minority voice must always be heard. A group conscience decision is a process that may take time (weeks or even longer). The greatest enemy of the group conscience is apathy. The group that listens to all its voices with an open mind and has a good understanding of the principles of A.A. is guided in its decisions by principles and not personalities. It is suggested that members remember to ask their Higher Power for direction.

(Also see Informed Group Conscience on page 34 of the A.A. Group - Revised and The Group Conscience section of this Handbook.)