

TRUST, RESPONSIBILITY AND LEADERSHIP

Response to Advisory Action #7 by Area 20

Question # 1

If we continue to use literature profits to fund services, should there be a limit?

Response

The members of the Fellowship in Area 20 (Northern Illinois) took no formal vote as to this specific question. The group conscience by those present at our 2009 Winter Assembly was, nonetheless, clear. A couple months earlier, initial consideration of the questions posed by Advisory Action #7 began with an expression of outrage by one member at the midyear increase in the price of the Big Book. He called for an end to discussion and for action. He proposed a motion to establish a task force to develop a strategic plan to reduce the dependence on gross profits from literature sales to 25% of total revenues by 2017. (App. E) With significantly more than substantial unanimity, Area 20 rejected this effort to limit literature profits at its Winter Assembly. .

The expression of views of those who addressed Question #1 varied widely. Again, the vast majority of those views supported placing no limit on the use of literature profits to fund services at this time. For example, groups simply said "Raise literature prices," or "Keep doing what you're doing," or "Raise literature prices if necessary." (App. F) Other groups simply stated that no limit should be placed on literature profits.

Several themes emerged in the course of this discussion:

The solution contained in our Big Book is priceless.

This fundamental idea was expressed by one member as follows:

I am extremely grateful to be sober through the efforts of AA. I used to drink beer, and several years ago I looked to see how much a quart cost. Back then it was \$2.30. Back then I drank a lot more than one quart a day. Think about that. Putting \$2 in the basket when I go to a meeting is nothing. . . . What I have is alcoholism. The answers are in the Big Book; it's priceless.

The initial reaction of some in Area 20 to the literature price increase (and, in particular, the 33% increase for the Big Book from \$6 to \$8) ranged from disappointment to outrage. Many service committees and groups, however, simply made purchases of the Big Book prior to the price increase and in quantities that they might not otherwise have bought to take advantage of the lower discounted price. The Book is critical to their efforts to carry the message. As one member put it,

When I buy a Big Book I think I am helping GSO. I know that part of my money is going to services for the next alcoholic. Not only am I able to give a book to a newcomer, because that is what was done for me, but I also know that some of that money is going to GSO when I can't put \$2 or \$5 in the basket.

In the course of the discussion of Advisory Action #7, some recognized that the current price of \$8 for a hardcover book such as the Big Book is not out of line with the current price paid for non-AA hard cover books.

Place no limit on anyone carrying the message to the still suffering alcoholic.

One alcoholic in Area 20, while expressing concern that controlling the costs of services should continue to be a focus of attention, stated quite simply: "Personally, I don't like putting limits on anybody who is carrying the message to the alcoholic who still suffers." Another member noted that our trustees have already acknowledged their willingness to accept the limitation that working within the maximum and minimum prudent reserve places upon their decision making.

We have already hamstrung them with a limit on the reserve fund. They have to fluctuate literature prices. . . . Now we are going to put another limitation on them in terms of limiting literature contributions to 25%. The thing is let them do their job. They are good people. They have AA in their heart. They are going to try to do the right thing.

Others recognized that further limiting profits from literature could not be undertaken without also limiting the services that we have directed to be provided to support carrying the message to the still suffering alcoholic, wherever he or she is found. One member questioned: "Who do we not want to help? Where do we want to cut back?" Another offered a more expansive consideration of those very questions:

You can make a case that literature profits come from your pockets, that literature profit is self-support. I would prefer to see that we were self-supporting through our own contributions. And I would love to see the Big Book sold for \$3. But that's not going to happen until we are truly self-supporting with dollars in baskets.

We are actively involved in carrying the message around the world. . . . I am unwilling to say that this guy overseas somewhere doesn't get the message because we don't have a couple of bucks. I am not going to do that. I am not going to be the guy that says don't carry the message. So, until we, individually – not as groups, not as areas and not as districts – decide to become responsible for the finances of AAWS and the GSB, they are going to use literature profits to support those services - unless you say to them, "We don't want to provide those services." You can't have it both ways; you can't have your cake and eat it too. Somebody doesn't get the message, or we continue to use literature to fund carrying the message.

Trust your trusted servants.

From others, there was a clear sense that to limit profits from literature sales at this time would unnecessarily interfere in the “Right of Decision” with which we endow our trusted servants on the GSB and at the GSO. These comments brought to mind Bill’s own discussion of Concept III:

Our entire AA program rests squarely upon the principle of mutual trust. We trust God, we trust AA, and we trust each other. Therefore we cannot do less than trust our leaders in service. The “Right of Decision” that we offer them is not only the practical means by which they may act and lead effectively, but it is also the symbol of our implicit confidence. (Concept III p.16)

As one member put it,

As a member of the Fellowship, I expect that the Trustees are carrying out the charge that we have given them. They are far better qualified and in a better position to determine what should be done to protect us from economic disaster and to maximize our resources to provide services to support carrying the message.

Another stated:

No one has a crystal ball. Ideally, if we all put more money in the basket, none of this would be necessary, and literature would be cheaper. Is that going to happen? It should happen. But is it going to? I don’t know. I don’t have a crystal ball. We have a GSB that wrestles with the difficult questions of the running of our office, the sale of our literature. They agonize because they know they get feedback from us when they don’t print directories or make other cutbacks. And we sometimes are not so nice. We pay some of them to agonize over these difficult decisions.

Minority Opinion

Because the questions posed by Advisory Action #7 lacked a time reference, some responded in the context of the price increase already instituted and of current economic conditions. This view was expressed in the rather terse perspective of one group: “No literature price increases.” Another GSR from the same district wrote: “We live in a world of want. Alcoholics are perhaps the worst. We want everything yesterday. Many AA’s are hurting financially. AA must learn to live within [its] budget.”

Another member of the Fellowship in Area 20 observed that increasing reliance on the profit from literature undermines Concept VII’s recognition that the effectiveness of the Conference is dependent upon the “power of the purse.”

Question # 2

If there is a limit, how do we continue to pay for services if there is a shortfall in contributions?

Response

While not specifically addressing Question #2, several members of the Area 20 Fellowship offered input on the responsibility for any continuing shortfall in contributions. Again, several common themes were reflected in individual comments.

Awareness is the key.

Several members noted that it is critical for the leaders within AA to get the message out as to the level of contributions necessary to support carrying the message with simplicity, clarity and transparency. The Annual Report of the General Service Conference, while accurate and detailed, is rarely the source of information that most members of the Fellowship rely on for information about AA's financial well being. As one alcoholic put it: "The [2009 East Central Regional] Forum was the first time I heard what it cost GSO for us to be a part of AA." That member suggested that the dollar figure representing the annual cost per member for services was the most meaningful for her.

Unfortunately, too many are simply unaware of the services at the group, district, Area and GSO levels covered by the dollar or two they throw in the basket. As more than one member noted, the General Service Board is not responsible for resolution of this problem. One member stated:

The entire issue concerning the need to raise the price of literature to meet a shortfall in contributions for services is the result of a disjointed service structure. If groups within Area 20 and throughout AA were better represented by their GSRs at the Area level, when the Fellowship asked for a service, they would also send money to cover its cost.

We own the solution to this problem.

Increasing awareness of the need for fiscal support for services we direct the General Service Board to provide is the ongoing responsibility of each of us. As one DCM noted:

A couple of years ago or so in my district, various members at different meetings were suggesting putting \$2 in the basket. Flyers were handed out. Midyear my group was flush. It made midyear contributions to Area 20 and to the General Service Board. Since then, no one has made such suggestions at my home group and expenses now exceed contributions. We all need to carry the message.

Another past DCM directly challenged those present:

These questions reflect the mumbling in the corner and wringing of hands, rather than the presenting of a challenge. We should treat this as an opportunity. We have a book AA Comes of Age. Why don't we write a book entitled AA Grows Up? Take responsibility. We own the solution to this problem. It's the basket that goes around the table. We own it. Why don't we just grow up? . . . Alcoholics Anonymous is ours to kill or improve.

Some placed primary responsibility with DCMs to carry this message. Others looked to District and group Treasurers to resolve the problem. But a number of members pointed to each of us as being responsible to carry this message for the still suffering alcoholic:

We are sharing the message for the still suffering alcoholic who is not yet in the room. . . . So we have to go out there and talk to those who do not come to an Assembly or a district meeting. Go to our groups. Go to the groups you don't normally attend and talk about this. We have to spread this word.

Another member shared a similar notion that now is not the time to cease talking about money:

I understand that it is my personal responsibility to know what it takes to fund AA. As a member of my home group, it is my responsibility to know my group's finances, to know that group's expenses, to actively attend that group's business meeting, to keep our Treasurer accountable for our funds. . . . I need to know how much it costs to fund AA, what services we are providing, to be plugged into the committee system and what it takes. They did a beautiful job at the Regional Forum explaining how much it costs AA to provide service to groups. We're alcoholics and we wanted to quit drinking; we just couldn't stop. Now we want to stop talking about money, but we can't do that either.

Some specific suggestions were offered to increase revenue realized from the sale of literature or from individual contributions.

Literature Sales

- Make Districts, groups and individuals aware of the impact of buying literature from a neighboring Central Office rather than buying directly from GSO.
- Eliminate the subsidizing of Central Offices and outside entities through the current discount structure.

Individual Contributions

- Make it possible for individuals to make online contributions directly to the General Service Board.
- Raise the individual contribution limit.
- Make individuals aware of the possibility of federal income tax charitable deduction available to them.

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Attached to this report is a brief procedural history of the development of this response by Area 20 (Northern Illinois) to Advisory Action #7 of the 2009 General Service Conference. Also attached is an appendix containing background information and nonverbatim transcriptions of the two Area sharing sessions held to consider the questions posed by the Advisory Action. It is our hope that those reviewing this report will take the opportunity to consider the transcriptions of comments offered by our members. They reflect the depth, breadth and richness of the feelings of our Fellowship in Northern Illinois for Alcoholics Anonymous and the importance with which we take our responsibility to carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers, wherever he or she may be. We are not so unlike others throughout the United State and Canada. While a small cross-section, it is nonetheless one with which many others may identify.

Respectfully submitted,

Ray M.

Panel 60/Area 20

Delegate Elect to the General Service Conference